**Case Study: Shaw’s Community Woodland**

 **Swansea**

**Background information**

Shaw’s Woodland is a small woodland of approximately 3 acres, previously a Victorian nursery plantation propagating trees from all over the world to supply local estates. The woodland still contains a number of specimen exotic trees but is now bounded by houses on all sides. The woodland has many established trees and lots of new native regeneration along with the interesting species.

The land is owned by Swansea Council who were no longer able to manage it, leading to extensive growth of laurel and bramble on the site, plus some unsafe trees. Local people got together to form “Friends of Gowerton Woodlands and Open Spaces” in 2015 to take over the management of this and another smaller woodland in the area.

**Group aims**

The aims of the group are to manage and improve the wood with the following objectives:

1. To make the wood a pleasant and safe place in which local residents can enjoy walking in natural surroundings and in which they can appreciate and learn about the plants and animals present in the wood.
2. To evaluate and improve the biodiversity of the wood.
3. To clear up and discourage littering and other anti-social or inappropriate behaviour in the wood.

**Volunteers**

The woodland is for the community and all ages use it – children pass through on their way to school, the local elderly residents like to use it along with dog walkers, adults in their leisure time and local parents accessing the small store across the road from the wood.

The friends group has 25 – 30 paying members with 6 people on the committee. Regular committee meetings are open to all members to attend.

Up to 15 volunteers meet once a month, normally on a Sunday afternoon. There are also extra sessions when, for example, there is a delivery of bark chip for the paths. Everyone does what they can and all help with litter picks etc and generally keeping an eye on the site. Even the local rugby club come and help with path maintenance!

The path through the wood has been used by local people for centuries and it is clearly still very popular with local residents.

The main aim is to maintain access for everyone, to enable local people to continue to use and enjoy the green space and experience the wildlife its history and its unique tree species. Since the group was founded, they have been able to manage the more invasive plant species, open up the paths through the site, plant young trees, manage litter and put up bird boxes. Dead hedges have been used successfully to create managed areas of habitat whilst providing somewhere to put cleared brash and branches. Branches are also used to define the path edges. The group have organised attractive bilingual signage describing the activities of the group and the wildlife to be seen in the woods.

**Getting permission**

Initially local people with an interest in the wood got together and petitioned to form the new “Friends” group. This was a fairly straightforward process because they had the support of the Council and the local Parks Officer. They were able to create a constitution and a management plan for the site, involving close liaison with the Council and advice from Keep Wales Tidy.

**Support received**

Rob Cross (Vice Chair) and Viv Davies (Secretary) said of the site “*We are blessed – it is a privilege to work with this unique slice of historic woodland with its international trees, trying to keep it open and accessible to all. The membership is multigenerational, from 5 years old upwards. We get feedback from local people that they really value and appreciate the woodland.”*

The group has received support from Keep Wales Tidy, the Council and also Swansea Council for Voluntary Services.