

What You Can Do Now Guides for Landowners and Landseekers

What you can do now - Public landowners

Public landowners such as local authorities and town councils face many demands on their land, whilst also often struggling to balance the books in a context of budgets cuts and over-stretched staff. Yet many public landowners want to use the assets they have to help address the climate and biodiversity emergencies, decrease food insecurity, and improve communities' health and wellbeing, as well as providing built infrastructure and much-needed affordable housing. By working closely with a group of public landowners through the [Resilient Green Spaces](#) project, we have unearthed much existing good practice and useful advice from public landowners who are trying to work creatively within the current context, which we have summarised below. The structure of this document is inspired by the recently published guide '[Local Authorities Making Farmland Work for the Public Good](#)' – produced by the pan-European [Access to Land Network](#), which shows how public landowners can use their power in different ways, not just around the land they own, but also as a source of information, networks, and through policy influence and management. This briefing shares some ideas which you, as a public landowner, can try and take right now to better support access to land for communities in your area.

As a landowner:

- Consider the holistic value of the land for the community - accepting a lower monetary price for the land may enable other social and environmental benefits – and this is permitted under the [General Disposal Consent \(Wales\) 2003](#).
- Consider using a licence process, if appropriate, with periodic check-ins to allow access to land, instead of a full community asset transfer, to reduce the workload for community groups who are just developing. However, a licence may not make sense if significant infrastructure is required as it provides less security to the group managing the piece of land - it may also limit their access to funding if very short term.
- Start mapping a full picture of the land you may have available by focusing on a small area, such as in a few wards, or where there is known demand or need for land from communities, and build outwards when a good process has been established.
- Consider adding GIS data on council owned land to [DataMapWales](#) or another publicly accessible mapping service so it is easier for community groups to understand what land may or may not be available, and its characteristics.
- If facing hesitance over whether to lease public land to a community business because of its potential profit-making capacity, consider the alternative – a stretched council not having the capacity to do anything with the land, or being forced to selling the land for a one-time cash injection, versus the longer term social, economic and environmental benefits of a self-sustainable social enterprise or community business.

As a facilitator of land access:

- Have a 'one stop shop' or key person for community members interested in accessing land to come to, who can then act as a champion for community groups within the public organisation, and make it easy for people to get in touch with them via your website, or

other less formal channels such as Facebook. A Sustainable Food Partnership Coordinator or staff member dealing with Community Food may be a useful colleague to fill this role.

- Try to get colleagues from all departments engaged in measuring the social value of particular land uses, not just their financial return.
- Work with intermediaries (e.g. [Llais y Goedwig](#) or [Social Farms & Gardens](#)) or existing local land trusts or asset-managing anchor organisations already trusted by the council and with appropriate systems in place, and bring together projects within an area regularly (such as through a council/third sector group) to more efficiently tackle both immediate issues and the wider context, and to be able to steer community members towards other sources of support.
- Set up a waiting list for people interested in accessing land so that they can be contacted when something potentially suitable becomes available, so landseekers don't need to repeatedly browse council websites in case they miss an opportunity.
- Get individual council board member support early on for particular projects so they can more easily pass through council processes.
- Seek out examples of other local authorities which have managed to develop planning guidance which considers ecological issues, such as [Brighton and Hove Council's Planning Advice Note](#) on integrating food growing spaces into built developments, or contact the [Community Land Advisory Service Cymru](#) for advice.
- Consider using Local Development Orders to get permitted development rights for new entrants on small scale holdings.
- Explore innovative approaches where offering access to land to communities or small-scale growers can directly feed into local public procurement such through as 'business supported agriculture', or a council buying all produce from a site.

As a regulator of land:

- Try to develop an organisational set of principles or strategy around community access to land for food growing to give a consistent sense of direction even when elected members change regularly.
- Use the opportunity of making Local Development Plans (LDPs) to integrate food growing and planning objectives, give evidence of need, and make an action plan with deliverables – and learn from other local authorities who are doing their LDPs at different times.
- Advocate for changes in national policy which could unlock funding to help councils support communities to access land for agroecological farming, in a similar way to the recent commitments around allotments.

You can find many more examples of good practice and tools to support community access to land in the ['Local Authorities Making Farmland Work for the Public Good'](#) guide.



Image Credit – Kindling Trust

What you can do now - Landseekers

Securing access to land for agroecological farming in Wales is very challenging. The [average cost](#) of agricultural land is over £6000/acre, and competition for suitable land can be intense, with prospective growers often outbid by commercial buyers. Even where land might be available, it rarely comes with all the infrastructure to make an agroecological growing project or business viable, such as accommodation, processing facilities, water, and electricity. Wales also doesn't have the same policy frameworks as other parts of the UK, particularly Scotland, to encourage community ownership of land. At the same time, changes in legislation, such as the Sustainable Farming Scheme and the push to increase the amount of locally grown produce which goes into school meals, could open up opportunities for agroecological farms, and there is increasing recognition of the importance of access to natural spaces for people's mental and physical health. Through the [Resilient Green Spaces](#) project, we have been working with people who own land and those looking for land, and have condensed some ideas below for landseekers within the challenging current context about how to potentially get access to land more easily:

- Have a detailed business plan to approach potential landowners with, whether public or private, including your vision, start-up costs, planned activities, and financial forecasting (including how any surplus/profit would be spent if trying to secure publicly-owned land for a below market rate).
- Where possible, try and connect your project's aims with local and national policies so landowners can see a holistic picture of their value, beyond simply the financial – for

approaching public landowners in particular, aim to show how your enterprise could support their policy aims, such as around sustainable food production or improving biodiversity.

- Build local connections and use informal local networks to help you find land. For example, advertise on local Facebook groups, go to local events and meet people.
- Speak to the Local Community Council about your project and get them onboard before submitting any planning applications. They receive notification of all planning applications in their area and if they can connect a proposal with friendly people and a positive community project, they will be much more likely to support it.
- Consider working with [Farming Connect](#) and [Lantra](#) to get training on navigating bidding processes for contracts to sell produce via local authorities.
- Get support from [Cwmpas](#) to help explore community financing options such as community shares offers, to raise funds for your initiative – our [recent webinar](#) on this topic might give you some ideas to get started.
- Reach out to the [Community Land Advisory Service Cymru](#) for help finding land, negotiating terms with landowners, and navigating planning processes.
- Become a member of the [Landworkers' Alliance Cymru](#) group to connect with other peers interested in agroecological farming in Wales who may be able to offer mutual support or useful contacts.
- Check out [this clip](#) from the webinar in we ran September 2022 for landseekers which includes signposting to further sources of support in Wales.

Private landowners

Private landowners have a key role to play in helping to create new opportunities for the development of agroecological farming in Wales, and to create opportunities for a new generation of agroecological growers and the development of new community led farms and growing projects to maximise the social, economic and environmental benefits that you land delivers for you and your local community. Working with local communities and engaging with farm land trusts can also help ensure the long term stewardship of your land for agroecological farming and provide new option for your succession.

- Consider whether part of your land might be suitable for the development of an agroecological smallholding. Even a few acres can provide a livelihood for one or more growers.
- Take a look at the [Community Farmland Purchase Toolkit](#) created by the [Ecological Land Cooperative](#). It is aimed at growers looking to buy land but can help you to understand the types of [legal structures](#) and [business models](#) that agroecological growers might be using, and the kind of [relationship](#) they might be seeking with a landowner.
- Take a look at the [Fresh Start Land Partnership Handbook](#) which to help landowners identify and parcel out land and buildings on which 'land entrepreneurs' can establish new, independent businesses through the formation of sound business-to-business relationships.
- Check to see if your local authority has a Sustainable Food Partnership Coordinator or staff member dealing with Community Food who may be able to connect you to groups, networks or individuals who might be looking for land to establish a new community business on.
- If you find a group or individual with an interest in your land take time to get to know each other, understand their business ideas and practical needs from the site, and establish

whether you can work together. If you feel you need more information about their plans or experience, let them know, and be clear about any concerns you may have, but given the relationship time to get to get know each other and establish some level of trust.

- If they need support signpost them to the [Community Land Advisory Service Cymru](#) for help finding land, negotiating agreements, and navigating planning processes, and to become a member of the [Landworkers' Alliance Cymru](#) group to connect with other peers interested in agroecological farming in Wales who may be able to offer mutual support or useful contacts. Also speak to both of these organisations yourself to see if they can support you in working together.
- If you are thinking about the longer term future of your farm, or you are concerned about the future of the land when you retire, you might consider speaking to a land trust who could hold your in trust to be farmed for community benefit in perpetuity. You can sell, gift or bequeath land to a farm land trust such as [Ecological Land Cooperative](#), [Soll Association Land Trust](#) or [Biodynamic Land Trust](#). In some cases you may be able to lease the land back for a minimal rent within your lifetime in return for maintaining the property, knowing that it will be managed sustainably and in accordance with your wishes in the long term.
- Alternatively you might consider developing a relationship with a more locally based land trust, development trust or similar organisation, to give them an opportunity to fundraise to purchase all or part of your farm to provide a long term asset for the local community. [Social Farms and Gardens](#) or [DTA Wales](#) will be able to tell you whether there are organisations in your area who might be interested in bringing your land into community ownership.

Resilient Green Spaces is a £1.27m partnership project led by Social Farms & Gardens to pilot alternative re-localised food systems using communities and their green spaces as the driving force for change across Wales until June 2023.

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