

Welsh wild plants for landscape and biodiversity

Report of seminar

attended by land management professionals involved in planning, managing, restoring and designing green spaces for biodiversity, landscape and public enjoyment.

held 25th February 2009, Llandrindod Wells



Compiled by *Flora locale*
Flora locale Wild Meadows (Wales) Initiative

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Other sources of information:

Websites

www.floralocale.org

www.wildmeadows.org.uk

Bilingual documents produced by *Flora locale*

Technical Advisory Notes: Restoring wildflower meadows in Wales

Grazing for wild plants and biodiversity

Paddocks for ponies and biodiversity

Discover wild plants

Welsh wild plants for landscape & biodiversity – Guidelines for planting projects in the countryside

Manifesto for the wild meadows of Wales

Wild flower identification leaflet

1. Background

The seminar, Welsh wild plants for landscape and biodiversity, and this report are key outputs from *Flora locale's* Wild Meadows (Wales) Initiative. The aims were to:

Safeguard and improve the condition of wild meadows in Wales

- highlight the need to safeguard and enhance wild meadows in the urban landscape
- raise awareness of the importance of local grassland green spaces as “breathing places”
- help enable local authorities to deliver on their biodiversity commitments to existing species-rich grasslands
- support local authority ecologists in developing appropriate management of grasslands in local authority ownership
- communicate the Manifesto *for Wild Meadows of Wales* to all delegates and improve the access to and availability of *Flora locale's* technical advisory notes and information about wild meadows.

Increase the use of Welsh wild plants in restoration projects

- promote the use of native wild plants in Wales, e.g. by highlighting the importance of, and the opportunities for, using wild plants correctly (including using natural regeneration where appropriate) as the basis for biodiversity enhancement
- disseminate good practice and knowledge about supply and use of wild plants of all types including trees and wild flower mixes, for development related projects.

Improve biodiversity outcomes from planning development decisions in Wales.

2. Introduction

The seminar was attended by 40 land management professionals involved in planning, managing restoring and designing green spaces for biodiversity, landscape and public enjoyment. See Annex 1 for the list of delegates, speakers and facilitators.

The seminar was opened by Iolo Williams, Patron of the Wild Meadows (Wales) Initiative, and chaired by Richard Clarke, Chairman of *Flora locale*.

Presentations were given on:

- Quarry face restoration: Noel Williams, Castle Cement
- Brecon Beacons National Park: Opportunities for restoration and enhancement following the pipeline. Graham Cowden, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.
- Urban wetlands and urban river restoration. David Holland, Managing Director, Salix River & Wetland Services Ltd.
- The use of wild plants in urban areas. Richard Scott, Senior Ecologist, Landlife
- Techniques for monitoring restored sites. Gerry Lucas: Senior Lecturer in Geology & GIS, Edge Hill University
- Sourcing native Welsh plants. Steven Bromley, Environment Wales Officer & Groundwork Wales
- Restoring brownfield sites. Kylie Jones, Reserves Manager, New Wildlife

Groups of delegates considered issues under the following headings:

- Achieving restoration
- Tools and knowledge for restoration
- Post-restoration monitoring

The ideas and views captured in these workshops are published in this report. It is intended that they will inform the decisions and actions of those individuals and organisations working in Wales and in particular those of the Wales Biodiversity Partnership, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government.

A publication, *Welsh wild plants for landscape and biodiversity*, has been produced by *Flora locale* which provides good practice on advice on sourcing and using native Welsh plants for ecological restoration including habitat creation). It is available free from *Flora locale* (enclose a large letter s.a.e or download from www.floralocale.org)

3. Conclusions & recommendations

Flora locale has drawn together these conclusions and recommendations based on the output of the workshops and discussions held in the plenary sessions and are summarised in section 4. Recommendations are in bold.

3.1 Planning (development control)

The planning system needs to be strengthened to allow it to address biodiversity as a core issue. In Wales, an updated version of Technical Advisory Note 5 (equivalent to England's *Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and geological conservation*), has not been published. This has created a major policy gap and as a result there is currently inadequate guidance to planners and developers. Specific issues related to planning and biodiversity include:

- Inadequate ecological assessment and lack of information about sites subject to planning applications; this is identified as a cause of habitat destruction through development.
- Options to safeguard and enhance biodiversity need to be integrated early in the planning process and understood by those involved in designing and evaluating a development (the developer, developer's planning consultant, landscape architect and local authority planner), so that habitats are restored or created as part of the course of development.
- Within revised planning guidelines, the use of Welsh-origin wild stock for restoration projects, and the use of natural regeneration, need to be fully acknowledged as best practice; specifying Welsh stock will also help local business enterprises.
- All local planning authorities need good access to a qualified professionals who are able to advise them on biodiversity issues relevant to planning in general and individual planning applications.

Recommendations

- a) **The Welsh Assembly Government be asked to review and update planning policy guidelines relating to biodiversity. These should recommend the use of Welsh (native) origin stock where developments involve introducing plants for biodiversity gain (habitat creation and restoration). If Welsh-origin stock is unavailable, native-origin stock from the English borders or further afield within Britain should be required.**

- b) Organisations and individuals that hold records about sites of biodiversity value should be made aware of the value of providing their information to Local Records Centres.**

3.2 Welsh (native) origin planting stock

The demand for stock is inconsistent, has boom periods and its sustainability is questionable. This causes difficulties for growers in such an uncertain market and limits the quantities of suitable stock available. As a result, much of the planting stock (especially wildflower seed) is imported from outside Wales.

Individuals who wrote specifications for planting schemes reported not knowing where they could source Welsh native stock and wanted better information on what was available. There was confusion about terminology, although terms in wide use are clearly defined by various bodies.

The demand for Welsh native origin stock needs to be reflected in confirmed orders for it. Demand should stimulate the growing of Welsh native origin stock by businesses in Wales.

Public bodies should take a lead by addressing this issue within their procurement policy and practice (sustainable procurement) and in revised planning guidance. The preference for Welsh native origin stock should be considered on similar parity with the procurement of locally produced food. In procuring planting stock, the carbon footprint of locally grown native stock should also be considered in comparison with importing stock from outside Wales. Procurement policy should not preclude the import of suitable stock from the Welsh borders, or elsewhere if that is the best available option.

Recommendations

- c) Project managers plan well ahead; orders for Welsh native origin planting stock are made early on in the project. Contract growing, and building a close working relationship with a local grower is advocated.**
- d) The specification of planting stock should be clear and unambiguous to avoid mis-supply (e.g. “Welsh grown” is not the same as Welsh native origin). The *Flora locale* publication *Welsh wild plants for landscape and biodiversity* is recommended reading.**

There was a strongly held view that there is a need to raise awareness about the importance of securing suitable sites for seed donation from species-rich grassland, to support wild meadow enhancement projects.

Recommendation

- e) The Welsh Assembly Government be asked to introduce a financial incentive to owners/farmers of species-rich grassland sites that are suitable for seed donation.**

Although there are a number of producers that can supply Welsh native origin plants and seed, many of those present at the meeting were unclear about what was available and from where. *Flora locale* has a supplier list available on its website.

Recommendation

- f) *Flora locale* seeks funding to identify suppliers of Welsh native origin planting stock and make the information available through its website.**

3.3 Park and urban greenspace management

There are many opportunities to improve the biodiversity value of urban parks and open spaces. Many barriers also exist, preventing changes to conventional management approaches which

result in poor biodiversity outcomes. In some cases, an ecological approach would result in cost savings and improve the quality of the greenspace as well as reduce the carbon footprint of the authority. Local authority staff and contractors would benefit from improved training and from the integration of biodiversity as a component of best practice when managing the local authority estate.

Ecologists also need to appreciate the practicalities and limitations associated with urban greenspace, such as existing use, how to address public perceptions, cost and ease of management and issues relating to dealing with contractors and mowing gangs.

Recommendations

- g) The Wales Biodiversity Partnership and local Biodiversity Officers, develop an approach to urban greenspace management that will improve biodiversity outcomes in the local authority estate. Suggestions include a “toolkit” for greenspace managers and operatives and the creation of the role of Biodiversity Champion for an elected member of a local authority.**
- h) The Welsh Assembly Government be asked to require all local government and public bodies to carry out a formal Environmental Audit¹ and develop an Environmental Management System² that fully address biodiversity conservation and restoration and consider carbon footprinting in managing the local authority estate.**

3.4 Cost

Well-planned projects using best practice ecological restoration principles can result in significant cost savings compared to conventional methods. Castle Cement's approach in its Welsh limestone quarries makes use of existing vegetation for restoration, rather than buying in stock to replant quarried areas. The technique also involves careful onsite storage of soil and positioning of charges to create screens on quarried faces where vegetation can readily recolonise.

The creation and management of wild meadows in suitable areas of urban greenspace can also result in cost savings by reducing the frequency of cuts. However, logistics for cutting and disposing of long grass (e.g. green waste or biomass) need to be considered (email: info@floralocale.org for comparative costs).

The use of Welsh native origin planting stock was seen as preferable. However, examples were given where local producers were unable to secure orders due to prices that were high compared with larger producers in other countries that were able to benefit from economies of scale. It should be borne in mind that the cost of planting is usually a minor cost compared to the cost of labour, tree guards, stakes etc. Furthermore, the carbon footprint of importing stock should be considered (i.e. transport will increase the carbon footprint). Life Cycle Analysis may demonstrate that, overall, using Welsh native origin planting stock may have a lower environmental cost; a marginally more expensive direct cost should not rule out using Welsh native origin planting stock.

Recommendation

- i) *Flora locale*, organisations and individuals make available information on good quality, well planned projects using best practice ecological restoration principles that are cost effective. These can be shared through *Flora locale*'s websites www.floralocale.org and www.wildmeadows.org.uk**

¹ See BS EN ISO 19011: Guidelines for Quality and Environmental Management Systems Auditing

² ISO 1400 series, e.g. see www.iso14000-iso14001-environmental-management.com/

3.5 Funding for biodiversity restoration projects

Difficulty in securing funding was considered a major barrier to implementing projects, coupled with the short-term nature and emphasis on capital funding, when the most costly revenue item is a project manager.

Lack of funding was also considered a barrier to effective post-restoration monitoring. Longer term ongoing management costs need to be taken into account when developing a project, otherwise there is a risk that essential management will be abandoned once a project is “finished”.

In several workshops delegates highlighted that funding opportunities for community-type projects are likely to be greater if projects were able to deliver other government policy priorities relating to, for instance, social and health benefits. Given an increasingly difficult financial climate, multi-objective projects not solely focussed on biodiversity may be more likely to secure funding. However, clear information on the value of biodiversity to support other agendas did not appear to be readily available.

Funding streams were also seen as complex, difficult to access and requiring simplification. Accessing funding was also considered a skill, requiring experienced people who understood the processes. There was a perception that information on grants was not readily available however there are some good information sources. Local authorities often have a local grants portal, the Welsh Assembly Government’s website www.new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/grants is useful, and the Directory of Social Change has an online guide to grants and also offers training on applying for funding.

Recommendations

- j) Applicants should develop more projects that will deliver multiple benefits for biodiversity, health and social well-being.**
- k) *Flora locale* should seek to work with partner organisations to communicate the public and cost-benefits of ecological approaches to land management and restoration.**

3.6 Knowledge and skills

Knowledge gaps in botany, soils and hydrology were identified among practitioners involved in developing and managing biodiversity restoration projects.

Recommendations

- l) The Welsh Assembly Government and Higher Education Wales (HEW) be advised that (1) further and higher education courses for land managers (e.g. farming, horticulture, ecology and engineering) should include modules in botany and identifying Wales’ native wild plants and habitats, principles of ecological restoration and management, working with soils and understanding hydrology and (2) consideration is given to offering dedicated botany courses**
- m) The Welsh Assembly Government be advised that understanding and knowledge of wild plants and habitats of Wales should be a subject encouraged in schools.**

3.7 Information and communication

Poor communication between local authority departments was identified as a major problem. Delegates also identified problems in finding out who does what in their local authority.

Recommendations

- n) The Wales Biodiversity Partnership is asked to develop and promote to government and local authorities a standard cross-cutting environmental management system that will identify responsibilities for addressing biodiversity in the work of the authority.**

Information on good practice is available from many sources but it can be difficult to access and is dispersed in many publications and websites. Delegates recognised the need to improve information sharing and the benefits of partnership working. They were made aware of the technical information and of information on projects demonstrating best practice on the *Flora locale* website. The site also has valuable links to other websites.

Recommendations

- o) The Wales Biodiversity Partnership is asked to promote the *Flora locale* websites as providers of sound technical information and examples of good practice.**
- p) Organisations send case study information on their projects to *Flora locale* to be posted on their websites**

Biodiversity needs to be made more relevant to people's everyday lives. Increased public support for biodiversity is needed and this requires raising awareness about wild plants and habitats among the general public, local authorities and public bodies

Recommendation

- q) Conservation organisations in Wales develop partnership working and grasp opportunities to share information and work with *Flora locale*'s Wild Meadows Initiative to safeguard and restore Wales' wild plants and habitats by increasing public awareness.**

3.8 Monitoring

Monitoring the success of restoration planting projects was considered a significant weakness, and often was not considered in either project planning or budgeting.

Recommendations

- r) *Flora locale*, working with partner organisations, seeks funding to develop simple monitoring guidelines for evaluating project success in respect of biodiversity, landscape and public enjoyment that can be included as part of a project plan. Use of photographic monitoring is strongly advocated.**
- s) In respect of Section 106 Agreements planning authorities be asked to include costs of monitoring for development-related projects.**

4. Summary of recommendations

This summary identifies the primary audience for each recommendation. However it is understood that others may be able to assist with the delivery of these actions.

Welsh Assembly Government

- The Welsh Assembly Government be asked to review and update planning policy guidelines relating to biodiversity. These should recommend the use of Welsh (native) origin stock where developments involve introducing plants for biodiversity gain (habitat creation and restoration). If Welsh-origin stock is unavailable, native-origin stock from the English borders or further afield within Britain should be required *recommendation(a)refers*

- The Welsh Assembly Government be asked to introduce a financial incentive to owners/farmers of species-rich grassland sites that are suitable for seed donation. (*recommendation (e) refers*)
- The Welsh Assembly Government be asked to require all local government and public bodies to carry out a formal Environmental Audit and develop an Environmental Management System that fully address biodiversity conservation and restoration and consider carbon footprinting in managing the local authority estate. (*recommendation (h) refers*)
- The Welsh Assembly Government and Higher Education Wales (HEW) be advised that (1) further and higher education courses for land managers (e.g. farming, horticulture, ecology and engineering) should include modules in botany and identifying Wales' native wild plants and habitats, principles of ecological restoration and management, working with soils and understanding hydrology, and (2) consideration is given to offering dedicated botany courses. (*recommendation (l) refers*)
- The Welsh Assembly Government be advised that understanding and knowledge of wild plants and habitats of Wales should be a subject encouraged in schools. (*recommendation (m) refers*)

Wales Biodiversity Partnership

- The Wales Biodiversity Partnership and local Biodiversity Officers develop an approach to urban greenspace management that will improve biodiversity outcomes in the local authority estate. Suggestions include a "toolkit" for greenspace managers and operatives and the creation of the role of Biodiversity Champion for an elected member of a local authority. (*recommendation (g) refers*)
- The Wales Biodiversity Partnership is asked to develop and promote to government and local authorities a standard cross-cutting environmental management system that will identify responsibilities for addressing biodiversity in the work of the authority. (*recommendation (n) refers*)
- The Wales Biodiversity Partnership is asked promote the *Flora locale* websites as sources of sound technical information and examples of good practice. (*recommendation (o) refers*)

Flora locale

- *Flora locale* seeks funding to identify suppliers of Welsh native origin planting stock and make the information available through its website. (*recommendation (f) refers*)
- *Flora locale*, organisations and individuals make available information on good quality, well planned projects using best practice ecological restoration principles that are cost effective. These can be shared through *Flora locale*'s websites www.floralocale.org and www.wildmeadows.org.uk (*recommendation (i) refers*)
- *Flora locale*, working with partner organisations, seek funding to develop simple monitoring guidelines for evaluating project success in respect of biodiversity, landscape and public enjoyment that can be included as part of a project plan. Photographic monitoring is strongly advocated. (*recommendation (r) refers*)
- *Flora locale* should seek to work with partner organisations to communicate the public and cost-benefits of ecological approaches to land management and restoration. (*recommendation (k) refers*)

General

- Organisations and individuals that hold records about sites of biodiversity value should be made aware of the value of providing their information to Local Records Centres. *(recommendation (b) refers)*
- Project managers plan well ahead; orders for Welsh native origin planting stock should be made early on in the project. Contract growing, and building a close working relationship with a local grower is advocated. *(recommendation (c) refers)*
- The specification of planting stock is made clear and unambiguous to avoid mis-supply (e.g. “Welsh grown is not the same as Welsh native origin) The *Flora locale* publication *Welsh wild plants for landscape and biodiversity* is recommended reading. *(recommendation (d) refers)*
- Applicants should develop more projects that will deliver multiple benefits for biodiversity, health and social well-being. *(recommendation (j) refers)*
- Organisations send case study information on their projects to *Flora locale* to be posted on their websites. *(recommendation (p) refers)*
- Conservation organisations in Wales develop partnership working and grasp opportunities to share information and work with *Flora locale*'s Wild Meadows Initiative to safeguard and restore Wales' wild plants and habitats by increasing public awareness. *(recommendation (q) refers)*
- In respect of Section 106 Agreements, planning authorities be asked to include costs of monitoring biodiversity outcomes for development-related projects. *(recommendation (s) refers)*

Appendix A

Delegates

Zoe Abbott	Keep Wales Tidy
Suzie Allen	Neath Port Talbot Borough Council/BTCV
Dr Richard Birch	Capita Symons
Ursula Bowen	Shakespeare Link
Rosie Carmichael	Carmarthenshire County Council
Mike Cherry	Department of Economy and Transport
Paul Chester	National Grid
Stuart Craxford	Environment Agency Wales
Becky Davies	Environment Agency Wales
Michelle Delafield	Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency
Gail Devine	Groundwork BNPT
Andy Dodgson	Powys County Council
Francois Dulong	Groundwork BNPT
Emma Durward	Powys County Council
Hilary Foster	Environment Agency Wales
Rhian Griffiths	Tirlun Design
Catrin Grimstead	Environment Agency Wales
Emma Hancock	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Sean Hathaway	City and County of Swansea
Clive Heaton	Powys County Council
Sheila Holmes	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
David S. Hughes	Pembrey Country Park
Mike Jenkins	Environment Agency Wales
Marianne Jones	Environment Agency
Fiona Lanc	Habitat Matters Ltd
Rhian Langford	Groundwork Bridgend & Neath Port Talbot
Andrew Lucas	CCW South East Region
Wendy Mackay	Groundwork BNPT
Jo Mullett	City and County of Swansea
Andrew Nevill	Torfaen County Borough Council
Dr Nic Perkins	BTCV Cymru
Clare Pooley	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Brian Price	Powys County Council
Mair Rees	Environment Agency Wales
Aled Roderick	CCW
Deborah Sazer	Butterfly Conservation Wales
Laura Shewring	Powys County Council
Samantha Shove	TACP
Daniel Snaith	Keep Wales Tidy
Richard Thomas	Keep Wales Tidy
Trevor Thomas	Powys County Council
Cliff Webb	Glasu
Derek Williams	Gwynedd Council
Rob Williams	Salix

Speakers and facilitators

Iolo Williams	Patron of the Wild Meadows Initiative
Steven Bromley	Groundwork Wales
Ivy Berkshire	Flora locale
Graham Cowden	Brecon Beacons National Park
Sue Clarke	Flora locale
Richard Clarke	Flora locale (Chairman)
Sue Everett	Flora locale
David Holland	Salix River & Wetland Services
Kylie Jones	New Wildlife
Gerry Lucas	Edge Hill University
Richard Scott	National Wildflower Centre
Noel Williams	Castle Cement