

**Minutes of Action Plan for Pollinators (APP) Taskforce Meeting – 27 April 2023, Hybrid meeting - MS Teams and in person at the National Botanic Gardens of Wales**

**Attendees:**

Andrew Lucas	Bee Friendly scheme – Bee Champion
Anna Hobbs	Bumblebee Conservation Trust
Ant Rogers	Biodiversity Implementation Officer Pembrokeshire
Anthony Hicks	Welsh Government
Bethan Beech	Natural Resources Wales
Bleddyn Lake	Friends of the Earth
Bob Griffiths	CEFNFFYRDD
Bruce Langridge	National Botanic Garden of Wales
Catrin Evans	Catrin Evans Consultancy
Clare Flynn	Bumblebee Conservation Trust
Gary Mitchell	Social Farms and Gardens
Geoff Robinson	Welsh Government
Hannah Jones	North & Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent
Harriet Carty	Caring for God's Acre
Jan Miller	Bee Friendly scheme – Bee Champion
Jill Jackson	CEFNFFYRDD
Jon Walker	Swansea University
Katherine Mullin	Natural Resources Wales
Kathleen Carroll	Welsh Government
Kathryn Thomas	Swansea Council
Kevin McGinn	National Botanic Garden of Wales
Kipper	Welsh Beekeepers' Association
Laura Jones	National Botanic Garden of Wales
Lucie Taylor	Social Farms and Garden
Maggie Gill	APHA – National Bee Unit
Maria Golightly	Bannau Brycheniog National Park
Mark Cleaver	Monmouthshire County Council
Rachel Carter	One Voice Wales
Richard Dawson	UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology
Rob Parry	Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru
Samantha Harris	Welsh Government
Sarah Kessell	PONT and Wildlife Trust
Tim Birch	Wildlife Trust

1. Kathleen Carroll opened the meeting. No additional points were raised about the minutes from the last meeting 3 Nov.
2. **Grazing is Amazing – How Grazing can Help Pollinators** – Jan Serry (PONT) (Please see slides attached, which contain beautiful images of sites being transformed.)

Jan explained that [PONT](#) is a small charity whose focus is on conservation grazing and the benefit it can bring to wildlife, landscape and cultural heritage. She provided a historical context for grazing and its impact on biodiversity. Grazing can support pollinators by reducing the dominance of coarse grasses, dead plant litter, scrub, bracken and bramble to maintain an open sward and allow forbs to flower. Grazing at a correct level can produce a heterogeneous landscape and intricate mix of habitats. She also explained the negative impact caused by the different farm animals when grazing is not timed well or is at too high a level. Grazing at the right time of year is a critical consideration and usually means avoiding the flowering period. Nutrient input from animals, and where they have grazed prior to being introduced to a site, are also important.

Llŷn peninsula – WG, Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) - part of the payment for outcomes trial - working with the National Trust. One of their sites was an SSSI but had not been grazed for over a decade. In four years, through grazing, it has become a species rich maritime grassland (image with sea thrift slide 11). A fence along the cliff line reassured the farmer that his animals would be safe. Jan also provided an example of Llŷn lowland grassland inland. Through changing the grazing pattern alone (fairly short in the autumn/winter but allowed to flower in the spring and summer) has created a more species rich site (image with pignut slide 15). The growing season is earlier on the Llŷn. Previously, farmers would have removed grazing animals with a shut out date in April. PONT have found that moving this date back to after Christmas has increased species diversity particularly in orchids and prevented early growing species such as yellow rattle from being grazed. This highlights that shut out dates can vary from area to area and that having one precise shut out date will not suit all farms in Wales.

Elan Valley – In this area, traditionally, sheep don't tend to graze on the lowland grasslands during the summer, apart from very, very short pulses or very light grazing for short periods. This grazing pattern has developed very species rich pastures (image with mountain Pansy slide 16).

Rush Pastures - Jan thought that rush pasture is one of the hardest grasslands to restore. They need to be grazed with cattle or ponies and sheep removed. Even light grazing by sheep can remove the botanical interest.

Woodlands – grazing is required to have a flower and moss rich woodland floor. Grazing needs to be at the right levels and correct timings. Without grazing bramble and holly take over and dominate the understory.

**Action:** Kathleen to inform agricultural environment scheme policy development team that Jan has interesting findings regarding shut out dates. Feedback from their trial scheme has shown that direct land-based advice and support for farmers is needed. As each site is different, site conditions change from year to year and having someone who knows the land and can discuss timing is reassuring for the farmer. Pont's view is that advice needs to be on the land and explaining principles via webinars is not sufficient.

### **3. Social Farms and Gardens - Growing well together: Our Work in Wales & A Focus on Community Supported Agricultures (CSA) – Gary Mitchell (Social Farms and Gardens) (Please see slides attached in pdf)**

Last year, Gary was a newly elected councillor for Powys. Powys Local Authority (LA) has declared a nature and climate emergency and have established a taskforce. Gary is also chair of the LA Farmer Estate Working Group for Powys. The LA has 131 farms (11,500 acres) and 40 woodland plots. They are looking at how these farms can be more nature friendly.

Slide 2 shows a map of Social Farms and Gardens' community foods system across Wales (since the slide was produced the number has increased to 137 community orchards).

The benefits of community food production include:

- Productivity - can deliver higher environmental gains versus traditional agriculture
- Community – food production can bring people together cross social settings.
- Biodiversity – a study carried out in Bristol showed that allotment gardening and market gardening support biodiversity

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) helps to address increasing concerns about the lack of transparency, sustainability and resilience of our food system. The main principle of CSA is the community supports the farmer through a direct connection. There are no 'middlemen'. What is produced on the farm goes directly to the consumer.

Previously, CSA growers would have had a formal relationship between their purchasers, the community and the farmer to help the grower work the land. This structure has waned and now there are different ways a community can get involved.

Products from CSA are primarily fruit and vegetables but can include eggs, meat, dairy and firewood (from two managed woodlands in Wales). Slide 5 has a map of CSA across Wales. Riverford organics, established in 1998, was the first CLA in Wales and the UK.

Of the ten most productive and well-established CSA in Wales, on average a site would feed about 50 families. Some sites are as small as 2 acres. They employ approx. 15 full time equivalent staff. Volunteer support is also important. Many sites are not certified as organic (this is primarily due to expenses and regulatory burden) but they follow an ethos of not using pesticides or inorganic fertilisers and have compost systems on site. For every £10 that's spent on a local CSA scheme, £29 pounds of that remains in the local community. Whereas at a supermarket, it's one for one. Slide 8 and 9 provide more information on the benefits.

Sites are between one and five hectares and therefore would currently fall outside of any agricultural subsidy support system. They also fall outside permitted agriculture development rights. Therefore, there is little incentive for farmers to provide land for

CSA. Social Farms and Gardens are part of Food Policy Alliance. Gary said that he will be meeting with WG Food Division to discuss barriers.

CSA is not affordable for all communities and they are not in all areas of Wales so there are accessibility issues. On behalf of Social Farms and Gardens, Cardiff University carried out a year-long study when grower was funded (through different models) to provide weekly free fresh vegetables to 4 deprived urban communities. [Report](#) and other links can be found on slide 9.

CSA is not one of Social Farms and Gardens funded work elements. They support CSA because they think it is the right thing to do and it is interesting. Social Farms and Gardens work with the CSA UK network (a body that supports CSAs, primarily in England).

In Wales, [Tyfu Cymru](#) supports commercial horticulture. Tyfu Cymru is part of Lantra. Lantra have got the new Farming Connect contract for horticultural support through the new farming scheme. Lantra will be delivering horticultural support to farming communities under Farming Connect. This is first time that this has happened and is part of a new shift leading towards a sustainable farming scheme. Social Farms and Gardens would like to work with them to support CSA.

**Action** (completed): Social Farms and Gardens to send Kathleen WWF Cymru Open Letter for Amendments to the Agriculture (Wales) Bill so that it can be circulated to the Taskforce group.

**4. Brecon Beacons Wildflower Seed Harvesting - Feasibility Study** – Maria Golightly (LNP Project Officer for Bannau Brycheiniog National Park)(Please see slides)

Catrin Evans was commissioned by the Local Nature Partnership to carry out the study looking at piloting *the development of a network of local, native wildflower seed donor and receptor sites across the park*. During the study they worked with National Trust, Plantlife, Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW), North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent (NMWTRA), South Wales Trunk Road Agent (SWTRA), Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru, farmers and landowners. Slide 6 shows the spread of grassland recorded for Bannau Brycheiniog National Park which covers covers 519 square miles.

**The study is not** a 'handbook on wildflower seed harvesting' but provides information for the park to enable staff to harvest wildflower seed. It has been compiled from different sources, resources, networks and information setting out basic principles and signposts to more detailed guidance and advice.

Please find Study attached and key findings are summarised in Maria's presentation.

## **5. Caring for God's Acre – Harriet Carty (Please see slides attached in a following e-mail)**

Caring for God's Acre is a non-religious conservation charity that is interested in burial grounds of all types and denominations, including rural and urban cemeteries and green burial grounds. Some of them have the oldest trees in Britain with ancient yews being globally important. Churchyards and cemeteries are holders of ancient meadows. They are often the oldest piece of enclosed land in a parish. Many date back to the Saxon era. Many others are Victorian which is still prior to destruction of meadowland. Management of the sites has been consistent through the centuries. Currently a lot of sites are managed largely as short grass, though that is changing.

Burial grounds' ancient walls (constructed when burial ground was established), buildings and monuments, with the nooks, crannies, carvings and different stone types, provide exceptional habitats for lichens.

A key point is they are quite hard sites to manage and that has protected them from intensive management that could destroy their value for nature.

Caring for God's Acre have carried out a hotspots project in central and NE Wales and the sites involved were self-selected. A botanical survey was carried out on 52 sites. Results showed that 15 are potential local wildlife sites and 17 potential green hay or seed saving sites.

Their Beautiful Burial Grounds Project worked with Church of England and the Church in Wales and NBN. The project has helped to initiate biological recording on their sites. Enter data or search for a site on: [Home - NBN Atlas Beautiful Burial Grounds](#) . Having biological data will hopefully allow them to raise the profile for nature with landholders as, traditionally, focus has been on the built heritage.

[Love Your Burial Ground Week](#) in early June and Churches Count on Nature are used to raise awareness and encourage citizen science and recording. In 2021- 22 they held 900 events and created 27,000 records. The events are a good way of connecting with people and to instigate positive management of the grounds.

The Church establishment seems to be becoming more open to adopting ways that will improve biodiversity. Church in Wales is committed to the biodiversity and to net zero by 2030 goals.

Caring for God's Acre is a very small charity and always works in partnership. They would welcome opportunities to do joint projects.

## **6. Next Meeting**

Meeting overran and this was to be decided via e-mail.

During the meeting a request was made for WG policy officials from the pesticide and agri-environment teams to attend the next meeting.