



## **Case Study Brecon Town Council & Powys County Council**

### **Project (activity):**

Llais y Goedwig are supporting Brecon Town Council as they take on the management of local park 'Island Fields' from Powys CC, and exploring how they might work alongside local organisations and volunteers to develop and utilise the site.

### **Project summary**

Island Fields is a large open green space in the centre of Brecon. In 2022 Powys County Council, who managed the site, were looking at potentially using it for development and housing. There was a subsequent backlash from Brecon town council, and an online consultation to determine what the community thought of the plans. In light of these responses, Powys CC offered an opportunity to BTC to take a long term management lease on the site.

Four years on, BTC now has a 99 year lease from Powys County Council from 2025. LlyG have been liaising, in a light touch way, with the town council, in collaboration with the local nature partnership officer, since early 2023.

The transfer of the site to BTC and the strategic volunteering grant have arrived alongside one another and allowed for greater engagement with plans, and an opportunity to support the introduction of new ideas and processes.

There is large town council support, with 15 BTC council members who are part of a working committee. Every time they meet, Liz Mutch (Llais y Goedwig Development Officer) attends, along with Maria Golightly, the Local Nature Partnership officer for Bannau Brycheiniog National Park. Meetings are held to advance the management of the site and how it could offer opportunities to the local community.

Conflicts on how the site can be best utilised sometimes appear, and to that end Liz encouraged further consultation and engagement campaigns with the local community (which took place in February 2025). From that consultation, priority activities were identified, which will feed into the developing management plan for the site. Liz has also shared resources developed by Llais y Goedwig, for example *The Woodland Health Survey* to help them to understand what they have, and to encourage a mapping exercise of the stakeholders that could be involved in the site. They are just now starting to talk about volunteers, and how working with volunteers can support some of the suggestions from the general public, e.g. improved paths, invasive species clearance, making benches, forest school activity, wellbeing activities.

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

BCC has proved to be quite cautious of volunteer involvement in the site, although they are enthusiastic in principle. The challenge is to allow enough flexibility in planning for any eventual volunteers to feel like they have ownership of the site and its development, and for volunteer

activity in general not to feel overwhelming to the council.

At this early stage, the council has tended to fall towards what can be outsourced and/or bought, rather than what can be developed with the community's involvement. The council remains very interested in the ideas and experience of recruiting and working with volunteers but don't have much direct experience, though 2 councillors do work with volunteers in their day job.

The council doesn't want to involve volunteers at this stage. They have agreed that until there is a management plan for the site and more is understood about their responsibilities in terms of management, that any third parties will have limited involvement.

The challenge right now is encouraging the council to let go of some of the responsibility, and hand over some control, planning and management of the space to the community who also rallied to save it from development.

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

The benefit to having Llais y Gowdwyg's involvement, is that we can bring our extensive experience to the table, both in managing green spaces, but also in working with volunteers and managing expectations in that respect. LlyG can help to fill the gaps in their knowledge, which might be causing them some anxiety and hindering progress.

Liz is in touch with several groups who would like to be involved as volunteers when the time comes, e.g. Mind, Brownies and Guides, Cadets, Local allotment Society. Keeping them engaged and informed for when their involvement can be facilitated.

In general, the lack of experience working with volunteers and community groups has perhaps led to an overly cautious approach and anxiety, which we need to be sympathetic to. We are progressing at the council's pace so they can improve their confidence and gain our trust.

### **Conclusion:**

This is very much the start of the journey for BCC, who have spent 4 years saving the site from development. They're very keen to ensure the site is managed responsibly and that all parties are respected on the site.

Our next steps with Brecon Town Council include a walk around the site with Liz Mutch, Maria Golightly and three of the BTC councillors, to draw up a map of the site and complete a woodland health survey.

We will also continue to explore the potential for Local nature partnership funding which could be sourced to facilitate some of the volunteer opportunities in the future. By the end of 2026, we anticipate we may have begun to support the roll out of volunteer opportunities, with a few events/workdays undertaken.