

Social **Farms**
& **Gardens**
Ffermydd a Gerddi
Cymdeithasol



Future Farms Pilot Partnership Case Study Review

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Section 1: Executive Summary



Image credit: Heather Birnie Photography

The Future Farms (FF) Pilot was established to test a practical, scalable model for enabling new entrant horticultural businesses to access land, secure affordable homes, and supply local markets in Powys and wider Wales. Developed through a multi-partner collaboration and piloted at Sarn (Wern Farm), the project set out to address structural barriers to agroecological horticulture while aligning with Welsh Government policy on food resilience, climate, biodiversity, public health and foundational economy objectives.

The pilot demonstrates that it is possible to unlock public land for small-scale, regenerative food production when planning, partnership, funding and political will align. However, it also highlights the complexity, cost and time required to establish such models - particularly where infrastructure must be built from scratch and institutional processes (leases, planning, utilities, procurement systems) are not yet configured to support small horticultural enterprises.

At Sarn, five new entrant growers now operate three independent horticultural businesses with secure accommodation, shared infrastructure and access to markets. Planning permission was successfully secured for Rural Enterprise Dwellings, a shared packing shed, polytunnels and renewable energy systems. The model combined capital grants, local authority collaboration and third-sector coordination to overcome barriers relating to land access, flood risk, SuDS, infrastructure provision and policy interpretation.

The pilot has generated significant policy influence. It directly contributed to new local planning guidance for horticultural holdings in Powys and Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, informed Welsh Government understanding of planning barriers, and aligns strongly with the Community Food Strategy for Wales, universal free school meals, Sustainable Farming Scheme development, and Well-being of Future Generations commitments.

Financially, the Sarn model was grant-intensive (approximately £450k capital subsidy), which enabled affordable rents and infrastructure provision. While this level of subsidy is unlikely to be replicable at scale, the pilot has informed the development of alternative blended finance approaches - including partnership with housing associations (e.g. the emerging Llandrinio model) - to reduce reliance on public grants while retaining affordability and long-term stewardship controls.

Community engagement at Sarn evolved from early scepticism to cautious and, in many cases, active support. The presence of growers living and working visibly on the land proved more influential than formal consultation processes alone. This underscores the importance of early, transparent communication and locally rooted leadership in future iterations.

Technically, the project provides valuable insight into site selection (soil, slope, flood mapping, water access), off-grid versus mains utilities, divisibility of infrastructure, housing typologies, irrigation risk under climate change, and the importance of detailed feasibility before grant commitments are made. Several sequencing challenges - driven by funding deadlines - resulted in decisions being taken out of ideal order, reinforcing the need for longer-term development funding in future pilots.

Overall, the Future Farms pilot demonstrates:

- Public land can be re-purposed to enable new entrant agroecological farmers.
- Planning barriers, while significant, can be navigated and influenced.
- Shared infrastructure reduces capital burden but must not compromise business autonomy.
- Affordable on-site housing is essential for viable small-scale horticulture.
- Water security and climate resilience must be central in site selection.
- Community trust grows through visibility, delivery and local economic participation.
- Strong cross-sector partnerships are critical to overcoming structural barriers.

The Sarn pilot now provides a live demonstrator site for Wales and beyond. The next phase will focus on refining the financial model, strengthening lease clarity, improving infrastructure provision, embedding learning into policy reform, and supporting replication - ensuring that access to land, housing and local markets becomes systematically and practically easier for the next generation of growers.



Image credit: Heather Birnie Photography

1.1 Key Learning Outcomes

Land & Site Selection

- Flat, well-drained land with secure water access significantly reduces development costs.
- Early flood-map analysis is essential.
- Water resilience (ponds, groundwater, capture systems) must be prioritised given climate projections.

Planning & Policy

- Clear local planning guidance reduces uncertainty and speeds up applications.
- Rural Enterprise Dwelling policy can work for horticulture when robustly evidenced.
- Permitted development disparities (especially under 5 hectares) remain a barrier.

Infrastructure & Design

- Farms should be designed to be autonomous and independently metered where possible.
- Shared infrastructure works best when it reduces cost without enforcing dependency.
- Off-grid energy can offer resilience but requires careful long-term cost modelling.
- Temporary housing must balance affordability with quality to support grower retention.

Finance

- Capital-heavy pilots require blended funding (grant + institutional + private).
- Early-stage development funding is critical.
- Rent-setting must model long-term maintenance, utilities and replacement costs.
- Housing association partnerships offer promising replication pathways.

Partnership Working

- Strong local authority relationships are pivotal.
- Third-sector coordination capacity must be properly resourced.
- Policy engagement alongside visible delivery strengthens systemic impact.

Community Engagement

- Early, honest and transparent communication reduces speculation.
- Visible, resident growers are the most powerful ambassadors.
- Community benefit land should be farmer-led, not imposed.

Grower Support

- Business-ready growers require ongoing mentoring and infrastructure access.
- Machinery rings and shared processing facilities are beneficial to improve accessibility.
- Security of tenure is fundamental to confidence and investment.

The Future Farms pilot has moved the conversation from theory to delivery. The challenge now is not whether this model can work — but how Wales can scale and normalise it.

Section 2: Background



Image credit: Heather Birnie Photography

There is a plethora of academic, scientific and citizen science reports and studies that have helped identify some of the issues this pilot is overcoming. SF&G's own [public procurement work](#) makes it clear there are big opportunities to increase fresh fruit and vegetables sales into the public sector.

We know that farming systems and outputs, especially in terms of livestock are changing, through market forces ([reduction in meat consumption](#)), through forthcoming incentives and support schemes (such as Welsh Government's recently launched [Sustainable Farming Scheme](#)), and due to the effects of climate change.

Food security, and food sovereignty, is being recognised at Government level as an area of concern as highlighted by [Tim Lang's report](#) to the National Preparedness Commission (Feb 2025) and [National Emergency Briefing](#) (November 2025). The global pandemic taught us valuable lessons about how fragile our 'just in time' global food system is and the almost immediate impact this can have on accessing food, particularly fresh food, for our communities.

Nature in Wales is struggling, even a quick glance over the [State of Nature](#) reports and SoNARR from [Natural Resource Wales](#) highlights the staggering decline of species Wales is facing, with 1 in 6 (18%) species facing extinction. These species depend on habitats, many of which are found in farms, as over 85% of Wales is under agricultural management.

Many of our rivers are failing water quality directives (with this figure around 60% of all rivers and watercourses [failing or in decline](#)). With agricultural practices (along with development, industry and homes through sewerage systems) being a major contributor, and the latest research is showing in some of the most polluted rivers, agriculture is the biggest contributing factor.

Public bodies are legislated to protect habitats under the [Environment Act](#), calling for 30% of our land to be protected for nature by 2030 but many are struggling to both identify the land and put protective measures in place. Farmers, especially those following organic or agroecological practices, can be incredible stewards of nature, but their incentives to do so are being squeezed by tight margins and inhibitive bureaucracy.

We know how vital access to quality green spaces and nature is for good citizen's health. Public bodies such as Natural England have completed many in-depth studies and have put this firmly on the agenda of their [new strategy](#). Social Farms & Gardens is part of a European (and America) consortium working on improved policy and best practice for Green Spaces, and particularly where they can provide benefits to health, under the [GreenME](#) programme of work.

Our [public health systems are being crippled by poor diets](#) in our communities, the rise in [obesity](#) and [diabetes](#) being just two examples. Our health boards, much like our local authorities are struggling to balance the books with Powys Teaching Health Board showing deficit budgets of around £25m a year. Yet changes to public food procurement could [deliver much wider benefits](#) as is being demonstrated by the [Welsh Veg into Schools](#) pilot project.

Our planning system can struggle to keep up with the needs of society and can sometimes create its own barriers, with small scale horticulture particularly falling through the gaps in permitted development rights and agricultural tenancies.

Powys County Council currently holds the largest [Local Authority Farm estate](#) in Wales, and the 5th largest in the UK, but pressures on the Local Authority to deliver essential statutory services can cause conflict and internal pressures when considering retaining and maintaining farms. [Welsh Government's own surveys](#) into Local Authority Farm estates shows a steady, but steep decline in the number of farms under Local Authority ownership.

The decline in horticulture is particularly apparent in Powys, there is very little field scale, mechanised vegetable production in the county, skills are declining, specialised machinery is

scarce and our fertile lands are competing with multiple needs (energy production, economic land, water management, etc).

Powys has an aging population, and the average age of farmers in the UK is now [over 60 years old](#). The 2021 census showed that more than 43% of the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries' workforce spoke Welsh – the highest proportion of Welsh speakers in all sectors of the economy so it has significant cultural importance. A [2024 report](#) by the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities also recognised the role of family farms in sustaining the language and culture. New entrant farmers (without farming families) are struggling to access land, housing, appropriate training and entry level jobs which is exacerbating the issues around farm succession and [generational renewal across Europe](#).

Previous work supporting the pilot

For many years, decades for some, the partners involved in this pilot have been working in and around these issues that are affecting food, farming, nature, climate and communities in Wales (and across the UK).

- [Pathways to Farming](#)
- Neath Port Talbot College Groups attempt to [re-introduce Horticulture](#) to the academic portfolio, and run a [sheep and beef farm](#) in Newtown.
- [Black Mountains College](#) and their academic and practical courses running out of their Talgarth base and now delivering outreach courses.
- [Lantra](#) and their [Tyfu Cymru](#) program – who facilitate the Wales Horticultural Alliance
- [Resilient Green Spaces](#) and [Sustainable Procurement for Local Prosperity](#) – piloting food hubs in Powys and the formation of one of the first small scale machinery rings, focused on Horticulture in Wales.
- Sustainable Food Places work across Wales: Including [Bwyd Powys Food](#)'s strategy / action plan For Powys and [Bwyd Sir Gâr Food](#) – work running a sister project on the Bremenda Isaf farm and school menu realignment within Carmarthen County Council, and their support through Shared Prosperity funding for the above and also the formation of a Carmarthenshire Machinery ring for horticulture enterprises.
- [Welsh Veg into Schools](#) Pilot work.
- The [Ecological Land Cooperative](#)'s pioneering work around small farm ownership, many with dwelling rights.
- Shared Assets review into Local Authority holdings.
- The work of the [Land Use Net Zero](#) team attempting to work out where carbon gains can be made through land use.

Key policy drivers that the pilot is supporting

- The role out of universal free school meals in all Wales Primary Schools.

- 30 by 30 targets and the work of the Powys Nature Partnership.
- The Net Zero Agenda, with both PCC and BBNPA completing carbon audits of their authority areas – showcasing food & agriculture as a high impact area on carbon – with up to 70% of carbon costs coming through procurement with food a big factor in that.
- PCC's Nature Recovery Strategy
- Sustainable Farming Scheme Guidance
- Healthy Weight Healthy Wales agenda
- Wales' Nitrate Vulnerable Zone restrictions.
- PCC's farm estate review processes.
- The Future Generations Commissioners focus on food in its Cymru Can report, and its subsequent report to PSB's linking health and diet outcomes.
- Procurement focused work, not just around Net Zero including the (Public Procurement and Social Partnerships Act)
- Social Prescribing framework For Wales
- Sustainable Farming Scheme
- Future Generations Commissioner Cymru Can report – focusing on food and the role of Strategic Partnership Boards have
- Community Food Strategy for Wales
- Rural affairs committee report 'Brining Home the Harvest' report of processing barriers – the findings of the report where influenced by written submissions of several of the FF supporters and partners.
- The work of Food Sense Wales and the role out of Sustainable Food Partnerships (SFP) across each Local Authority in Wales. Carmarthenshire and their SFP, Bwyd Sir Gear Food have been an integral part of the FF project.
- FPAC Manifesto – Putting Food at the heart of communities

Key recent reports such as those linked below also bring to the fore the importance and urgency of this pilot.

- [Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security \(2026\)](#)
- [State of Natural Resources – interim report summary \(2024\)](#)

Phase 1 of the future Farms pilot was to bring together a collaboration of partners to focus on planning barriers to horticulture growth in Wales.

This in-depth work was supported by Welsh Government's Backing Local Firms Fund and supported the work of Shared Assets, Landworkers' Alliance, SF&G, Our Food 1200, Lantra and others. Whilst the work primarily focused on planning constraints about homes for

growers, utilising Rural Enterprise Dwelling policy opportunities it also looked at things like permitted development rights, and the difference that exists between larger farms, those with existing buildings and smaller, often bare land plots.

Through the Welsh Horticulture Alliance, robust evidence was presented and worked on with Welsh Government's Food Policy Division and Planning Policy team. They [produced a report](#) highlighting some of the issues presented. Having completed this work, the Deputy First Minister for Wales produced a statement of direction / intent supporting horticulture in Wales. This work is on-going and it is hoped that in the future Technical Advice Notes (TAN's) such as TAN 6 could be updated and modernised. Work has also started on looking at creating a TAN around intensive Agriculture.

Section 3: Identifying Barriers

Land Access

Affording to purchase land anywhere in the UK is a challenge for most, and particularly in Wales, where we are now seeing the highest average cost per acre / hectare anywhere in the UK. Prices are now at £12,000 an acre and no hint of that reducing.

Smaller parcels of land tend to command higher prices, the loosely termed 'pony paddock tax' being applied in many cases.

Any land that has the potential for development (homes or industries) can see the land price rise by a factor of five or higher.

Finding suitable land for horticultural focused enterprises in Wales can be a challenge with factors such as slope, aspect, soil depth (and condition / composition) all being important factors. Other elements such as shading, frost pockets, access to and from site all become important factors too.

Planning Policy Framework

As this pilot is all about providing affordable homes for growers, on the land they are tending to, there are a number of planning challenges for this pilot to address.

'[Flood maps for planning](#)' are produced by Natural Resources Wales and updated twice a year. These assessments provide a visual assessment of the risk for all land in Wales. The maps support national planning policy [TAN 15 - Development, flooding and coastal erosion](#). The fundamental principles of the TAN are to restrict new development in Zone 3 subject to the limited exceptions that are set out in TAN 15. Basically all vulnerable development such

as residential uses and schools are protected from being built on Zone 3 river and sea flood risk areas. Non dwelling structures such as barns may be allowed within certain criteria.

Gaining planning permission to build homes in the countryside, outside of development plan boundaries (identified through local development plans) is unacceptable in principle, unless in association with specific countryside uses such as farming. There is national planning policy in [Planning Policy Wales](#) and [TAN 6 – Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities](#) to support such applications as was made through this pilot (such as TAN6's Rural Enterprise Development policy – RED's) more on this in [Section 5](#).

In 2018, Welsh Government published [statutory standards](#) for sustainable drainage systems for surface water drainage. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS). This is an additional and separate process to submitting a planning application. It is generally required for any new development over 100 m² or for a development proposal of more than one dwelling. The SuDs process is dealt with by a statutory SuDs Approval Body (SAB), a separate team in the county/ county borough council. Guidance on SUD's can be found [here](#), and SF&G and Lantra hosted a webinar on this in January 2025. Additional fees apply and the SUD's / SAB process and pre application advice from the SAB team is strongly recommended prior to submitting a planning application. Ideally SAB approval will occur before gaining planning approval but the SAB team at your county/ county borough council will be able to provide advice on this process.

At the time of writing (February 2026) Farmers who farm on land holdings under 5 hectares still only benefit from reduced permitted development rights in Wales. In short, Farmers on holdings over 5 hectares can build new structures (within certain criteria) up to 465 sq metres. Unfortunately, those farmers on land under 5 hectares are not afforded these rights. They need to apply for full planning permission for any new structures. Similarly areas within national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty are afforded very few permitted development rights. Please see the [CLAS Cymru pages](#) of the Social Farms & Gardens website for more information on this.

Local and national farming support

It can be argued that local and national policies to support horticulture and agroecological food production are lacking compared to more generalised support to the agricultural sector.

The current system for farm support and subsidy in Wales, the Sustainable Farming Scheme is based on an area of land approach, rather than pure environmental outputs, which will provide substantially less support to smaller farms.

Funding need

To develop and work up an ambitious pilot such as this Future Farms approach takes significant time and resources. Much of the skills and resources for this work have come from the 3rd sector and they need to be provided with revenue finance for their input. This whole pilot project has been developed over a number of years. Ambitious pilots like this take time and therefore funding with some longevity is needed.

There are considerable capital costs required for the development phase of the site, homes, infrastructure etc. But other costs such as planning fees, consultants, surveys also have to be covered and factored in, these can sometimes be classed as revenue and or capital. Many funders will have limits on both types of funding which can be a challenge.

Lacking accessible food production infrastructure

Powys, and Mid Wales in general, lacks fresh food processing, storage and distribution infrastructure. As well as things like agricultural tools and equipment, much of the field scale machinery has disappeared through lack of on-farm production, and the machinery that remains is few and far between or will often need significant maintenance to be become workable. Much of what is around is at a size and scale above what is needed for smaller farms.

Storage, particularly cold / temperature-controlled units are lacking and many that are in county are for final / finished production of food items (packaged, clean and bottled etc.) and in private / corporate ownership, which is not accessible to new entrants in to farming. To set up such infrastructure on a farm can be costly, due to significant power requirements and the associated connections, appropriate housing and suitable locations on farm.

Equipment designed to wash, pack and process horticultural produce is not readily available, again coming at a significant initial investment for individual farms and leading to challenges accessing alternative routes to market such as Welsh Veg into Schools.

Finding skilled growers

Although there have been a few recent programs to support the growth of horticulture skills in and around the area, the numbers being upskilled is small, this created some challenges when recruiting skilled, business ready growers to the Wern Farm. The initial insecurity of tenure and uncertainty in the early phases of the pilot may have been off-putting for more skilled growers looking to set up their own farms, and many of those who could manage the level of unknowns lacked the depth of skills needed. Therefore, the pool of suitable growers

- who were skilled, prepared *and* able and/or willing to risk being part of a pilot project - was smaller than expected.

Section 4: Finding Collaborators & Building the Partnership

Social Farms & Gardens has been in existence for almost 50 years, supporting farms, gardens, orchards and other forms of community growing initiatives. Throughout this time, they have developed meaningful partnerships with others operating in the sector and with similar aims and ambitions. SF&G have also been supporting the development of emergent policy and guidance for the sector and through this work have formed many allegiances with partner organisations, individuals, local authorities and governments.

Social Farms & Gardens has also delivered many collaborative programs of work supporting community food production, through a range of funders and with a growing number of stakeholders. All of the above allowed the quick identification of strong partners that could each bring their own skills and more specific areas of interest to the partnership. The likes of Our Food Trust (formally Our Food 1200) have clear aims and ambitions relating to Powys, making for easy alignment to the pilot's objectives. Equally many of the other partners in the project have clear and intentional remits that align well.

It was clear from the outset that involvement and support from the Local Authorities (PCC & BBNPA) would really aid and improve the outcomes and relationships were cemented with both of these and brought to the partnership, either formally or informally at the right times. Equally in terms of funding and more national policy support Welsh Government support and oversight was essential, although not holding any formal role in the partnership departments such as Food Division, Land & Nature Division and the Circular Economy and Economy and Business teams were vital in helping to deliver and shape the pilot outcomes.

The formal partnership was tiered with the more essential partners forming the core group and others either coming in for specific areas of support and or supporting the overall aims through a stakeholder / steering group role:

Core Partners:

- [Powys County Council](#)
- [Social Farms and Gardens](#)
- [Shared Assets](#)
- [Our Food 1200](#)
- [GWLAD consortium](#)
- [Landworkers' Alliance](#) (LWA)
- [Cultivate](#) & the [Bwyd Powys Food Partnership](#)
- [Carmarthenshire County Council](#) & [The Bwyd Sir Gar Food Partnership](#)

Steering Group Members:

- [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#)
- [Lantra](#),
- [Black Mountains College](#)
- [Ecological Land Cooperative](#)
- [Eco Dyfi](#)
- [Food Sense Wales](#)

Key Stakeholders:

- Welsh Government
 - i) Food Division
 - ii) Planning Policy Team
 - iii) Foundational (Circular) Economy Team

Other collaborative spaces where skills, expertise and interest in the project were bolstered include:

- The Wales Horticultural Alliance
- Food Policy Alliance Cymru
- Community Rights and Empowerment Working Group

Section 5: Finding Solutions to the Barriers

Land Access

Through working with Powys County Councils Corporate Assets team, the Leader of the Council and their Farm Estate team, options to pilot the Future Farms on a county farm holding were made possible. Early on in the project a potentially suitable equipped (farm with home, and buildings) was considered. The Gwlad consortium carried out the initial feasibility study, which showed a strong potential for the site to be used as a horticultural, multi farm holding but ultimately this site was not made available, due to very genuine circumstances.

An alternative 'bare land' (one without any buildings) was soon offered as a possibility. Gwlad and others in the partnership turned their attention to this new site and carried out a feasibility study and early investigations into planning options (and constraints) were put forward. Due to the short term nature of the funding on offer to the partnership, this option was pursued as the preferred site.

As is often the case with land transfers, the formal transfer of the land (under a 95 year lease, through a Community Asset Transfer) has taken a long time, and the final lease is still in development, but hopefully this will be secured soon.

Planning Policy Framework

Through a lot of the work in the background by collaborators on this pilot, work to influence local planning policy and guidance was quickly established. This led to the publishing of formal planning guidance by Powys County Council relating to horticultural holdings and especially those seeking Rural Enterprise Developments (homes) on them. The guidance is published [here](#). This guidance was then quickly followed with adoption of very similar guidance that now also covers the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority – meaning around a quarter of Wales is now covered by this progressive policy.

The FF partnership engaged with the local SAB team and began exploring the options to meet, and exceed all of the requirements under the SUD's framework.

Welsh Government invested resources into fully understanding planning barriers to horticulture in Wales and working with the Welsh Horticulture Alliance soon produced a report on the issues (and opportunities) surrounding horticulture expansion for Wales. Their report is published [here](#).

Whilst in the background Welsh Government was progressing with their program of government commitment to produce a [Community Food Strategy](#), this has now been published and case studies relating to many of the partners in the consortium form part of the strategy.

Food and the direct link to health is being championed through many organisations and avenues with the Future Generations commissioner and his team taking a lead role in highlighting the connections and putting forward solutions for improvements.

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has outlined the importance of the food system to achieving Wales' Well-being of Future Generations Act. Rising food insecurity and diet related ill-health pose, particularly in the most deprived areas of Wales, serious challenges to Wales achieving its well-being goals. Wales' reliance on an increasingly volatile global food supply chain poses a huge risk to the ability of future generations to access local, healthy and sustainable diets.

Welsh Government has made progress in addressing these challenges – establishing universal free school meals for primary schools and developing a [Community Food Strategy](#) which supports local food partnerships across Wales and aims for year on year growth of horticulture. However, food and diets are largely missing from the well-being plans which Welsh public bodies are required to set and meet under the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The [Future Generations Report 2025](#) recommends urgent action on the food system in Wales including:

- The development of a national food resilience plan to establish national policy coherence and action to improve access local, healthy and sustainable diets, including growing the horticulture sector in Wales.
- Extending universal free school meals up to the age of 16, ensuring two portions of locally sourced, seasonal and sustainably produced vegetables for each school meal, and ensuring every child leaves school food literate.
- Establishing a Welsh fruit and vegetable voucher scheme for low-income households.
- Local authorities should establish local food resilience plans involving local food partnerships and integrate the food system into their well-being plans.
- Public bodies in Wales should restrict or eliminate the provision and promotion on foods high in sugar, salt and/or fat.

In 2025, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and Food Sense Wales launched [food guidance](#) for Welsh local authorities around building local food resilience and promoting healthier diets.

Local and national farming support

See [Section 2](#) for a long list of local and national policy this pilot is supporting.

Lacking accessible food production infrastructure

Organisations such as SF&G and the local food partnerships in both Powys and Carmarthen have been addressing some of the gaps in horticulture infrastructure. SF&G and the food partnerships have received a variety of funding support which has specifically enabled the formation of two (small scale) machinery rings that are supporting horticultural growers in their respective areas. Wern farm is set to become the host of the North Powys machinery ring, with another in development in the south of Powys. Carmarthen's Bremenda Isaf farm hosts a larger one covering Carmarthenshire and other neighbouring local authority areas.

Further support for the growers at Wern Farm from Bwyd Powys Food has funded the purchase of 5 polytunnels between the three plots, and participation in a new LPIP pilot to get Welsh veg into hospitality is enabling the construction of a walk-in cold store and new washing facilities for the growers to share.

Finding skilled growers

Section 2 details the array of organisations and programs supporting the development of a skilled horticulture workforce in Wales.

The five growers that have been selected and are now in residence at Wern Farm are both skilled in their respective horticultural fields and prepared for the challenges that working within a public facing, pilot project brings. They're passionate, capable and have already made a great start; setting up growing areas on their individual plots, beginning a collaborative veg box scheme and inviting the local community to participate in events on the farm.

Section 6: Finding Sites to Pilot



Image credit: Heather Birnie Photography

Site assessments

Maximising the chances of success is vital for any project, and a detailed site assessment was an important element in achieving that aim. Comprehensive feasibility studies were carried out covering:

- Meteorological data
- Soil assessment (texture, structure, pH, organic matter (OM) content, soil biology)
- Drainage & wet areas
- Biodiversity review (hedgerows, trees, connectivity opportunities)
- Water courses and water supply
- Access
- Infrastructure
- Markets
- Economics

This information was used to develop a site plan, subdividing the farm into plots such that each plot was capable, in and of itself, of supporting one business. The size and location of each plot took into account the quality of the land. It was also designed to offer growers the

flexibility to develop a range of growing systems (for example protected cropping, field scale vegetables, permanent beds and perennial crops).

Sharing facilities

Shared access to facilities was essential to developing viable businesses. Sharing the costs of packing sheds, crop storage facilities, water storage, machinery and equipment etc, was essential to reducing the fixed costs. This was key to ensuring all three businesses could be viable with minimal upfront investment, which allows the recruitment of growers without significant capital.

Evolution of the idea of community land

The idea of community land started because there was a section of less productive land, about 5 acres, well positioned to be a buffer between the new farms and the house next door. It was also connected to a public right of way, and contained significant habitats including veteran oak trees, wet undulations and a spring fed pond.

It was felt that giving the local community a direct stake in the land would generate support for the whole project. This proposition, however, was not fully explored because of the extreme time pressures to complete the project within funding deadlines on a new site, after the loss of the previous site. This also meant that the conversation with the community was never sufficiently organised to discuss whether the community had any desire to manage such land – more in [Section 8](#).

After multiple iterations, the area of the land was slightly reduced to 4.75 acres.

So the idea emerged that the three farmers should manage the land for communal benefit. The project partners increasingly felt that the best stewards of this land would be the farmers themselves. But the logistical and financial arrangements of this were not discussed with the farmers until very late in the process. This was one of many examples of activities taking place in the wrong order as a result of the pressure to invest in the farms according to funding deadlines.

Is having land for communal benefit worthwhile?

Powys County Council is renting the land so the land must be paid for at £150/acre by whoever secures the benefits of the land. The land does have income generation potential, and it can provide valuable services to the three farms. The value of this is likely to be more than £150/acre.

- It would earn £28/acre/year from the basic tier of the Sustainable Farming Scheme. It would earn a further £28/acre/year if used for nature restoration, and £43/acre/year if used for social purposes.
- A large pond is situated in this land and is a valuable water supply for the farms as well as increasing biodiversity.
- There is grant support for use of land for community purposes.
- In time it could yield revenue e.g. coppice woodland, mob grazing for livestock or event spaces that can be rented out.
- Bringing the community to the land leads to new customers for food grown on the farms.

Members of the Future Farms Partnership will always be present to provide further ideas and share their knowledge of access to financial support for communal use of land.

Key lessons

a) Land; topography, soil type

Land has a significant bearing on farm development in several key ways. Farmland that is quite flat (not withstanding flooding) will keep development costs much lower. At Sarn even relatively modest changes in level had to be addressed by importing substrate (stone) also partly due to winter weather conditions, adding another £12,000 in costs. Impermeable clay soils prone to flooding could add thousands of £s in track development, requirement for more expensive SUDS arrangements (as at Sarn) and may even render some land unsuitable for farming, with a couple of acres at Sarn being set aside for the pond and marshy areas.

b) Matching land availability to number of farms at each location

Determining the notional number of farm businesses that can be accommodated at each site is critical to assessing project viability from the outset. This must take account of several key factors:

- **Farm business type:**
The nature of agroecological enterprises strongly influences required land area. For example, a containerised mushroom unit may operate on ½ acre, whereas field-scale production of one or more crops might require 10–20 acres.
- **Planning conditions:**
Meeting planning thresholds for economic viability can increase the land requirement for each farm. Commercial horticulture aiming for marketable volumes and profit may need 5–10 acres. Without a need to meet planning thresholds e.g. for temporary housing, less productive holdings could be just 1–2 acres.
- **Space constraints:**
The total area of good growing land, land required for farm infrastructure, and an

assumed allocation of around 10% of land to meet SFS eligibility, determine notional farm size.

Section 7: Financing the Pilot

Grant funding was available to support the wider project including significant funding to pay for most of the farm build. Grant applications were made before the location at Sarn was identified and were necessarily generic. These were also made before construction and other costs started to spiral. By the time Sarn build was being planned and costed in detail it was clear that some trade-offs would need to be made i.e. building a much smaller barn and design of temporary houses that could not be upgraded which had not been the original intention.

Sarn was established as a pilot project, and both the partnership and the farm tenants have had to feel their way through the design, build, and institutional arrangements. There continues to be an extended transition period in relation to the farm lease and control, as two tenant households moved onto the farm in May 2025 while the lease agreement between PCC and Our Food Trust/Farmland Trust is still pending. Furthermore, because grants were not fully sufficient to complete the farm build, some minor works remain outstanding, with completion expected by February 2026. Given this context, offering discounted rent for May and allowing generous decision-making timeframes for prospective tenants was appropriate.

It is also worth noting that the Sarn model chose to provide reasonably good-quality temporary housing, recognising that other models - such as the Ecological Land Cooperative - have struggled with farmer retention, partly due to inadequate, tenant-funded, temporary housing (often cheap, damp, cold static units).

Looking ahead beyond this pilot - Financial model for Llandrinio

Our Food Trust has applied for a community asset transfer of 30 more acres of land at Llandrinio. This time the project is a partnership with ClwydAlyn Housing Association.

This model has the following key features:

- ClwydAlyn wishes to buy two Council sites already allocated to housing by the Council. One site is adjacent to the farmland and ClwydAlyn would build three farmhouses on this site looking onto the farmland. The capital receipt for the Council would be up to £1m.

- ClwydAlyn would make the farms homes available for rent, or part-rent part-purchase, or a gradual transition from one to the other. ClwydAlyn would always keep a very small proportion of the ownership, thereby ensuring the homes can only be sold to another farmer.
- The farm building costs (for three farms) would be about £124,000 (total costs above less £170,000 for housing and less £30,000 for half the preliminary costs with the other 50% being covered by ClwydAlyn).
- It seems possible that the farm infrastructure building could be covered by the Mid Wales Growth Fund, matched against the private investment made by ClwydAlyn for buying land and building homes. This possibility is being explored at the time of writing.

This model awaits agreement from the Council. Our Food Trust and ClwydAlyn are working to get this agreement.

Grants and Funders that have supported this pilot include:

Welsh Governments [Backing Local Firms Fund](#) – this fund provided the necessary revenue to complete the planning guidance work, and it supported some of the early planning fees (surveys, consultants, SUD's and planning application). A specific Case study on the [Future Farms funding](#) has been created by Cynnal Cymru as part of their work to support the Foundational Economy.

UK Governments, Via Powys County Council provided funding through the [Shared Prosperity Funding](#) agenda. This fund supported a number of the finalised surveyys, specific site assessments (habitat surveyys, drainage and the like) but also contributed to some of the physical development costs of the Wern Farm site (highways crossovers, sewerage treatment plant, energy / power solution, ground works and one of the homes).

Two rounds of funding through Welsh Government's [Assets Collaboration Fund](#) (Phase 3) were successful in providing a mix of revenue and capital to help fund work within both Carmarthenshire and Powys. In Powys this provided the funding for the third and final home, some of the snagging requirements and the main barn for the farm.

The [Local Places for Nature](#) fund in Powys provided much of the landscaping requirements, the compost storage area, volunteer shelter and a lot of the wildlife features (bird and bat habitats, swales and pond).

Cultivate and their [Bwyd Powys Food](#) funding provided support for essential items to support the growers in their enterprises, including up to £6000 of polytunnels per plot, and provided the necessary funding to provide a 'visitor' compost toilet facilities on the farm.

Other organisations such as [Coed Cymru](#) have generously provided thousands of trees for planting around the site, including hedges, plot boundaries, micro woodlands and coppice areas and important habitats such as the riparian river buffer zone that volunteers and growers helped to plant.

Social Farms & Gardens have provided some funding through the [Powys Orchards project](#) (Shared Prosperity funds in Powys) to provide some training outputs around orchards and have provided some fruit trees to form the basis of an Orchard on site.

Evaluation

Formal external evaluations have been carried out relating to specific elements of funding that have supported this pilot.

These can be found here: www.farmgarden.org.uk/projects/future-farms

Key lessons

a) Valuation of rent for houses and land

The Sarn farm development was made possible by grants that covered nearly all design and infrastructure costs, totalling around £450k. This represents a substantial subsidy that made rent setting considerably easier—though clearly not replicable without such funding.

Rental valuation drew on:

- Market rents in a Welsh rural context
- Information gathered by organisations such as LWA on housing rents within agroecological enterprises
- Considerations of affordability for farmers
- Financial modelling to ensure rental income would balance lease commitments and outgoings over the long term

Given Sarn's off-grid electricity system (solar PV, battery array with a generator for roughly three months of winter top-up requirements), tenants should see some electric cost savings, with no standing charges and lower overall power costs. However, irrigation water is supplied solely from the mains, which will become prohibitive for large-scale horticulture. Several factors will determine whether the mix of off-grid power and on-grid water is cost-neutral or more expensive than a fully on- or off-grid system. More detailed cost modelling is therefore essential to understand implications for land and house rent setting.

b) Clarity of terms and conditions

As noted, the pilot nature of the project has meant a degree of ongoing uncertainty around terms and conditions. With formal lease agreements still pending, the arrangement has required goodwill and trust to carry it forward until legalities are finalised. While two households were comfortable with this, one prospective household decided it was not suitable and withdrew by July 2025 (another household took the third plot and house from October 2025).

Specific issues that proved complex or contested included:

- Ensuring that all rented land was of adequate quality; although the rent of £150/acre (from June 2026) is modest, charging for areas such as marshland or ponds as part of plot 3 was not appropriate.
- Verifying that actual plot sizes matched PCC/landowner maps; at Sarn, land at both the western and eastern ends was held or allocated to other parties.
- Determining responsibility for any common land within a plot (as at Sarn), including whether tenants wished to rent or manage it.
- Clarifying which farm infrastructure was included; early on it was decided that polytunnels and irrigation systems would be tenant-funded, as not all businesses would require them, and they are not fixed assets. Internal fences to define plot 3 boundaries were also not included as part of the farm build and will need to be added by plot 3 farmers.

Section 8: Consultations

Community engagement in Sarn

There is an inevitable tension about when to engage the community. If very early on, then there are no answers to many of the questions from members of the community and this can generate frustration and anxiety. If too late, then it looks like a *fait accompli* is being imposed on the community.

There were several challenges at Sarn, some particular to this situation, some universal to all community consultations:

- The project aimed to find solutions to national (and global) problems, but there was a sense that it wouldn't deliver local benefits – so why should this community bear inconveniences to solve problems they haven't necessarily identified as being priority?
- There was no existing model that the project partners could point to, to show what was envisaged. (This will not happen again, now that Sarn is operational and welcomed by much of the community.)
- The use of public land for any project is inevitably more political than a private development. Whilst driven by non-profit organisations with strong community links in Powys and across Wales, none of those leading this project were directly connected to Sarn village itself. This contributed to concerns that the initiative was being imposed by organisations who didn't understand the locality.
- Simultaneously, some tenant farmers around Powys were losing their council farms, which caused tension between local people and Powys County Council, and seemed to go against the reasoning behind this project – more farmers needing access to land.
- The project at Sarn was developing on a greenfield site. There was a fear that this was a trojan horse for more housing development, of which there has been a substantial amount in the locality in recent years.
- In any community conversation, a minority of oppositional voices can dominate discussions. More neutral views tend to be lost as only those with strong feelings either way are likely to participate in consultations.
- There was little understanding of the economics of small-scale market gardening businesses. There was therefore a great deal of scepticism about the ability of the land to support one, let alone three farm businesses. There was a perception that the project was doomed – even designed – to fail and led some to question the underlying motivations of the project.

The Future Farms Partnership organised three forms of community engagement:

1. Door-to-door delivery of a bilingual letter about the project and face-to-face conversations on doorsteps.
2. A day-long event in Sarn village hall where the whole project team was present with plans and images (and tea and cakes).

3. Presentation of the project to the Community Council.

The majority of residents did not actively engage with the letter, but it encouraged a good number to attend the consultation day in the Village Hall. Residents attended gradually during the day, with most who attended bringing concerns (which is inevitable), small group and 1:1 discussions enabled us to get to know individuals and understand motivations better. There was a larger group who attended together in the evening with shared concern that the project was being imposed by a mistrusted local authority and partnership that had little understanding of the local area and specific market opportunities.

There were some negative comments about the project on a local Facebook group, we decided not to engage with these due to the difficulty for proper discussion in online spaces, although there were positive comments on several posts alongside the negative.

Two members of the partnership were invited to attend a Community Council meeting. Whilst there was still concern about the suitability of this initiative in this particular locality, the Council warmed to the narrative of enabling new farmers to start farming.

We had a positive response to the proposal for tree planting on the site, where the trees would build biodiversity whilst also protecting the farmable land from the river and as productive elements. We didn't talk about rewilding.

There was a real shift in local dialogue once planning was approved and we could start activity on the site, but the biggest positive change in local perspective of the project was once the growers themselves started to work on the land and build a local presence.

The farmers at Sarn and the community

Sarn is a rural Welsh farming community: close-knit, intergenerational, and includes an active village hall and community association. Annual events such as the Christmas Fayre and Potato Day are well attended and bring vibrancy to the community. The community includes long-established families who have farmed or lived here for generations alongside newer arrivals who have integrated and become key characters around the village. The growers were fortunate to be working alongside fairly new, but well-respected local producers Cig Cynefin, a first-generation farmer operating from a council farm and selling meat directly to local customers. By collaborating on marketing, shared markets, and Christmas vegetable bags, they were able to build on groundwork already laid around local food and direct sales.

When the growers first began visiting and working on site, the dominant response was definite scepticism. There was wider uncertainty surrounding the future farms partnership

and the purpose of the project, particularly why it was happening in this specific location, whilst other farms already with housing and infrastructure were empty. At the time, tensions were high due to broader concerns about council farm tenancies and rural housing development. Some residents feared the project could be a precursor to future housing development, reflecting frustration that new houses are being built in small villages while local services are simultaneously under pressure or closing. There were also doubts about the viability of small-scale horticulture on limited acreage, with assumptions that such land could only be profitable through solar development. Questions were raised about the lack of local roots and perceived limited farming experience of the growers. These reactions highlighted both the need for clearer communication from the outset and a general lack of awareness about the economic potential of small-scale vegetable production.

Attitudes did begin to shift once the growers were living on the land, and they have put in considerable effort to improve public opinion of the project. Being physically present - working visibly, chatting with people walking down the lane, attending village hall events, visiting the pub and producing food - made a significant difference. Some early critics are now committed veg box customers - a strong indicator of changing perceptions. Overall, engagement has evolved from scepticism to cautious support and, in many cases, genuine enthusiasm. Being identifiable, approachable individuals rather than a “faceless project” has been crucial.

The early consultations seemed to be effective in raising awareness: many people had heard about the project and understood that it would involve multiple small horticultural businesses. However, there were clear gaps around purpose, long-term vision, and alignment with wider council decisions affecting local farmers. While we recognise the limits of time, funding and community capacity to engage, more proactive, transparent communication - particularly in early stages - could have reduced speculation and built trust sooner. As the project moves forward, visible delivery and meaningful opportunities for dialogue will be key to sustaining and deepening community support.



The first public event the growers hosted in June 2025.

External Events

A number of external events and conferences have been attended by many of the partners helping to champion the pilot and to share and disseminate learning at all stages. These include but are not limited to:

- Attendance and speaking at the Oxford Real Farming Conference, where a specific panel discussed access to public land for increased agroecological food production.
- Attendance and panel discussions were held at the recent Wales Real Food & Farming Conference.

- Partners were invited to present at a well-attended Sustain webinar on Local Authorities and planning issues associated with agroecological land-based developments.
- SF&G were an invited panellist on a recent Local Authority planning officer's webinar.
- SF&G's CEO was invited to the House of Commons All Parliamentary Group on Horticulture and Environment enabling information sharing across the borders and within central government.
- SF&G attended the launch of the Bridging the Gap report in Westminster at the back end of 2025.

Continued awareness raising

In November, BBC's [Escape to the Country](#) Powys programme aired, which picked this project as emblematic of the whole County, and filmed at Sarn back in June 2025. (Feature starts at 35m38s.)

One of the growers; Lydia: *"I would never have been able to even think about getting seven acres of my own if I had to fund it all myself. If you want to live on site as we are, it's unbelievably expensive I feel really blessed!"*

Key Learning Points

Engagement with the local community needs to be planned and well implemented by suitable people. Whilst not always possible, a project driven by local growers themselves who already have local community support could remove some of the concerns raised by the Sarn community.

The key narrative is the opportunity for new young farmers to join the community. The example of Sarn can be presented – the BBC TV coverage, and one or more of the farmers from Sarn could come to a community discussion in Llandrinio.

No provision should be made for community land. Any choice to use some of the land for communal purposes should rest with the resident farmers. Because using some land for communal purposes can be a net generator of income and value, the farmers are likely to do it. The Future Farms partners and the farmers at Sarn can help with ideas on how best to do this in future projects.

Section 9: Accessing the Land

The objective of the project team securing land in the Powys region was to support modern regenerative horticulture, creating 3 small-scale commercial farms. The Future Farms team were interested in any farmland that might be offered to them from Powys Council. Ideally the land would have good access for farm vehicles and those of an HGV nature to be able to bring in the required infrastructure. There were other environmental, social and economic factors that needed to be considered for any site so a whole farm study would be needed on any prospective site.

Factors considered

- Elevation
- Drainage and risk of flooding
- Biodiversity value
- Soil type and condition
- Topography of the site
- Availability of water
- Amount of investment needed to make the site functional
- Potential for a market return
- Length of lease and rental amount
- Planning constraints and the ability to gain planning permission for essential structures.

Securing the land at Sarn

The 35-acre greenfield site on the edge of the village of Sarn was proffered to the partnership in the early stages of the project. The partnership had been considering another site with existing structures, but this fell through due to multiple complications. The tenancy on the land at Sarn was due for renewal and following an initial assessment was considered suitable for horticulture. We then commissioned a whole farm study on this second site. Unfortunately, this required some tests to be replicated, and it also affected the developing planning application, but much of the groundwork undertaken by the Partnership, including market viability, remained relevant on the new site.

In 2023 Powys County Council asked Our Food Trust to complete a Community Asset Transfer expression of interest form. A 95-year lease was offered, and heads of terms were agreed in January 2025.

From that point the lease of the land at Sarn, has been in the hands of Powys County Council lawyers to finalise. Because the lease was not ready when planning permission was gained

(in October 2024) and the farmers were ready to move onto the land in April 2025, the Council offered a permit to use the land.

The lease has still not been agreed at the time of writing (January 2026). The slowness of the process has created challenges:

- It leaves the resident farmers with uncertainty since moving onto the land.
- Insurance of capital items on the site cannot be transferred from the Council because they remain the only legal landlord.
- High level of risk of infrastructure improvements and dwelling installations being carried out by the project team without the security of a long lease.

The situation at Sarn is quite unique because the project team have a good working relationship with Powys County Council and a lot of trust has been placed in the project succeeding. Not many potential tenants would be offered occupation of farmland based on written permission to use the land while lease negotiations continue to fruition. Indeed, most tenants would not be able to raise the funds to improve and occupy a site without a lease in place. The fact that the Future Farms team were able to raise funds 'up front' as a pilot project has meant the project can continue but it is not a model that could be replicated elsewhere.

Section 10: Designing the Spaces & Applying to Planning



The site, from the north-east

Concurrently additional site research was carried out, including soil and ecology surveys. A basic aerial survey was commissioned. Research into flood risk on the site revealed that the data previously used for planning consultation was soon to be updated to account for the effects of climate change, this updated map showed a high flood risk to the west end of the site, where the dwellings were proposed, resulting in a re-siting of the dwellings to the eastern part of the site.

The re-sited dwellings were some distance from the Sarn village built-up area and close to Wern Cottage, an isolated neighbouring property, making the Planning and community issues more complex.



Revised layout, showing updated flood risk zones

The layout was subsequently developed and revised:

- Re-orientating the barn to maximise solar panel exposure to the roof.
- Removing the polytunnels pending input from the growers (who had not yet been recruited) and was subject to a separate planning application.
- Omitting the ancillary accommodation and educational facilities, as proven to be unaffordable based on the budget/funding.
- Substantially reducing the tracks due to significant costs.
- Removing the proposed bridges across the stream.

Concurrently with the site layout development, a tree survey was produced by Lingard Farrow Styles and a site-wide landscape scheme was developed with Haire Landscaping, the

The Site:

An aerial photograph showing a road and surrounding fields. The road is a light-colored, straight line running diagonally from the top left towards the center. To the right of the road, there are green fields with some trees and a small cluster of buildings. The overall landscape is rural and agricultural.

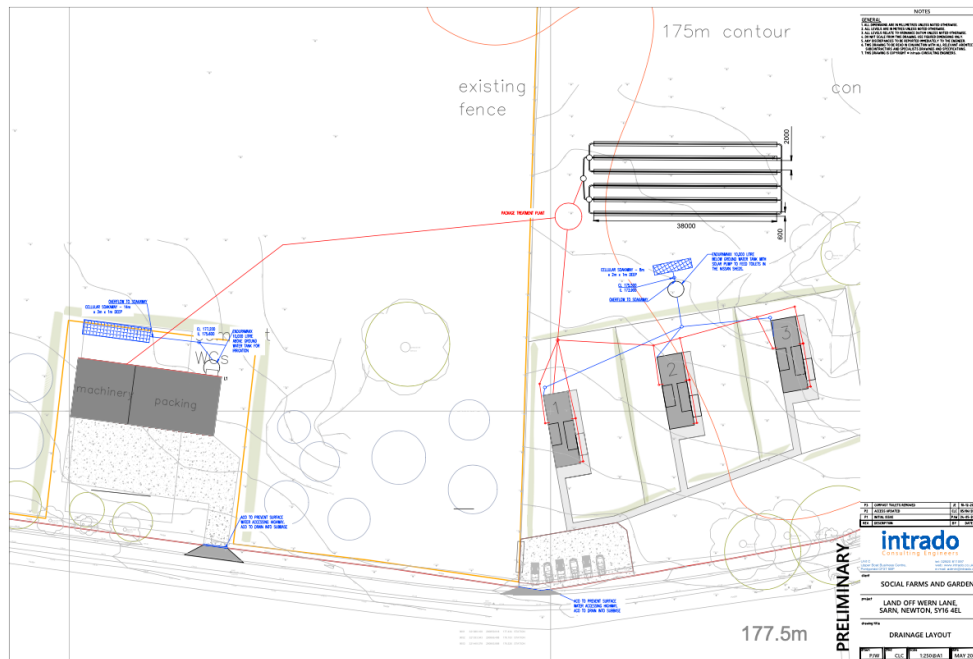
Flooding Constraints

Current government planning guidance must increasingly account for higher flood risk due to more extreme weather events. This reduced the amount of land suitable for housing and infrastructure at Sarn, and would be similar in other potential locations. Early analysis using flood-risk mapping is essential to determine if/where any buildings can be located.

At Sarn, the farmyard and housing had to be moved from the original plans and condensed into the limited area deemed suitable from a flood-risk perspective. Although this did not significantly increase costs, it has restricted future infrastructure potential (e.g., education spaces, visitor or student accommodation). Other locations may experience much higher costs where raised access tracks, engineered ground levels, or other mitigation measures are required.

Drainage

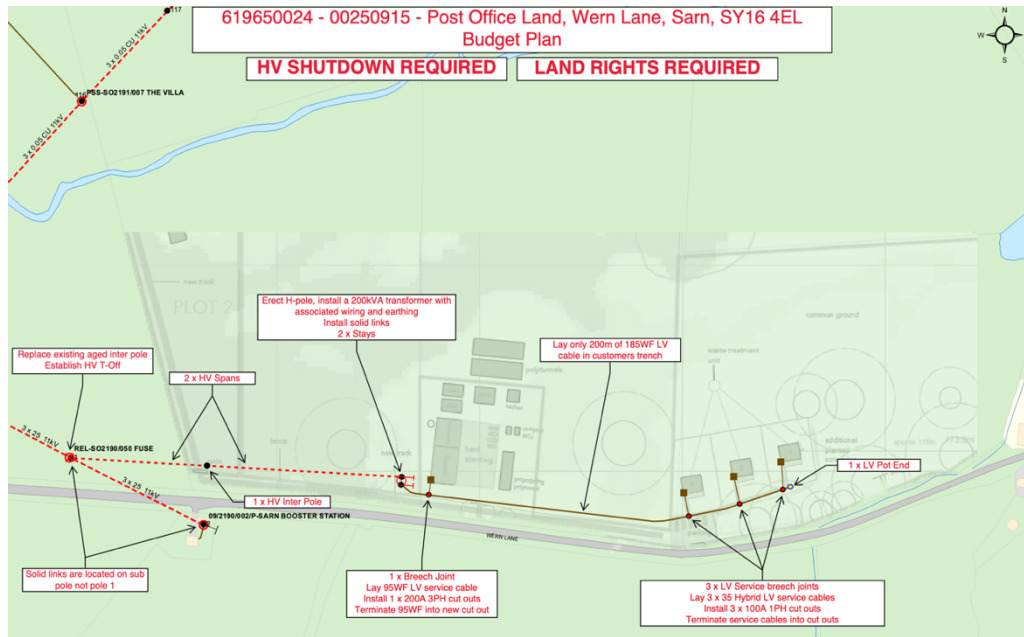
The extent of the buildings proposed on the site required a SUD's application, alongside the planning application. A study and report were commissioned from Intrado, examining flood mitigation and rainwater storage options. Percolation tests were commissioned from a local contractor, to inform the Intrado report. Concurrently, the team carried out some initial research into land-based and natural flood risk mitigation and methods of foul disposal, e.g. adaptations to the existing pond and reed beds respectively. The former was ultimately incorporated alongside the more 'conventional' attenuation methods specified by Intrado, the latter was excluded due to the tight timescale but could be re-visited for future sites. The Intrado SuDS scheme incorporated rainwater capture, two 10,000L tanks, for use by the growers - originally one 10,000L tank to the shed, and one 10,000L below ground tank for the houses, the latter was substituted for three 5000L above ground tanks when the Nissen hut homes were omitted. Attenuation was proposed in the form of extensive below ground egg-crate reservoirs, capturing overflow from the tanks, with swales above the soakaways. Foul waste is processed by a packaged waste unit with an extensive herring-bone run-off field, proximity to the Caerbita stream was considered in the siting of the run-off. The existing pond on the site was re-landscaped and bunded to form a larger pond, to improve resilience over the dry months.



Initial SuDS / drainage layout

Services

The site did not have any electrical or mains water connections. We established that there were overhead power cables on the site and engaged with Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) to identify budget costs for providing mains power to the shed and dwellings, this proved to be a torturous process, with widely varying costs being provided, from approximately £10k to £50k for a single-phase connection. Alongside this exercise, we carried out research into off-grid options - solar PV, micro-hydro and wind - working with local consultants/installers, and factoring in running costs and standing charges for a grid-linked setup. This study concluded that an off-grid option – i.e. extensive PV (ground-mounted and on the shed roof), multiple inverters, battery storage, and backup diesel generator – would offer the most capital effective, affordable in use and resilient solution. Micro-hydro and wind generation were discounted based on the site conditions, ie lack of reliability in both cases. The consequences for energy use across the site were considered when opting for the off-grid approach, ie the potentially restricted power supply would inform decisions on heating the houses and would have an effect on potential equipment used in the shed. The expectations of the potential growers were also discussed in light of the limited electrical power, for example requirements for household appliances (eg tumble driers, electric ovens, forms of water heating etc), and ambient temperature within the houses (ie 21°C or potentially lower). This became particularly relevant when opting for the off-the-shelf cabin housing solution discussed below, as the cabins as delivered were all-electric.



Design layout from SPEN, for mains connection

To supply, install and commission an off-grid electricity system comprising:-
 29.92kWp roof mounted solar PV system with 4 No. SMA SB6kW solar inverters.
 Qty 2 No. SMA SI8.0 battery inverters.
 Qty 5 No. BYD 15.4kWh Lithium batteries c/w BMU and Battery isolation unit.
 Qty 1 No. Stephill SSD10W generator c/w DSE 3110 control interface, remote start and 3 way fuel valves.
 Qty 1 No. SMA Datamanager c/w router and power supply for remote monitoring by SMA EnnexOS platform.
 All associated protection, switchgear and cabling terminating in an agreed isolator for local distribution connection.

Initial specification for off-grid solution

The above outline specification was used to tender the package of works on Sell-2-Wales, with returns from several installers with various options for equipment specifications. A local company, Westflight, was appointed via the tender process. The final specification was adapted to include an additional inverter and an upgrade to the generator, to mitigate the additional power demands from the cabins. The direct electric heaters to the cabins were also disconnected and replaced with woodstoves, again to reduce and balance the energy demand. Notwithstanding the above, a degree of management and communication is needed by the growers to manage energy use on the site. Westflight are remotely monitoring energy use across the site, this data will be reviewed after the first year of occupation.

Options for water provision to the site were also examined. An off-grid borehole solution was informally tendered to local contractors and discussed in detail with Igne Boreholes. A geo-technical survey was commissioned to establish potential well depth and long-term availability of water. The stream on the site was considered for extraction for non-potable uses, this proved to be an unreliable source. Alongside this exercise Crown Energy were appointed to obtain costs for mains water connection, having ascertained that there was a mains supply in Wern Lane. Following Severn Trent's site survey of the water main it was established that no road closure would be necessary, avoiding the consequent expense and time delay, and that the mains connections (separate metered connections for the houses and the shed) would be straightforward and cost-effective. The significant cost difference between the borehole option and mains connections informed the decision to go with the latter. There were some reservations around ongoing costs for mains water, especially for crop watering, mitigated to some extent by the rainwater capture and improvements to the pond for water storage. The growers installed pipework from the shed to the growing areas for irrigation, supplemented by captured rainwater and possible extraction from the stream (within limitations).

The availability and cost of water and power supply are major determinants of feasibility. Proximity to mains services can substantially reduce capital costs and, in some cases, may be a deciding factor in whether a potential site is viable. Conversely, an off-grid approach may bring long-term savings and resilience but requires higher upfront investment. Off grid systems are much more capital demanding but will make savings for farmers over many years while mains connections might be much cheaper but pass the burden of standing and usage charges onto tenant farmers. This was not really modelled for Sarn and not fully thought through in the notional rent charges for farmers.

Electricity supply

It proved very difficult to obtain reliable cost estimates for a mains electricity connection at Sarn. This uncertainty contributed to the decision to invest approximately £70,000 in a solar array and winter/backup generator. The ground-mounted solar installation, along with associated planning permission, allows for future expansion. While the off-grid system can significantly reduce power bills (by avoiding utility standing charges and usage fees), the full cost comparison with diesel and equipment lifecycle costs has not yet been modelled but should be considered for future projects.

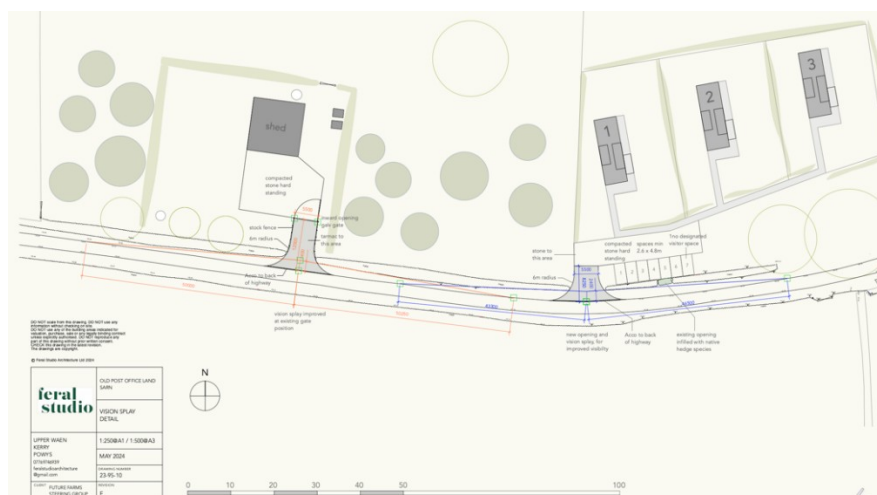
Water resources /supply

Climate change is expected to bring drier springs and summers, with particularly acute effects on horticultural enterprises. Irrigation must now be planned for across the UK, not only in traditionally dry regions. Large-scale irrigation using mains water is unlikely to be financially viable at current produce prices, and restrictions on water for irrigation may be imposed during periods of water stress.

On-land water resources therefore become critical. At Sarn, borehole installation (estimated at £12,000–£18,000) was outside the available budget. The onsite stream dried up summer 2025 and the locals say that it has dried every summer for the last 5 years. While the constructed pond and roof-water harvesting will reduce mains water dependency, they could only provide a few days supply in severe drought. At Sarn more thought could have been given to shallow ground water exploitation adjacent to the stream and through swale construction to maximise water retention, all to reduce summer reliance upon expensive mains water. Reliable year-round water sources - perennial streams, rivers, or groundwater - should be a key criterion in selecting future sites.

Planning

Alongside the above, the drawings and other documents for the planning application were developed, with Social Farms and Gardens' Community Land Advisory Service (CLAS) and Asbri Planning. Powys CC Highways Department was consulted prior to submission of the application, the layout was revised to include a second crossover/site entrance, to avoid clashes between vehicles accessing the houses and those accessing the shed and yard. Details of vision splays and parking arrangements were developed for submission.



Vision splay details, developed with Highways Dept

The application was submitted in March 2024 and validated in April 2024. The consultant documents discussed above - drainage strategy, landscape scheme, tree survey, ecology report, green infrastructure statement etc - were developed for inclusion with the application. A detailed flood risk assessment was prepared and submitted with the application.

The planning application can be found here: <https://pa.powys.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=SB2HPNM4N00&activeTab=summary>

The application was approved in October 2024, following extensive consultation with the PCC planning department and other consultees, including site meetings. The application received several comments from the local community, expressing various concerns about the proposals. Community engagement was encouraged, via door to door leafleting and a subsequent community meeting in the Sarn Village Hall. At the latter, reservations were expressed around the economic viability of the scheme, and around potential further development of the site, fears that were addressed by the project team at the meeting and subsequently.

Further planning applications were submitted for the ground-mounted solar array, approved November 2024: <https://pa.powys.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=SJLTM6MPHR100&activeTab=summary>

And for the polytunnels, approved in August 2025: <https://pa.powys.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=SXSJOZMPFUP00&activeTab=summary>

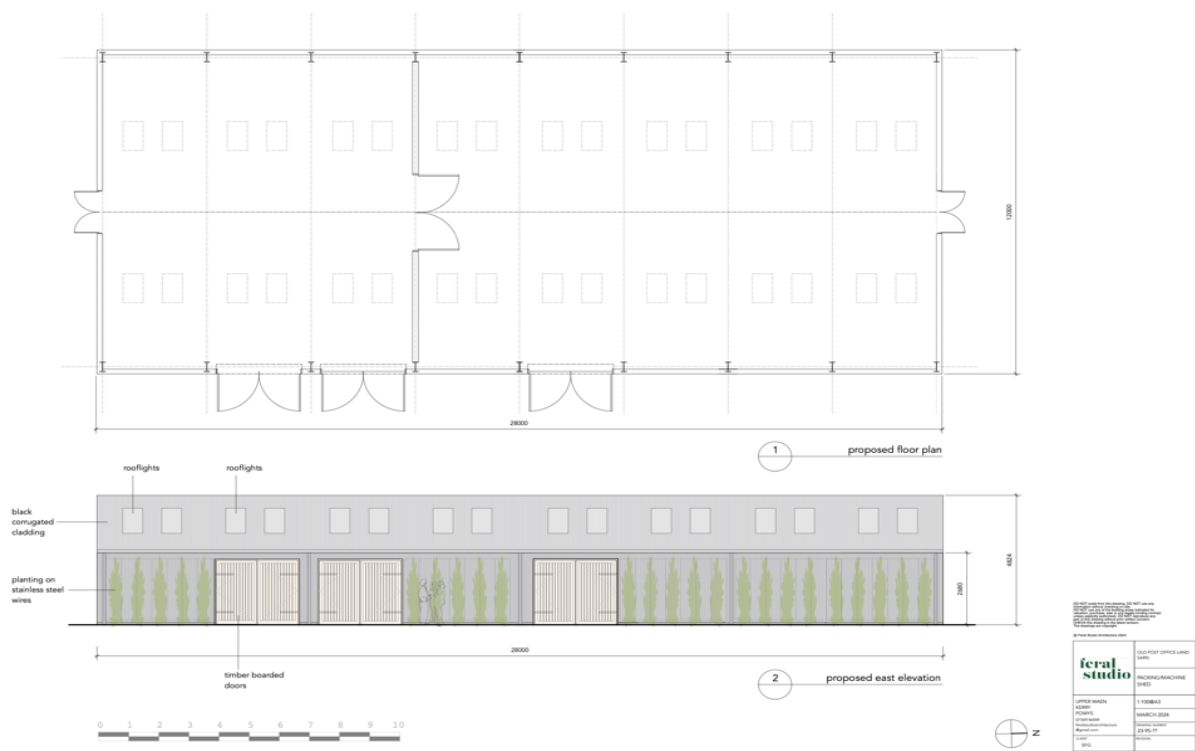
Groundworks

Following granting of planning permission, the groundwork package – crossovers, hardstanding areas, tracks, below ground drainage and SuDS measures – was developed, for tender on Sell2Wales in late 2024. The tenders were evaluated by the team using a matrix based on cost, quality of response, locality and experience. Malcolm Coates Groundworks were selected and were able to commence the works promptly in December 2024, initially under a Letter of Intent while a cost-saving exercise was carried out to arrive at a final contract figure, included in a JCT Minor Works contract. The hardstanding area to the shed was reduced in size, the concrete slab to the shed omitted and tarmac to the parking area omitted as part of the cost-saving exercise. Works on site were hampered through the winter by the wet weather and consequent mud, requiring additional hardcore to form the shed and house bases. The JCT contract included a Liquidated and Ascertained Damages (LADs)

clause for late completion, an extension of time was granted due to the poor weather and site conditions. The original contract works were supplemented by additional landscaping works, forming a bund to the existing pond to retain water for irrigation and earth movement to drain existing damp areas of the site for cultivation, funded by additional grants. Malcolm Coates acted as Principal Contractor for CDM purposes. The contractor produced two-weekly retrospective invoices, with progress reviewed by FSA via weekly site meetings, plus additional site meetings when required.

Shed

The packing and storage shed was originally 30m x 12m on the approved planning drawings, steel portal framed and corrugated metal clad, with timber barn doors and planting to soften the visual impact. The shed was originally orientated on a north/south axis, to minimise visual impact from Wern Lane, this was revised to a west/east orientation to maximise solar exposure for the PV. Other shed typologies were considered, e.g. Romney huts – discounted in part due to incompatibility with a solar installation.



30m x 12m shed plan

As part of the cost-saving exercise the shed was reduced in size to 12m x 12m, with provision built into the steel framing to extend when feasible. Following input from a structural engineer and steelwork designer, the shed package was informally tendered to local contractors, with Phil Jones Steel Framed Buildings being awarded the contract. The shed was originally intended to accommodate the entire PV array, reducing the shed size and roof area required a ground-mounted array to supplement the rooftop PV, consequently requiring an additional planning application, see link above.



The 12m x 12m shed

Divisible farms

Although co-locating several agroecological farms on one site (three, in this case) reduces development costs and enables peer support, Our Food Trust believes it is important to design farms to be as divisible as possible. This ensures each business can operate independently or choose to collaborate at varying levels, rather than layout and infrastructure obliging them to be conjoined.

At Sarn, budget constraints resulted in constructing a smaller shared barn for the three enterprises. Water to the land plots was not originally separately metered and that had to be put in by the growers. While the housing has separate water and electricity metering, the barn is shared and bills are sent through as one total which needs to be divided by the growers. Splitting bills across the 3 farm businesses for Sarn is therefore more complex.

Designing without full divisibility should not become the default. Future developments should aim for separate barns and individually metered utilities for each farm business, which would better support long-term operational flexibility and business autonomy.

Homes For Growers

Concurrently with the development of the planning drawings and documents, FSA carried out an analysis of low-cost housing options with Richard Luff from Our Food Trust. Several building types were assessed against criteria of:

- Cost-effectiveness
- Planning/Building Regulations compliance
- Comfort
- Lifespan
- Ease of assembly/dis-assembly
- Modularity
- Adaptability
- Low carbon/sustainability

The study compared Nissen huts, adapted off-the-shelf timber building (eg Dunster House), small bespoke timber framed unit, part-fitted shipping container, pre-owned static home, serviced slab (for the growers' own shelter, eg yurt). Based on the above criteria (particularly the potential for Building Regs compliance and modularity/adaptability), the Nissen hut option was selected for further development. We liaised with a local Nissen hut kit supplier and discussed fit-out details with a local craftsman to develop a well-insulated and Building Regulations compliant shell, using Warmcell insulation and TJI joists. Heating and hot water options were assessed in tandem, prioritising low-emissions solutions feasible within the tight budget. Thermal and emissions calculations for Building Regulations were carried out for various insulation, heating and hot water options, 300mm Warmcell, a wood stove for heating and an ASHP hot water cylinder were specified, respectively. Building Regulations plan approval was granted based on the above specification.



The Nissen huts

The house contract was tendered on Sell2Wales, with a limited response from potential contractors. The figures tendered were in excess of the remaining budget for the houses, particularly as some overspend on the groundworks had been accommodated. The tight funding timescale did not allow for a meaningful cost-saving exercise, coupled with limited availability for the potential contractor, and the pressing need to accommodate the growers on site. The latter was particularly prescient as the PV and associated equipment had been installed, creating a security issue until the growers were on site.

The team re-visited the original assessment document to identify other off-the-shelf options that might be affordable and available at short notice. Pre-used timber cabins and fitted-out shipping containers, both readily available, were reviewed in more detail, with the recruited growers included in the evaluation process. The cabins proved to be the more popular option, from a comfort and quality of space perspective, also available sooner and cheaper (cabins approximately £40k per unit, fitted-out containers approx. £45k, Nissen Huts to Building Regs standard approx. £60k). The ground slabs and incoming services setting-out were re-designed and the groundworks completed prior to arrival of the cabins. Following a site survey and transportation/siting assessment, including consideration for possible craneage, the cabins were installed in April 2025. Additional works were commissioned to reduce the electrical load of the cabins, disconnecting electric heaters and electric showers, installing timers for the immersions and installing woodburners.



The cabins

Landscape

The landscaping works were funded by a PCC Local Fund for Nature grant and included hard and soft landscaping (pond formation and tree planting), bio-diversity enhancements (bird and bat boxes) and visitor facilities (benches, shelters and compost toilets). The soft landscaping was tendered on Sell2Wales, again with a limited response. The contract was awarded to a North Wales landscape contractor. The weather-related delay in completing the groundworks, and particularly the site levelling following the works, hampered the tree planting, which was eventually carried out in March/April. The unusually dry Spring resulted in the loss of some of the young trees and hedging. Ideally the tree/hedge planting could have been delayed until the following Spring, but this wasn't feasible within the funding criteria. The contracted tree planting was supplemented by extensive planting by volunteers and the growers, with trees supplied by Woodland Trust and others. The benches, compost toilet and bird/bat boxes have been installed on the site, the pond has held water over the winter and should provide a significant resource through the Spring and Summer.

Polytunnel Planning



Image credit: Heather Birnie Photography

The growers' experience of the planning process for the polytunnels was one of the more challenging aspects of the first year. The support from Social Farms & Gardens, whose time, expertise and financial assistance enabled them to navigate what was an unfamiliar and

complex system, significantly reduced the administrative burden. This allowed the growers to focus on establishing the farm, and without it the process would have been considerably more demanding.

In practice, securing permission proved lengthy and, at times, frustrating. SF&G initially pursued permitted development rights but were turned down twice before proceeding to a full planning application. This resulted in a prolonged waiting period with limited updates, pushing approval well into the growing season and delaying installation further. Poly tunnels had always been presented as a core component of the project, as they are essential to the viability of small-scale horticulture in the UK climate, so it had been assumed that approval would be largely procedural. The extended timeline therefore felt confusing, particularly as many comparable market gardens construct poly tunnels without seeking formal permission. However, due to the public facing nature of the project and its strong links with Powys County Council, it was important that the full and transparent planning route was followed.

The uncertainty and delay had a tangible impact on the growers' businesses in 2025. Crops sown in anticipation of tunnel planting became root-bound and leggy in modules while decisions were pending. As poly tunnel crops tend to be both high-value and productive, the delay reduced early-season output and affected income. Favourable summer heatwaves meant that some crops planted outdoors established better than expected, enabling small harvests before the tunnels were fully erected. Nonetheless, the experience highlighted how critical timely infrastructure decisions are to the financial resilience of new small-scale horticultural enterprises.

Key lessons

a) Providing bespoke temporary housing is not easy/cheap

The original design choice for Sarn was to be an adapted Nissen hut designed to be 67m² and upgradable to a permanent house (if planning was granted) but these would have cost about £82k each which was outside budget limits. Therefore, a late in the day swap to somewhat well-insulated, functional, and reasonably pleasant second-hand holiday homes (£49k, 50m²), fitted with wood-burning stoves, provided a comfortable living space that should be adequate for several years. However, with both Nissen huts and the holiday homes, use of cheap fossil fuels (diesel or gas) is becoming legislatively ever more complex with the push towards electrification having major bearing upon the solar PV system costs. In the end wood burning stoves were fitted for space heating only.

There is a strong relationship between temporary house size (m²) and cost. 45-50m² may feel small but 70m² is a good deal more costly and that must be borne through grants or tenants rent. Sarn house durability and comfort over multiple winters, however, remains

untested. It is therefore premature to say that this build system has struck the right balance between comfort and the relatively high annual cost, assuming 5–6 years of use (they might be reusable, but their value may be very low by then so the expenditure should be viewed as sunk money). Nonetheless, given each housing unit costs about £49k fitted, this equates to close to £10k per year over a 5-year period.

b) Adapt barn design and size to agroecological holdings

The original steel framed barn design was 30 × 12 m and this design choice was “locked in” by planning approval. Budget limitations meant it was built as a 12 × 12 m barn with a crushed-stone floor rather than concrete. Retrospective costing showed that more compact Nissen-hut barns could offer much lower-cost space. Given the larger of these are 7.3 m wide and divisible, it would be possible on future farms for each farm business to have its own Nissen barn, built as a unit that can be extended. This design, layout, and potential for extension would have been feasible at Sarn, though flood-risk constraints would have required careful initial siting. Barn area per farm business should be modest at the start - around 35 m² - recognising that more space will be needed as businesses expand. This approach helps keep initial capital outlay lower until enterprises can invest for themselves.

c) Wastewater treatment

There was reluctance to adopt a nature-based system - constructed wetlands and compost toilets - due to concerns this might jeopardise planning permission within tight grant deadlines. This led the Sarn design to use a conventional package treatment plant, flush toilets in houses, and one compost toilet. In principle, savings could be made by adopting nature-based wastewater solutions, which would also better align with the ethos of agroecological farming.

d) Completion and snagging

Compressed decision and contracting timelines due to the 6-month time response from planning, budget constraints and final contracting works falling close to grant completion deadlines meant that some minor finishing works remained incomplete in April 2025. Items such as the balance of landscaping, connecting water harvesting structure to barn and houses, entranceway fencing, compost toilet, volunteer shelter and finishing works in houses and barn all remained outstanding. Successful applications for further funds both from Cultivate (£5700-) and ACPW3 (£6000-) mean that all works will be complete by end of February 2026, 11 months after the original grant completion date. The need for snagging to be undertaken is a very common occurrence. However, in the case of Sarn it proved rather more challenging due to a) extremely compressed build timeline (6 months between planning permission and grant end date), b) insufficient funds, c) final design choices and so costs only being made late on, d) difficulty finding reliable contractors who would commit to doing work retrospectively.

Section 11: Site Development



The three timber cabins when the first growers had moved in.

Two of the three plots and houses were occupied from May 2025, with the final household arriving in October. The core infrastructure was largely in place: the barn had been constructed, hardcore car parks and entranceways installed, and the housing units were close to completion. However, a number of essential elements were still being finalised, including water connections to the houses and internal fittings in the barn. The pond was excavated soon after the growers arrived, though prolonged dry conditions meant it did not fill up until later in 2025. The first growers were encouraged to move in prior to full completion in order to provide a security presence for the adjacent solar array. This arrangement was not problematic, as they were keen to begin establishing their businesses, but it did mean living and working on a partially finished site.

In practical terms, the lack of fully operational utilities created early challenges. Initially, there was no running water within the houses, requiring water to be collected from the barn connection for domestic use. There was also no direct water supply to the plots; for Plot 1 in particular, this meant transporting water significant distances during a period of heatwave and drought, it would be desirable for this to be included in the site development for future

projects. Entrance fencing was also delayed and only completed in January 2026, during which time loose sheep were able to enter the site, fortunately without causing crop damage. Plumbing issues were experienced beneath all houses, largely due to poor installation, and insufficient insulation in the barn plumbing led to burst seals and leaks during the first frost, leaving the barn without water for several weeks. These issues are perhaps due to the use of generalist contractors and pressure to complete works within funding deadlines and constraints.

Elements of landscaping and boundary infrastructure were also problematic. Tree planting across the site was poorly executed: many trees were left unstaked, several became dislodged, and a significant proportion did not survive their first year due to late installation in a drought year. The boundary hedge along the eastern edge was unevenly planted, did not follow the boundary line, and suffered approximately 50% losses. In several areas, fencing had been partially removed and left in disrepair, with unclear boundary demarcation, particularly between Plot 3 and the farmyard and communal land, which has created ongoing management challenges.

There were also missed opportunities to strengthen the long-term functionality and accessibility of shared infrastructure, mostly due to funding constraints rather than negligence, although it does demonstrate the need for experienced market gardeners to be part of the development process. For example, the hardcore surface in the car park was not extended to the side door of the barn, despite this being a heavily used access point and the location of a key water tap. This limits accessibility to the newly constructed compost toilet and constrains plans to develop an outdoor wash station. Similarly, concreting and sealing the barn floor during construction - as was omitted during the initial cost-saving exercise - would have improved its utility as a vegetable packing space, reducing dust and enabling safer, more efficient processing of produce.

Overall, aspects of the site development and build appear to have exhibited the trade off between needing to stay within budgets and meet funding deadlines, and the long-term usability and specific needs of horticultural businesses. While the fundamental infrastructure has enabled the growers to begin trading and establishing their enterprises, several elements of workmanship have created avoidable challenges - although maybe they only seem avoidable in hindsight! These have added pressure during an already intensive start-up phase, highlighting the importance of quality control and future-focused design in projects intended to support new farms.

At the same time, it is important to emphasise that the growers would have been unlikely to be able to access or afford this level of infrastructure independently. The opportunity to live on site in functional accommodation, with access to a shared barn, utility connections, and initial landscaping, represents a significant capital investment that would be far beyond the

reach of most new entrant growers. The additional funding made available to the growers to complete works, including building a compost toilet and additional landscaping work, themselves over recent months to continue improving the site has also been greatly valued. While there are clear lessons that could inform improvements on future sites, the foundational infrastructure and support provided have created a platform from which the growers can build resilient, land-based businesses.



The back of the barn, showing generator, water storage and lean to.

Key Lessons

- a) Early occupation before full completion can support project goals (e.g. security and business start-up), but it must be balanced with ensuring essential utilities and infrastructure are operational to avoid placing unnecessary strain on growers
- b) Tight funding deadlines, and use of generalist contractors can lead to poor workmanship and design oversights, highlighting the importance of quality control and involving experienced growers in both planning and delivery.
- c) Providing access to substantial initial infrastructure and funding delivers significant value, enabling opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible to new entrant growers.

Section 12: Grower Recruitment and Retention

Grower Journey working group (May 2024)

The Partnership established a working group to identify suitably experienced growers for the opportunity at Sarn and assess training and support needs for establishing new businesses.

It was decided that for this pilot, with the significant uncertainties around timing, planning and security of tenure, the opportunity would only be suitable for those with sound experience of operating a fruit & veg growing business and sufficient resources to establish their new enterprises quickly.

Promotion (July 2024)

Although there was still significant uncertainty, it was decided to begin the recruitment process. This was in order to have candidates able to proceed as soon as planning permission was granted, rather than risk not finding growers before the project funding ended in December.

Criteria were developed and advertised through Partner networks, social media and websites, appraising potential applicants of the risks of the project not happening and inviting them to join FFP on this pioneering journey. The text of the advert is below.

We are seeking experienced growers who can establish their new enterprises quickly and soon be thriving. (We anticipate future opportunities for those with less experience for on-farm learning). Therefore, applicants must have:

- At least 2 years' experience working on a fruit and vegetable farm selling its produce e.g. as either a lead, or assistant grower or apprentice, ideally involving planning and management of the operation.
- Access to sufficient start-up funds for their proposed new enterprise.

Preference will be given to those who can evidence:

- A sound understanding of agroecological growing.
- The motivation to be part of a movement to feed the community and the flexibility to try new approaches.

- Willingness to collaborate with other farmers in shared spaces.
- Sensitivity to concerns of neighbours and an intention to integrate into the local community. We are particularly keen to see applications from those local to the area.
- Awareness of potential markets, how you might reach them and what support you would need to achieve this.

Selection process (October 2024 - February 2025)

A scoring system was developed to create a short list of candidates for interview.

Essential Criteria

2 years' experience

Ability to access land within proposed timeframes

Access to sufficient start-up funds or plan/route to achieve them once confirmed

<u>Desirable Criteria</u>	weight
Experience of working on a fruit and veg farm and selling its produce.	20
Experience of involvement in planning and management of operation.	15
A sound understanding of ecological growing.	15
The motivation to be part of a movement to feed the community and the flexibility to try new approaches.	10
Willingness to collaborate with other farmers in shared spaces.	10
Sensitivity to concerns of neighbours and an intention to integrate into the local community. From the local area.	10
Awareness of potential markets, how you might reach them and what support you would need to achieve this.	15
Willingness/ability to contribute to the hands-on building of farm infrastructure	5
Totals	100

Overall, nineteen applications were received, and thirteen online interviews were conducted by a panel of three partnership members. Candidates were invited to visit the site, ahead of an interview covering growing experience, business aptitude, cooperation with others and personal resilience.

The first round of advertising yielded five applications (two from couples), but we were only able to appoint one grower from this round. A second round saw a further eleven applications (three from couples/groups), though most had experience that was not purely in market gardening and there was a desire to run supplementary enterprises (such as processing into jams/chutneys etc, a café, educational courses or paid work off-site) alongside growing to make it work financially. There was a degree of apprehension about the planning conditions which made some individuals decide not to proceed because of the risk of investing their life savings into a venture that might be forced to close in 5 years. This appeared particularly acute for single applicants.

The second round of interviews yielded two candidates we'd have liked to appoint, but neither was able to follow through – one for family reasons and the other due to nervousness around the planning requirement. So, we were still left with just one appointed grower at the end of the funding period to December 2024.

Project budgets had been used up so efforts to publicise the opportunity continued through personal networks. Three applications arrived in January & February 2025 through word-of-mouth, and the two remaining farm plots were awarded by early March. The same interview process was followed for consistency.

Retention

The growers awarded to one of the plots in March participated in training and planning activities between March and July but eventually decided they could not proceed due to family issues.

In August another word-of-mouth application was received and a pair of experienced growers who had not been ready to apply previously, were interviewed and awarded the remaining vacant plot from October 2025.

Training & support

A training needs analysis was carried out by Eco Dyfi, with applicants for the farms at Sarn and with others in the Partnership networks. From this assessment a bespoke "Pathways to Farming" course was developed and delivered in November/December 2024 with mentoring continuing into 2025. The focus was on the practicalities of starting a new enterprise, including crop planning and defining markets. Some of the appointed Sarn growers attended, together with others in the region.

Welsh Government's Farming Connect programme run by Lantra also provided access to a range of training and other support. Sarn growers used this service for business planning, mentoring, legal advice and a facilitated workshop on collaborating with other businesses using shared facilities.

While there is a case for pre planning farmer selection which could help with design, in practice this is unlikely to be feasible. Therefore, generic design decisions about farm business type must be made before farmer recruitment or arrival. As a broad early planning tool, assuming three co-located horticultural enterprises each with 5–10 acres has been a useful rule of thumb to estimate how many farms a site can support. However, financial pressures may push toward fitting more farms onto a site than ideal and this tension needs to be managed.

Key Lessons

- a) Ideally, recruitment should not commence until planning, security of tenure and basic infrastructure provision have been secured. Otherwise, this will limit the pool of interested growers and/or put unnecessary risk on those willing to take it.
- b) Although there is significant interest in the opportunity to start a new small farm, the uncertainty around the 5-year Rural Enterprise Dwelling planning condition and the possibility of having to leave at that point also limits those willing to proceed.
- c) It would be sensible to assume a level of fall-out in future farm recruitment.
- d) The nature of market gardening dictates that recruitment should ideally be timed to allow growers to get on site in late autumn/winter to facilitate preparation before the growing season begins.
- e) The level of support for new market gardening enterprises in Wales is excellent.

Section 13: The Grower Journey



Aerial view of plot 2 growing area from Aug 2025

The opportunity at the Future Farms site in Sarn was well advertised in growers' networks and was easily discovered by growers already tuned in to the agroecological/organic market garden world. It was circulated in lots of WhatsApp groups and social media groups and was sent on by friends and acquaintances. For a young grower, looking for the next step in their career, the opportunity sounded incredible, offering a holistic package for growers where there are so few secure options for accessing land. Seeing that the project was considering all elements of the business - living, land security, markets, training, legal advice - gave the confidence to take a leap into the unknown.

The application process included simple requests from the application, quick responses from the partnership and an appreciated collaborative and relatively informal tone. Visiting the land for the first time before being accepted was a significant moment, walking around and trying to judge whether this could be a long-term project and home. Moving onto the land happened slightly later than hoped for some, and travelling up to three hours round trip while trying to begin work on site was challenging. However, moving in was exciting, especially seeing the houses on site for the first time and eventually being able to bring belongings and stay overnight. For those who were part of the project from early 2025 the timing was rather difficult in terms of the season progressing faster than the site being ready

for occupation, for others who joined later, moving in during Autumn proved beneficial, allowing observation of how the land responded to water and wind before major planting decisions were made.

Living on the land is essential in running a market garden business. Daily presence is required throughout the growing season to open and close polytunnels, water seedlings, check irrigation, observe for pests and diseases, monitor seed crops and work long hours. In the early stages of establishing the business, income is reinvested into materials, tools and infrastructure, meaning off-site part-time work has been necessary for most of the growers to cover domestic costs. With working part-time, minimum wage jobs, it would be impossible to start a market gardening business without access to affordable housing. Access to a plot of land that would not otherwise have been affordable to rent, alongside cheap housing and the grace period of one year free land rent that was offered, has therefore been fundamental and appreciated.

The living spaces are warm with the woodburner, dry - also helped by the woodburner - easy to keep clean and have all the amenities needed. They also have large windows and glass doors on the southern end, for lots of natural light and wonderful views of the forested hill opposite. However, there is not a lot of storage, especially for two people, and would be particularly difficult for a small family to live in full time. The cabins were a last minute decision due to constraints of time and funding, they are designed for holidays and summer and are not well insulated enough for all year round living without a good source of heating. In this exposed valley they shudder and creak in strong winds and can let draughts and water in around doors and windows. Again, because they are not purpose built, there is limited porch space for removing wet clothes, and the growers have had to build their own log stores despite the need to store large amounts of firewood if heating economically. The housing functions, can keep residents warm and dry, and is massively appreciated in order to live on site without being in a caravan, but longevity will be the ultimate test. There is also uncertainty about what the housing options will be past year 5, when hopefully full planning permission is gained.

The growers bring substantial experience to the project. Backgrounds include over five years in commercial vegetable production, an MSc in Sustainable Food, a BSc in Zoology, and experience in grassroots organising. Previous roles in established agroecological market gardens included managing more than 250 annual and perennial plant varieties, expanding veg box schemes, increasing turnover and profit, initiating food solidarity schemes, leading marketing and graphic design, and managing teams of volunteers. This depth of experience has enabled confident establishment of new businesses on site. However, the risks remain significant. Personal savings, including inheritance money, have been invested into setting up the project and covering living costs, with little likelihood of recouping this investment in the

first few years. There is a strong sense of risk in putting time and money into a pilot project without full security or clarity on long-term planning permission to stay living on site.

The absence of a finalised lease has created practical and psychological challenges. It has prevented access to certain financial support mechanisms, such as Universal Credit during business set-up, and made it difficult to apply for or accept funding opportunities that require proof of tenure. Investment in additional infrastructure has been delayed due to uncertainty about security on the land. The delivery of information has at times been challenging, with significant changes introduced without clear communication. A more structured handover process covering accommodation systems, on-site infrastructure and project requirements would have been beneficial. In practice, much of this information sharing fell to neighbouring growers rather than being formally provided by the project.

The on-site community has been one of the most important elements of the grower journey. Operating neighbouring businesses in close proximity, with potential market competition and shared facilities, carries a high potential for conflict and requires commitment to collaboration and good communication. The individuals recruited have worked well together, with shared values and an aligned vision for the land. Early facilitated workshops with external facilitators trained in cooperative working were a strong component of the recruitment process, although funding limitations meant this support did not continue throughout and wasn't able to be accessed by the full collection of growers embarking on this project. Monthly community meetings are now taking place to discuss the collaborative veg business, communal land management and shared values and aspirations.

Operationally, much is working well. The barn is well positioned close to road access, entrances are wide enough to accommodate lorries, and there is ample parking for events. Off-grid energy with diesel backup has resulted in low energy costs, although diesel use has been higher than expected during grey winter periods. The land itself has proven slightly wetter and windier than anticipated, requiring adaptation in tree planting, soft fruit placement and wind protection strategies. Use of septic tanks and water based sewage systems could be seen as a contradiction to the sustainability aims of the project, although the newly built compost toilet is a welcome alternative. Water tanks on houses and the barn are positive features, but mounting height and tap fittings could be improved. Reliance on mains-fed water, alongside uncertainty about billing, presents longer-term cost concerns, and a borehole may have offered a more resilient solution.

The growers have had a good first season on the land. There were challenges around getting onto the land and gaining polytunnel planning permission, which held them back from achieving a full season of growing in 2025. Nevertheless, first sales of vegetables in June 2025, and veg boxes in July, provided tangible proof of progress. From May 2025, the first year became a period of setting up systems and infrastructure: building markets, formalising

the business partnership, constructing tunnels, laying irrigation and getting to know the community. Although growing took place on a relatively small area - around two acres across Plots 1 and 2 - the businesses generated sufficient income to reinvest in scaling up production for 2026. Veg box numbers have increased steadily, with the first week serving 13 local customers (although only one from Sarn initially). Over the final five months of 2025, the scheme sold 455 boxes to 60 households within a 15-mile radius. The growers are now progressing through organic conversion, developing relationships with wholesale buyers to diversify markets, and planning to transition into a workers' cooperative structure.



The first market stall the growers did in Sarn, alongside Cig Cynefin

Community engagement has been central to this first year being a success. A summer Bioblitz and autumn Harvest Feast brought residents and visitors onto the land, building

trust and connection through shared experiences rooted in food and ecology. Hedge planting days, a seed swap, site tours and the engagement of local contractors for fencing, mowing and repairs have further embedded the farm within local networks. The veg box scheme has expanded to collection points across Montgomeryshire and into the borders, alongside the introduction of a subsidised Newtown Under 5s box – supported by Bwyd Powys Food – and a Small Veg Box option, broadening access and responding to different household needs. Regular market attendance and collaboration with other producers have reinforced the growers' role not only as food producers but as contributors to a resilient local food economy. However, there remains room for improvement. Uptake within Sarn itself is still lower than hoped, and more targeted local outreach and storytelling could strengthen participation. More structured, ongoing engagement - such as regular open days, seasonal workshops, volunteer opportunities and school partnerships - would help increase community involvement beyond one-off events and build longer-term support for the project.

Overall, the grower journey reflects both the inherent risks of starting any new land-based enterprise and the transformative opportunity created by integrated access to land, housing and shared facilities. Without this project, alternative land options are vague and precarious, lacking long-term security and accommodation, which puts the ongoing uncertainties around this project in perspective - it's likely that the growers would face many of the same challenges setting up elsewhere, but without the ongoing support of the partnership and each other. The Future Farms model has enabled committed and skilled growers to establish agroecological businesses, grow chemical free, seasonal veg, engage local people and support the development of a resilient local food system. With increased tenure clarity, strengthened communication processes and continued support, it offers strong potential as a replicable pathway for new entrant growers seeking secure, community-embedded livelihoods.



Harvest Feast Sept 2025, with produce from the land

Key Lessons

- a) Providing integrated access to land, affordable housing, and shared infrastructure is transformative for new entrant growers, significantly lowering barriers to entry and enabling viable land-based businesses that would otherwise be out of reach.
- b) Clear communication, secure land tenure (e.g. leases), and structured onboarding processes are critical; without them, growers face practical limitations (e.g. funding access) and uncertainty that can delay investment and development.
- c) Strong community—both among growers and with the local area—is essential to success, but requires ongoing facilitation, structured engagement, and targeted outreach to build long-term collaboration, participation, and market support.

Section 14: What Next?

Scale up to 100 farming enterprises across Powys and beyond!



Image credit: Heather Birnie Photography

The next step for the Future Farms Partnership is mainstreaming this in order to create [100 new farming enterprises](#), growing agroecologically for local and regional markets. There are several ways to do this:

- Support diversification on existing farms, primarily through building new supply chains to secure markets.
- Build new small farms on more land Facilitate access to secure new markets to enable farmers to diversify and create new enterprises on new farms. Build collaborative marketing and sales operations to retain more of the revenue. The first order from Birmingham – once a key market for Powys farmers – has just been received from the City Council.
- leased from Powys County Council.
- Buy farmland into community ownership and build farms and community growing projects on this.

A partnership is being discussed with ClwydAlyn Housing Association to build farmhouses through Wales' social housing programme. This would enormously contribute to the financial viability of building new small farms in the context of hugely inflated land prices. It would also be a major innovation in farming, of international interest. The Centre of Food Policy, established by Tim Lang at the University of London, is planning a major research programme with this Powys housing/land/farming initiative as the centrepiece.

The Future Farms Partnership's 100-farm programme has several components:

1. Secure land for new farms and build affordable farms with homes.

- a. Land leased long-term from Powys County Council. The next project site which is being considered is in Llandrinio.
 - b. Land purchased by the community. The first project is underway in Talgarth.
 - c. Development of Farmland Trust, a local charitable community benefit society designed to secure land into community ownership to be held in perpetuity for growing local fresh food.
2. Advocate for public policies, locally and nationally, that prioritise food security and enable the creation of new farm enterprises.
3. Develop skills and pathways into farming for a new generation of farmers.
 - a. Bridge the gap from graduation from Black Mountains and other colleges to running farming businesses - work experience and apprenticeships.
4. Facilitate business support to farmers.
 - a. Government funded support already worked well for the farmers at Sarn. Expand this as more new enterprises start.
5. Retain public/community ownership of land that is suitable for horticulture, so that its use for food security is held in perpetuity as a community asset.
 - a. All publicly/community owned land that is suitable for growing fresh food for local markets is a priceless asset for future food security and needs to be protected.
6. Build rapid expansion of local growing of fresh food into all future policy area and strategic plans for the county, including;
 - a. the Local Development Plan
 - b. the Strategic Development Plan for Powys, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire
 - c. affordable housing provision in Powys - linking housing and community food growing
 - d. the Transforming Towns agenda – developing local markets for produce
 - e. the Wellbeing Assessment and Plan – health, wellbeing and economic opportunity relating to food and farming
 - f. social value contracting in public procurement – local food supply chains serving social care and development sites
 - g. education and schools – supplying schools with local food and teaching children about local food.

Appendix 1: Reference Library

1. https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-08/bro_sfg_report_email_eng_0.pdf
2. https://www.eating-better.org/site/assets/files/10374/pas_factsheet_wales.pdf
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Appendix 2: Supporting Organisations

Supporting Organisations

- [Powys County Council](#)
- [Social Farms and Gardens](#)
- [Shared Assets](#)
- [Our Food 1200](#)
- [GWLAD consortium](#)
- [Landworkers' Alliance](#) (LWA)
- [Cultivate](#) & the [Bwyd Powys Food Partnership](#)
- [Carmarthenshire County Council](#) & [The Bwyd Sir Gar Food Partnership](#)
- [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#)
- [Lantra](#),
- [Black Mountains College](#)
- [Ecological Land Cooperative](#)
- [Eco Dyfi](#)
- [Food Sense Wales](#)

Appendix 3: Maps

Maps for the future project in Llandrinio

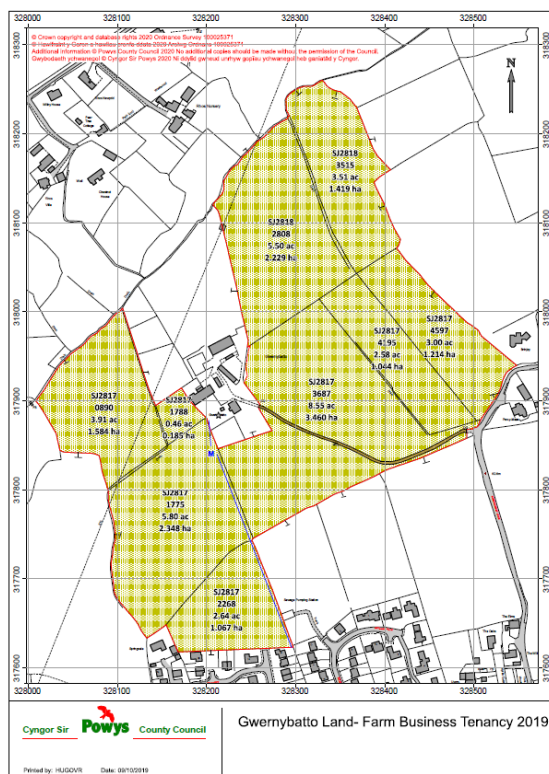
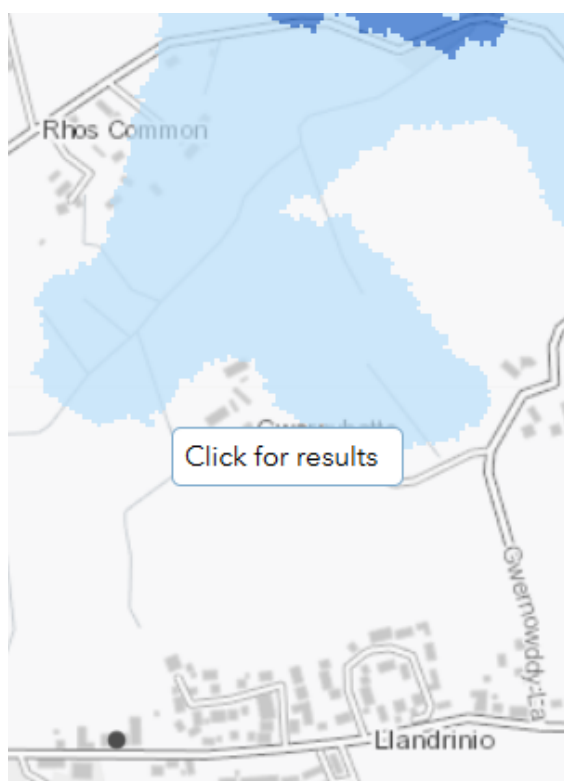
Maps and satellite view of Llandrinio (Gwernybatto)



OS map



Satellite image



Social **Farms**
& **Gardens**
Ffermydd a Gerddi
Cymdeithasol



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government