

CA 15

Ymgynghoriad ar asedau cymunedol

Consultation on community assets

Ymateb gan: Wellbeing Economy Alliance Wales

Response from: Wellbeing Economy Alliance Wales

Inquiry into community assets

Response from Wellbeing Economy Wales- WEAll Cymru.

Within the larger WEAll Global movement WEAll Cymru is the Wales Hub, seeking to promote economic system change, supporting and underpinning local communities to create greater resilience. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Within the last two years we have brought together over eighty organisations to share and discuss their work in communities which touches our field of interest- such as food, equality and new economic systems such as the Doughnut Economic Model.

In pursuit of this Purpose, Wellbeing Economy Wales has the following objectives:

- **To unite** diverse movements and campaigns around shared aims and values;
- **To grow** a broad alliance of people, organisations and businesses;
- **To amplify** examples and practitioners of Wellbeing Economics in Wales;
- **To educate** ourselves, our members and the wider community.

Wellbeing Economy Wales exists to promote, facilitate and campaign for new economic models and practices which serve the wellbeing needs of people and

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nature, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The enabling work achieved by Wales as a Wellbeing Government with significant role of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Commissioner singles Wales out as a country which enables its people and communities.

In your consultation you requested a response to four areas. As a expanding network and alliance we are continuing to discover the projects being undertaken at local level.

Our most recent discussions have been around food, local initiatives and building local resilience. Whilst this is a narrow part of the community asset discussion we are aware that the challenges highlighted will be experienced by many groups. This response is made in consultation with Our Food 1200 - a project supported by Monmouthshire County Council, the Brecon Beacons National Park, the Welsh Government, and the Conservation Farming Trust (ourfood1200.wales).

Whether the current statutory and policy framework empowers communities in Wales to develop community assets

In a recent meeting on local food provision in Wales participants in the meeting noted the difficulty that they were having acquiring land for growing and the challenges encountered in the planning process. The Our Food 1200 project faced significant issues with planning conditions for small scale farming enterprises within the Brecon Beacons National Park- however the Authority has identified the update

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of planning regulations around sustainable farming as a future priority. Planning constraints have been noted on other projects – not just those in protected areas.

Cwmpas supported Our Food 1200 with advice on constituting as a Community Benefit Society, by supplying a consultant to develop a suite of policy documents for the new organisation, and by funding a mentorship with the Kindling Trust in Manchester, which has recent experience in community purchase of land for farming.

The lack of a statutory instrument specifically supporting the disposal of community assets and assisting in the building of community resilience is unhelpful. Whilst this is desirable specific provision should be made to support rural economies. We are aware of different situations in Scotland and England where communities are empowered and have the ability to 'grow' their own confidence and deliver services and resources at a local level.

The localisation of services has the greatest impact on deprived communities, rural areas (often first language Welsh), women (invariably single parents) and the elderly- more so in the crises of the last two years.

The extent the Community Asset Transfer scheme promotes and supports effective development of community assets

In discussions with Our Food 1200 there was no knowledge of this scheme. It is unclear from the information found who are the beneficiaries of this scheme.

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To explore barriers and challenges faced by communities in taking ownership of public or privately owned assets, including finance and support services

In acquiring any asset the two greatest barriers- once a project has been identified- are the access to funds and the pace of the disposal. Because the community in Wales has 'no right to buy and 'no right to bid' the speed at which these transactions progress is determined by the vendor and is far faster than a community can manage. The circumstances of the asset, be it a public or private hands, generates very different challenges.

Our Food 1200 is resolving this issue by working with philanthropists to develop a line of credit, so that the community can operate very quickly as a cash buyer of land. The community then has time after the purchase to re-finance.

Other notable barriers to progress might be community resources- not only financial but volunteer skills and confidence. Whilst the Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA) recommendations note the need for support services and links. The greater impact could occur if community groups were able to access a Land Fund, where money can be granted or loaned, to allow them time to scope and develop projects.

To discover what lessons can be learnt from beyond the Welsh border.

We would support the recommendations made by IWA.

Within Scotland there is a Right to Buy provision in Statute and a Community Land Fund of £20 million given as grants to communities. Whilst this is a substantial sum

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in these difficult times the benefit needs to be set against the costs of providing these community services and support networks, specifically in areas of deprivation.

England has a Right to Bid for community assets which seems a lesser Right.

The importance of multi-purpose community resource hubs in building community resilience around food, mental health, loneliness, craft working, climate emergencies, etc. and therefore the need for a community right to bid for, and means to buy, land and property assets should be made explicit in Welsh law.