



## Case Study

### Flintshire County Council

#### Project (activity):

Working with the Flintshire Countryside management team.

Initial contact with Flintshire (FCC) was via a partner organisation, Cynnal Cymru. Flintshire at that point were interested in support with advertising opportunities, consolidating links with other local volunteering organisations and streamlining processes for volunteers and staff within the Council to enable them to expand their volunteer offer.

We initially circulated a document to capture current volunteering opportunities, processes and support, plus aspirational opportunities for volunteering. We also generated a list of ideas around expanding their volunteer offer, asking for their input on which they would like / had capacity to prioritise. Publicity and Marketing of existing opportunities was identified as one such area that required additional support and prioritising, taken forward with Liz Mutch, Llais y Goedwig. Training support for volunteers was a second area of focus, taken forward by Hywel Dodd, Llais y Goedwig.

#### Project summary

We offered to support improving the consistency of communication to volunteers with newsletter templates and a centralised mailing system so updates and information can be streamlined, as well as supporting better marketing of opportunities via existing portals. We will support (with policies and systems) and report on the process of one of the autonomous groups on Council land achieving 'Investors in Volunteering' status, for the benefit of other groups across Wales interested in doing the same. We also helped to facilitate a programme of volunteer training across Countryside services in the County.

Greenfield Valley Heritage Park is a large site with several buildings that reference the industrial revolution, a canal, a monastery and several other places of historical interest. The Countryside Management team works within this site, with over 500 volunteers on their database. They were looking for a way to improve how they connect with these volunteers, to improve volunteer takeup, retention, and ease induction processes. The Countryside Management team wanted to set up a mailchimp newsletter, update the volunteer sign up forms and opportunities, and improve the visibility of volunteer offers on the Council website which currently didn't make it easy enough for volunteers to find relevant opportunities.

Llais y Goedwig Development Officer Liz Mutch undertook a scoping exercise of the council website, putting herself in the position of a volunteer looking for opportunities within the Flintshire area, interrogating how long it took to find those opportunities, how they were described, and how it linked to other flintshire council departments areas. It was a relatively convoluted process, with several click throughs to find these opportunities. Recommendations for ease and consistency were made and implemented.

Second to the website scoping, we looked at online and social media information related to

Greenfield Heritage Park, from both the park itself and the Council, and how the two may differ in terms of content, along with any brand alignment and/or links between the two. We made recommendations on how these could be streamlined and how opportunities could be improved. Likewise we looked at the volunteer application forms, and the language used on the council forms, versus Greenfield Park's forms. We were able to provide guidance on ensuring they adhere to GDPR and consistently communicate the same things. A new volunteering form was created that could be used by both parties. Although they had differences to reflect the two groups' needs, they conveyed consistent, updated information.

We looked at cost effective packages for a newsletter to their volunteer database. In lieu of any budget, the most cost effective solutions that would meet the needs of the countryside management team was MailerLite, which fitted the brief, is much cheaper than mailchimp while offering the required functionalities, as well as being easy to train people on and maintain.

We have spent time updating and cleaning their volunteer database, created a Flintshire countryside persona with MailerLite, generated a newsletter, and sending out the mailer to their improved database. We are hoping to run an online session on how to upload images to the mailer, checking that all the images have permissions, followed by a session with the investors and volunteers who will be road testing the application forms, and inputting into the development of the newsletter.

Llais y Coed Development Officer Hywel Dodd formed a bridge between Flintshire Volunteering and training providers. Training needs were identified by the volunteers, with Llais y Coed utilising its contacts to identify and organise training. Positive feedback was received by volunteers who felt valued and developed their skills. It was an effective partnership that built on each partners' strength.

Training included Brushcutter training for 6 volunteers, Fruit tree pruning for 12 volunteers, Scything for 10 volunteers, as well as Bee keeping, Stick making and Blacksmithing.



**What worked well, what didn't work so well:**

The biggest challenge was a combination of time pressures and training needs.

A lack of time to engage has impacted on what we have been able to achieve with Flintshire to date. And true for every council we worked with.

The job remit of the Countryside Management team has expanded while their team has shrunk. Their capacity to complete statutory duties is so low, that working on projects like this is understandably low down their list.

Staff are trained in conservation and countryside management, rather than in GDPR regulations, communications, image permissions etc. To implement these changes requires learning, which they have very little time to do. The impetus to make the changes is constrained further, and is a barrier to making these improvements.

Collaborating with the cultural heritage team in Flintshire, which overlapped with the Countryside Management teams in some responsibilities, offered exciting possibilities for overlaps in their volunteer offer, how we might be able to streamline that process, and offer opportunities for a division of labour that might benefit both teams.



The practical skills training has proved successful, and popular. The relationship brokered between the Countryside Management team and the training provider (Irwedd Griffiths, Bro Gele) has continued, with several additional courses being booked directly by the Local Authority. These have included Working at height and Manual Handling (12 people per course), Plus 2 more people will be doing a strimmer day course, in response to previous brush cutter training organised.

### **What has been learnt:**

This was an example of what the team simply hadn't had time to do up to now.

The Countryside Management team did have a volunteer coordinator in place, as a result of a successful funding bid (in place until the end of March 2025). However the volunteer coordinator wasn't responsible for the administrative support or improving policy or process. Through this work, the team have realised the broader spectrum of requirements for managing volunteers, and identified gaps in knowledge that could be addressed.

Going forward, it could be really valuable to create a volunteer role, perhaps for someone less able to work outside in the park, to take some of the volunteer coordinator work, offering support and learning around office based tasks rather than the practical outdoor roles.

### **Conclusion:**

The Countryside management team, as well as the wider Council recognise the importance of their volunteers, and value what they do, but out of necessity are putting so much time and effort into ensuring their site can remain open, that anything office based has become very difficult to maintain. Any support we can provide in this area - though perhaps not seen as a top priority - will have a great impact.

What we didn't have time to do was to look at the volunteer journey, from point of contact onwards. How are they kept in touch with? Is there regular contact in between work days? How can they maintain and encourage volunteer participation, both on site and in local council areas? In the future we might be able to look at the ways in which the current volunteers are contacted and how new volunteers are inducted, for example.