



Area based trial update  
Working with partners to better manage our natural resources

December 2015

## Introduction

Welcome to the December 2015 Rhondda trial update. This issue includes information on:

1. The draft priorities for managing the Rhondda's natural resources
2. Sharing the draft priorities: stakeholder engagement workshops held in November 2015
3. Information about Area Statements, a requirement under the Environment Bill
4. Update on the Rhondda trial projects
5. Ideas, suggestions and opportunities which have been highlighted by our partners / communities
6. Community engagement (summer 2015)
7. Area-based partnership working with Rhondda Cynon Taf
8. Policy and legislative background to the 3 trials (Rhondda, Tawe and Dyfi)
9. Next steps

## 1 Draft priorities for managing the Rhondda's natural resources

Based on our engagement work and evidence gathering, we've identified the draft priorities for managing the Rhondda's natural resources. These have been developed and agreed upon through our work with partners in the Rhondda and are outlined below:

- **Manage the public estate for multiple benefits**

- Main areas of focus:

- Enhanced opportunities for people and communities: social enterprise, training, fuel, jobs and recreation.
  - Optimised management of public land for the environment: flood attenuation, nature conservation and carbon storage

- **People benefit from being outdoors**

- The outdoor environment as a natural health service to help improve physical and mental health
  - Access and recreation: improve quality and ease of access
  - Children use and interact with the outdoors

- **Help create safe, healthy and resilient places for people to use and enjoy**

- Partners working better together to tackle / reduce crime and anti-social behaviour
  - Well-connected, multi-functional green infrastructure network delivering a wide range of benefits for people, wildlife, and resilience to climate change

- **Work with nature to help restore the natural water environment**

- Upland restoration
  - Opportunities to work with natural processes to improve flood attenuation and deliver WFD objectives
  - Mitigate impacts from the urban environment / infrastructure

- **Change perceptions**

- The Rhondda as an outstanding location for recreation, particularly walking & cycling
  - Support local tourism and initiatives, and link to wider opportunities

## Underlying principles to delivery

As well as the 5 priorities highlighted above, we've identified two core, underlying principles which are critical to help deliver the priorities for the Rhondda: 'working better together' and 'nature recovery'.

The current financial climate necessitates better working with partners to help deliver common goals and objectives to benefit people, the environment and local economy. Nature recovery is a statutory obligation for NRW and central to the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems approach. These 2 principles should be central to planning and delivery of the priorities and opportunities in the Rhondda.

## 2 Sharing the draft priorities

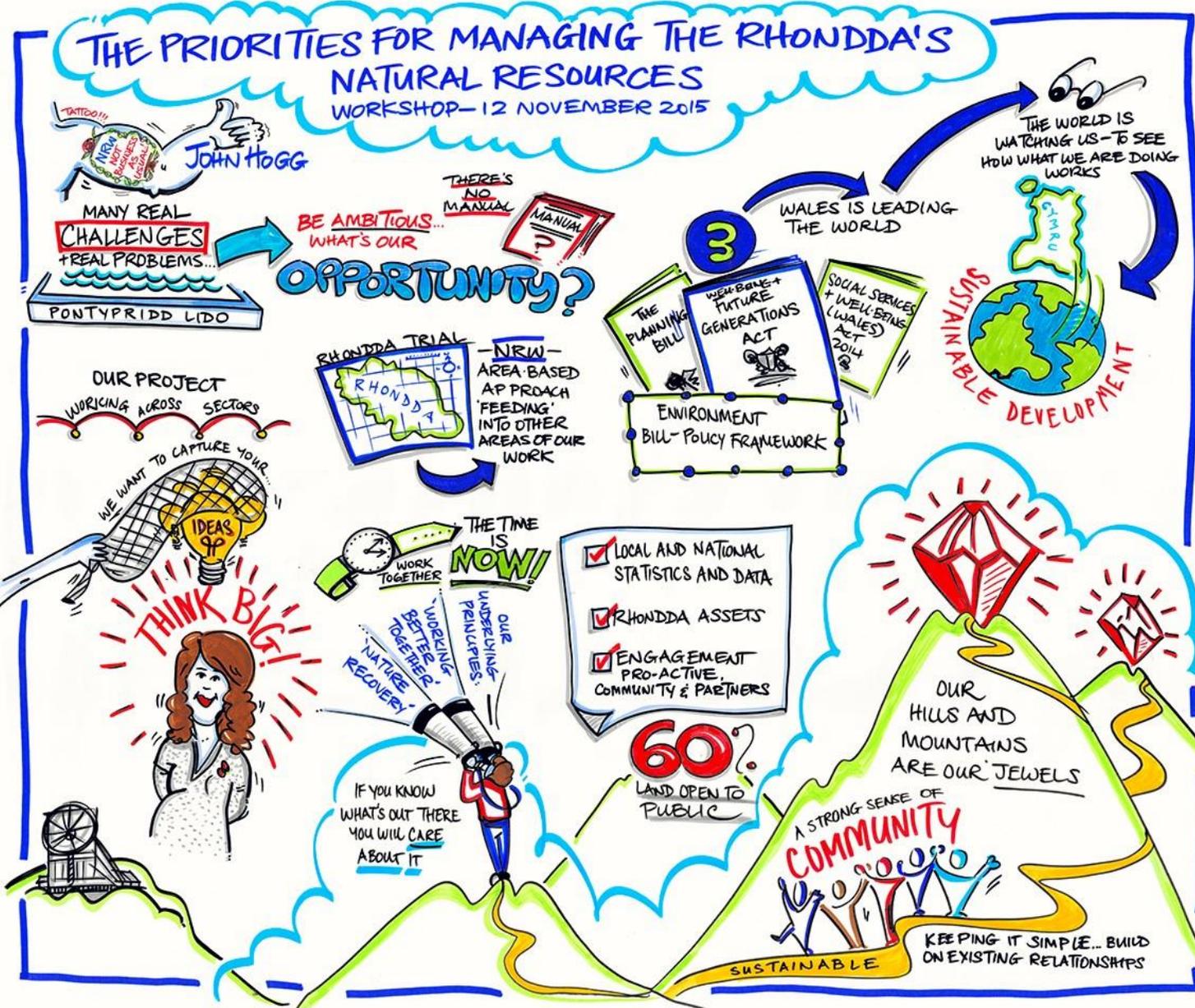
In November 2015 we hosted two workshops to share the draft priorities for managing the Rhondda's natural resources.

The first event was an internal session with Natural Resources Wales' (NRW) teams and officers who work in, or cover the Rhondda area. The second was with our partners, including: public bodies, community groups, third and private sector organisations.



The main aim of the events was to capture feedback on the draft priorities. We wanted to check if the priorities are appropriate, what we may have missed, and have a wider discussion about a trial, non-statutory statement we'll be preparing for the priorities.

In December, we'll be reviewing all of the comments and feedback gathered from the workshops, and if necessary, amending the priorities as appropriate. Initial feedback from the two days was positive and we're not anticipating significant changes to the priorities already identified.



Visual minutes from workshop 3, Pontypridd Lido: November 12<sup>th</sup> 2015

### 3 Area Statements and the Environment Bill

The Environment Bill requires NRW to produce 'Area Statements' in order to further the priorities and opportunities identified in the Welsh Government's National Natural Resource Policy (anticipated for Summer 2016), and reflect local priorities, issues and opportunities.

Whilst the scale of Area Statements has yet to be agreed, it is anticipated that an Area Statement will refer to the natural resources in an area, the benefits which the natural resources provide, and the priorities, risks and opportunities that need to be addressed. NRW will also specify in Area Statements, the public bodies which it considers may assist in addressing the priorities, risks and opportunities.



Area Statements will have a central role in helping to ensure Wales' natural resources are sustainably managed. They will be a catalyst for change, providing the vehicle for proactive and positive natural resource management in Wales. The production of Area Statements will be a statutory duty on NRW, and will help inform Public Service Boards' Well-being Plans, local planning policy decisions, and decisions relating to land and water management.

For the Rhondda, we will prepare a vision document (non-statutory) by spring 2016 to build on all of the work undertaken so far, outline the key priorities and opportunities in the area, and set out how we can take this forward. The reason this will not be a statutory document is the Environment Bill is not expected to be enacted until early 2017. Therefore, until this time, documents produced for the Rhondda, Tawe and Dyfi areas will not be statutory in law.

Below are some of the things our partners said when we asked them what future Area Statements should incorporate:



## 4 Update on the Rhondda trial projects

Funding from Welsh Government was allocated to the three trial areas (Rhondda, Dyfi and Tawe) in 2014 for activities / projects that deliver the widest possible benefits, and which help develop our understanding of the practical and operational aspects of sustainably managing our natural resources. Below is a summarised update of the projects:



### Healthy Hillides: working to partners to tackle wildfires in the Rhondda

- NRW part-funded Project Officer hosted by the Wildlife Trust South & West Wales (WTSWW) to coordinate 'Healthy Hillides' project
- New partnership group established (NRW, South Wales Fire & Rescue Service, WTSWW, RCT and others)
- New approach and focus on taking a joined up approach focussing on awareness and pro-active land management techniques at prioritised sites to help tackle wildfires



### Investment at Llanwynno: People benefit from being outdoors

- Investment in recreational infrastructure, including gates, picnic tables, an outdoor classroom, new pathway and clearance works (completed in spring 2015)
- Investment at Daerwynno Outdoor Centre: renewable energy supply, outdoor learning equipment for children, bird/bat boxes and a beehive (spring 2015)
- Car / people counters installed to build evidence base of usage (summer 2015)
- TBC: Recreation & Access Plan for Llanwynno



### Working with nature to help restore the natural water environment at Cwmparc

- Restoration of peatland on NRW managed estate for flood attenuation, carbon storage and benefits to biodiversity (winter 2015-16)
- In-channel, large woody debris installed to reduce the energy of the river, trap debris and sediment to help restore the riverbed for wildlife (completed in summer 2015)
- 'Live' river level / flow monitoring station installed in the Nant-Cwmparc (adjacent to Railway Terrace), and connected to NRW's website for real-time checks



### Creating safe, healthy and vibrant places for people to enjoy

- Bringing internal and external partners together to better understand the challenges, costs, impacts of crime and anti-social behaviour, and identify opportunities to work better together to help address the challenges
- Developing approach with partners to help understand the issues to prepare a holistic approach to crime and anti-social behaviour on publically owned land
- Feed into NRW's Incident Management Review so incidents of crime on the NRW managed estate are captured and acted upon consistently across Wales
- Focusing on preventative work with young people to enable long term change



### Llyn-Fach Nature Reserve

- Partnership project with Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) to create a Wildlife Trust nature reserve in the Rhondda Valleys, on NRW managed estate. First Wildlife Trust reserve in the Rhondda for over 20 years.
- Site: designated SSSI in unfavourable condition. A number of priority and protected species present: water vole, nightjar, peregrine, water lobelia and fir club moss
- £50k secured by WTSWW in grant money (with NRW support) to undertake habitat restoration and positive management for wildlife and achieve favourable condition



### People and the environment

- Environmental training for community groups, including: biodiversity recording, brush cutting, herbicide use
- Bio-blitz event to record wildlife species on NRW managed estate
- Working with school groups to develop outdoor teaching and community gardens, community food growing, and encouraging better management for pollinators

## 5 Ideas, suggestions and opportunities

People have suggested a wide variety of ideas and potential opportunities for the Rhondda which we've captured. Some of these are highlighted below:

- Woodlands and communities  
Use of unproductive areas of Welsh Government Woodland Estate for community enterprise.
- Family Bikepark, Barry Sidings  
Café and bike hire at Barry Sidings (RCT owned park), with family bike trails in the adjoining Gelli Wion forest (NRW managed woodland).
- GP surgery walks  
Easy to use outdoor walking routes mapped from doctors' surgeries / hospitals / pharmacies, to help encourage outdoor activity and exercise. This could be linked to local parks / woodlands.
- GP referrals to outdoor providers  
Build / share a network of outdoor groups and coordinators GPs can refer to for outdoor based activity.
- Rhondda Academy  
A 2 day leadership training programme for 16-18 year olds run by NRW with partners and local business support and sponsorship.



## 6 Community engagement (summer 2015)

To complement our ongoing engagement work with professional partners and community groups, we attended a variety of community events in the summer of 2015.

The reason for this was to find out the views of people who live and work in the Rhondda. To help us capture their views, we asked people to complete an A5 flyer answering 3 questions about their area. Based on all of the responses we collected, several clear messages emerged which highlight that many people in the Rhondda:

- Love their surrounding countryside, local parks, and scenery and are proud of the strong sense of community spirit
- Enjoy using the outdoors for walking, dog walking, cycling etc but would like to see better provision for walkers and cyclists
- Don't venture into surrounding countryside, despite their relative close proximity to outdoors spaces
- Would like to see more jobs / opportunities in the area and address the constant threat of crime and anti-social behaviour
- Are concerned about a lack of activities / things to do for children and teenagers in the area.



## 7 Area based partnership working with Rhondda Cynon Taf

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (WoFG) sets out Welsh Government's vision for Wales to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. Public bodies in Wales will have to plan for the long term, work better with people, communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined up approach.

With these requirements in mind, we're developing ways to take a more joined up approach with Rhondda Cynon Taf to help plan, work and deliver better together. To kick-start this, we hosted our first NRW/RCT joint community event 'Have a Voice in the Valleys' in the Rhondda Fach in July 2015, where over 150 members of the community attended. A report of the 'Voice in the Valleys' event can be viewed [here](#).

To find out more about the WoFG Act and what it means for you, Welsh Government have produced a video: [Megan & the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act](#).

## 8 Policy and legislative background to the 3 trials (Rhondda, Tawe and Dyfi)

The Welsh Government's Environment Bill will give Natural Resources Wales (NRW) a duty to manage natural resources sustainably in Wales. To prepare for this, NRW is undertaking three exploratory area based trials in the Rhondda, Tawe and Dyfi catchments. The main purpose of the trials is to explore how to embed an integrated approach to managing natural resources within specific geographical areas, help inform NRW's programme to embed natural resource management within Wales, and to capture learning along the way. Each trial is developing its own process but some of the key elements of this approach are: to be area based; involve stakeholder engagement throughout; be evidence based; plan for the long term; and be people focussed.

As part of the new approach, the Environment Bill requires NRW to produce Area Statements setting out the vision, priorities and opportunities and evidence for a place incorporating the environment, society and the economy. Area statements will advise on what the strategic priorities are in the context of local needs, and will inform the Needs Assessment and Wellbeing Plans as set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The statements will inform other plans for the place such as local development plans. Opportunities for incorporation into other planning processes, will also need to be considered.

## 9 Next steps

- Prepare a learning document for Welsh Government, based on all the work undertaken across the 3 trial areas
- Prepare a vision document (non-statutory) to build on all of the work undertaken so far, outline the key priorities and opportunities in the area, and set out how we can take this forward.
- Continue working with partners and community groups

If you'd like to find out more about the area-based trial in the Rhondda, please contact Christian or Becky at [rhondda@cyfoethnaturaolcymru.gov.uk](mailto:rhondda@cyfoethnaturaolcymru.gov.uk)

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