

Collective report on

**Developing collaborative land
management actions across the Green
Connections project area**

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Introduction

This work was commissioned by the Green Connections Powys project (the project). The project operates across the county of Powys and is a collaboration between [Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust](#), [Radnorshire Wildlife Trust](#) (RWT) and the Brecknock Office of the [Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales](#).

Following on from a previously commissioned feasibility study, 'Exploring Collaborative Habitat Land Management in Powys'. Three facilitators, namely Mark Ward (MAES Services); Helen Barnes and Gwenan Ellis were commissioned to build on the results of this study and provide one-to-one facilitation for small landowners and land management contractors within the vice-counties of Breconshire, Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire, with the aim of creating sustainable relationships between services and service providers to bring about better habitat management. The work was carried out in February and March 2023.

Summary of work

More than 30 landowners, and at least 10 potential contractors & conservation graziers were contacted. More than 15 visits to landowners and commoners were then made to assess needs, collect information on issues and to offer advice and support in implementing management. Further information on habitat management, local graziers/contractors, and guidance on other organisations that can support land management was shared as appropriate. They were signposted to local habitat groups, the Farm Liaison Service, Farming Connect and PONT amongst others.

Meetings were attended with Wildlife Trust staff, Powys Nature Partnership focus groups, landowner groups and local habitat groups, and a talk given by one facilitator to a Green Connections Roadshow event.

As a result of the facilitation work, we were able to highlight some issues and make recommendations for future action. Some of the issues have been addressed through the production of a factsheet clarifying the regulations landowners need to abide by if keeping their own livestock, or bringing in conservation graziers. A flow chart has also been produced to help land managers decide appropriate management actions for their habitats.

Findings

1. Gaps in knowledge. There was a collective uncertainty about grazing and other land management, e.g. how many livestock should be put on a parcel of land and for how long. A large number of the landowners contacted had only started managing land recently and had very little understanding of different land management practices and especially on keeping livestock e.g. some of the landowners weren't aware of stock movement regulations. There was a collective need for further support and ongoing support.

2. Quite a few landowners didn't have holding numbers and weren't aware of Welsh Government funding and support. One landowner visited had over 20 acres of land but wasn't aware of any government support or aware about livestock record keeping requirements and obtaining a holding number. A recurring topic of conversation with landowners is the lack of awareness of what funding is available for land-based projects/work. Several individuals expressed the need for support in applying for WG Agri environment funding schemes due to them having no knowledge of systems such as Rural Payments Wales.
3. Although the 2022 feasibility study identified that there was some interest in workshare and similar groups, the facilitation work did not find any seriously interested participants. Some landowners contacted did not have an issue with finding contractors to manage their land, or sheep to graze it, particularly in Montgomeryshire. Many land owners cited their advancing age as being a reason not to participate in work sharing. Volunteer groups were considered a good idea, but mostly in terms of landowners benefitting from their efforts. With remote rural locations difficult to reach by public transport getting volunteers to work on habitats was considered to be problematic. Machinery hire, loaning and the idea of a machine ring were discussed, but more facilitation work would be needed to bring this to fruition.
4. Desire to be part of landowner groups to provide a forum for discussion and support. The majority of individuals across the project area were interested in this and were signposted to either the Montgomeryshire Habitat Group or other local group as appropriate, e.g. North Brecknock, or were supported to create their own group if they could make it self-sustaining, e.g. two small groups in Radnorshire. A potential group in the south Brecknock area expressed an interest in being part of a group but no one identified themselves as a lead point of contact, so more support would be needed there.

Recommendations

Detailed recommendations have been given in the individual reports for the three vice-counties, and are summarised here.

1. Fund facilitation into the future. Although efforts were made where possible to ensure progress in collaborative land management brought about by this facilitation work will be sustained beyond this contract; this has not always been possible due to the short timescale and the need for ongoing support by some landowners in order for them to achieve good habitat management. There have been many direct requests from some landowners for continuing the work begun under this contract to continue into the longer term, and efforts should be made by the Wildlife Trusts or others to secure funding for such a post. A strong theme raised during engagement

with landowners was the desire to have a single point of contact for a longer period who could undertake an initial survey of a holding, produce a management plan which incorporates themes such as nature, access, heritage etc and identify funding sources. Although local groups can provide some support to individuals there is still a strong case for funding an engagement officer (potentially in partnership with an organisation) that takes a holistic approach to land management which incorporates work nature recovery, health & wellbeing, heritage etc. Most people are looking for one point of contact for information, and the development of a 'Contractors & Consultants directory' where individuals and groups could be signposted to an agent or facilitator who could apply for a grant on their behalf would be a useful addition.

2. Use the Montgomeryshire Habitat Group and other local groups as a hub for shared information and knowledge. The facilitation work has demonstrated how important word of mouth is in finding a grazer, hedge layer, hay contractor etc., and most participants welcomed the opportunity to discuss ideas with like-minded people. The Montgomeryshire Habitat Group already has a website and a forum that could be better utilised to share information. A database and a 'classified ads' type of page with resources wanted and resources available including labour; volunteering opportunities; livestock and/or machinery would be useful. Other groups are not so well resourced but could still function as an information exchange, and could explore in partnership with other likeminded organisations, whether a suite of machinery that aligns to the needs of smaller landowners could be centrally held with a commercial operator for hiring and leasing, modelled on the Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water weed wiper scheme.

3. If funding was available a 'land manager' that could overlook activities on multiple holdings would work well. The 'land manager' could coordinate activities, provide land management advice and manage external contracting work. A paid manager for lots of sites would be a good idea who could specify management prescriptions for each site and organize the grazing, volunteer activity, sharing of machinery etc.

4. Better utilisation of the Farm Liaison Service to get landowners up to speed with record keeping regulations and Welsh Government support. The Farm Liaison Officers have indicated that they are a happy for small landowners and anyone not registered with RPWOnline to approach them for help. Participants have already been encouraged to subscribe to the Welsh Government Gwlad enewsletter.