

Swansea Learning Exchange Event meeting report

Swansea Waterfront Museum, April 14 2010

Present:

CHAIR: Dr Steve Harris - Science Shops Wales (SRH)

Paul Wimbush - LAMMAS (PW)

Grenville Ham - Green Valleys Project (GH)

Mary Ann Brocklesby - Awel Aman Tawe (MAB)

Jenny Carlisle - Awel Aman Tawe (JCaat)

Michael Butterfield - Green Valleys Project (MB)

Jackie Charlton - Green Valleys Project (JCTgv)

Phillip Jenkins - Cwmclydach Communities First (PJ)

Keith Jenkins - Cwmclydach Communities First (KJ)

Cris Tomos - Glogue, Hermon and Llanfyrnach (CT)

Angharad Dalton - SSW (AD)

Chris Blake - Green Valleys Project (CB)

Graham Logie - Green Valleys Project (GL)

Lis Burnett - NESTA (LB)

Usha Ladwa-Thomas - WAG (ULT)

Welcome & Introductions & Apologies:

Dan McAllum from Awel Aman Tawe had sent his apologies. Adam Kennerly had not sent apologies and ULT will contact him

ULT opened the session, welcoming the attendees. Stating that each of the groups present were "winners" of recent prizes or large grants, ULT said that she recognised that each had a mutual interest and shared experiences out of which there was a potential to create a group to share/exchange knowledge. The purpose of the meeting was to explore the possible function and purpose of forming a learning exchange group.

Issues outlined by **ULT** for further consideration included the possibility of regular discussion with the Minister through the group, the issue of involving other groups and how not to exclude non-winners.

ULT stated that she had invited **Steve Harris** from Science Shop Wales, to lead this group because of some very interesting ideas on exchange of knowledge that Steve Harris had to offer.

A Communiversity of Wales

SRH provided a brief introduction to Science Shops Wales' work and function, followed by a short description of his own approach and motivations - describing himself as an academic activist working inside the academic system to encourage social justice and sustainability.

SRH declared an interest in LAMMAS, since SSW has formally supported their work.

His presentation was entitled ***Creating a community of sustainability learning and practice.***

Setting up a learning exchange group **SRH** said was not a revolutionary idea, but the Communiversity approach differs to those that currently exist. The focus was on discussing the formation of a 'community of sustainability learning and practice' dedicated to sharing and building the knowledge needed to respond to the impacts of climate change and take forward the transition to post-carbon living in Wales.

Such a network would:

- Share and exchange technical, organisational and financial knowledge
- Identify key knowledge and resource needs
- Share and exchange key skills and competencies
- Identify key skills and competencies gaps or needs
- Provide a safe, mutually supportive community of peers
- Facilitate communication on behalf of the learning group as a whole with e.g. policy-makers, agencies and funders

Activities undertaken by the network could include:

- A series of site visits workshops & seminars
- Dialogue, discussion and shared hands-on activity
- Encourage participants to articulate their own knowledge and approaches while gaining a deeper understanding of others' outlooks and emphases,
- Explore the 'bigger picture' of which all the projects are a part
- Session interactions to be captured by participants and observers/facilitators and
- Materials produced made available online
- Ongoing coordination support by facilitators

SRH said that the offer from Science Shops Wales, if the group wishes to create a formal group is that of support.

SRH went on to outline the common features of similar knowledge exchange structures:

- Cooperative, mutualised, not-for-profit - owned and operated by faculty and students
- Low- or no-cost to end-users
- Non-bureaucratic, non-hierarchical, egalitarian
- Course materials, research outputs etc. 'open source'
- Involves every level of post-16 learner in integrated, multi-level groups
- Emphasis on action learning
- Short courses
- Integrates vocational and academic learning, physical and mental activity, skills-based, cognitive and emotional development
- Takes place at sites of transition action

SRH outlined his involvement with the Stroud Communiversity and its roots in the Steiner and Quaker movements.

Examples cited: [Stroud Communiversity](#), [The School of Living](#)

ULT said that she shared **SRH's** enthusiasm for the idea, buying into the model with her experience in skills development. **ULT** said that the Minister does not want to drive community work in Wales, but rather facilitate it; as such **ULT** is willing to make a proposal for funding and supporting this group (e.g. paying for Science Shop Wales to facilitate, venues etc) to the Minister if the group wishes to take it forward. **ULT** also noted that the idea had not yet been discussed with other organisations such as Cynnal Cymru, EST etc. and awaiting the views of this group. **ULT** outlined that **Lis Burnet** had offered to write up the good

practice from the days so that the information could be disseminate more widely.

Lis Burnett (LB) of NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) gave a brief introduction to the organisation which funds innovation. It is funded by an endowment and therefore independent. **LB** explained that she was in attendance today since TGV were winners of NESTA's Big Green Challenge.

NESTA will be evaluating the impact of the projects and comparing successes, and is also keen to absorb the type of learning that could stem from the formation of a learning network.

*General discussion ensued with **MB** welcoming the open agenda presented. **CT** saw a potential for value beyond Wales & urged use of tech such as Skype to reach beyond boundaries. **PJ** Spoke about the value in creating a safe network of peers. **GL** wanted to focus on tangible action based results such as policy inputs as well as learning and sharing – **SRH** said this was possible and pointed to a consortium response to the TAN 6 consultation through the Low Impact Development Network.*

***Jctgv** spoke about expert patient panels as used in the health sector, saying she would like this to become an expert group that speaks with experience and clarity on these issues.*

***MAB** said she was excited by the model of social change presented, and the fact that this could come from Wales. She said she supported a non-hierarchical structure, rejecting models where learning takes place separately from decision makers.*

***MB** wanted a model that would allow the group to tackle 'major threats' to renewable work from agencies such as EAW.*

***GH** saw an opportunity to unburden the problems faced by all the groups present as well as opportunities to share learning to take work forward.*

***SRH** said that the best way to truly challenge a system is to grow your own – hence encouragement to consider the Communiversity structure.*

*There was some discussion around the innovative and groundbreaking nature of the projects represented at the meeting. **GL** referred back to his point on policy development.*

The discussion on the Communiversity proposal ended here until later in the day.

Group Presentations

Each group delivered an introductory presentation on their projects.

LAMMAS

Paul Wimbush of LAMMAS presented first, his presentation was entitled '**What If**'. He outlined his professional background and said his combined experiences had led him to believe that the Steinbeck dream of owning your own house and land is fairly universal. Currently the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 precludes the possibility that people might build their own eco-homes that are:

- Generating electricity from renewables,
- Fuelled directly from the land
- Integrated into the natural ecosystems
- Growing food
- Creating land-based livelihoods

PW spoke of the problems stemming from the '47 T&C Planning Act – the separation of the urban and the countryside by the act has led to a number of difficulties for low-impact developments.

Grazing land **PW** said is the most under-used resource in Britain. He asked 'What if' we converted this into abundant ecosystems using permaculture techniques, provided education and training in grass-roots sustainable solutions, acted as seed and resource banks, strengthened the resilience of emerging transition networks and promoting solutions to society.

Education, he said, is key to establishing such communities, and as such he finds the idea of the Communiversity attractive.

PW then went on to outline LAMMAS' history: set up in 2005 – the 'spark' being emerging low-impact policy in Pembrokeshire (policy 52). 76 acres of land was acquired and a permaculture design was developed for the site. Planning disputes ran throughout 2006-08 with the local authority, and in 2009 LAMMAS succeeded in a public hearing. Work to build the LAMMAS vision is now underway using their Low Carbon Community funding. **PW** described emerging National Planning policy in Wales as 'amazing'. **PW** closed by briefly talking about the next steps. He said he was keen to see similar low impact developments built throughout Wales, speaking of the need to 'invent' communities.

Cwmclydach Micro-Hydro Electricity Project

Phil Jenkins presented on behalf of the project. Cwmclydach is a former mining area which has Communities First status. Currently the Hydro Scheme exists only in planned form; having just received funding to start the scheme. The Scheme has 2 planned phases of development – top and bottom developments, the bottom scheme having the greatest capacity.

Whilst planning permission has not been a problem for the project, the following issues have all caused difficulty in the development of the plans:

- Funding for project
- Security
- Planning Permission
- Environment Agency Approval
- Suppliers and Installers
- State Aid & private finance

PJ elaborated on the state aid and private finance problem – the community group without fully realising have drawn down too much combined state aid and must find matched funds or return some of the funding. Knowledge sharing had not been a major issue – in a way, the Communiversity already exists **PJ** said, as they had received a lot of assistance from Awel Aman Tawe & The Green Valleys. The biggest threat to the project he said were the financial difficulties around State Aid.

PJ closed by running over the project's projected figures; saying they expect total income generated to be £44,644

*The group suggested ways that Cwm Clydach could use to overcome their state aid problem. **PJ** said he would look into the suggestions. He also acknowledged that there had been considerable help from Green Valleys*

The Green Valleys

Grenville Ham introduced the Green Valleys project. He explained the project is a Community Interest Company that enables, designs and finances local low carbon initiatives in the Beacons. Led by a board of local volunteers, the

'umbrella' project develops community led energy projects, governance structures and capital finance, and is based on Low Risk - High Return seed projects. Once established and generating and income community groups then finance low return projects. Formally established last May, the project's roots go back 4 years. **GH** said there was a realisation that no-one would take the idea forward, so he set about to create his own project. The aim he said was to fix energy supply prices in the area.

TGV has so far:

- Provided support, advice and finance packages for local groups
- Set-up a Board - comprised of volunteers from local communities
- Developed a Hydro Business, a Woodland Business and Community support plans

5 local groups have been formally established : Talybont, Crucorney, Dyffryn Cwmdru, Cwmdru and Llangattock. Many others are on the way. TGV assists the community projects with governance, project support, finance and expansion. **GH** then gave a brief overview of the community woodlands work undertaken by the project which uses locally sourced wood fuel to reduce heating costs, improves the quality of woodlands and increases biodiversity value. Next **GH** gave an overview of the community Hydro projects that GVP has enabled:

Talybont 34kW Community Hydro : Installed April 2006 : Powers 75 homes

Llanover 11kW Hydro : Installed Sept 2007 : Powers 20 homes

Abercraf 12.7 kW hydro : Installed Sept 2008 : Powers 28 homes

GH said the Hydro schemes were the 'bread and butter' of the project - since developing lots of little hydro schemes has a short pay-back period. Further environmental benefits stem from the Carbon audit that is carried out in each community as part of the hydro work. The carbon auditing allowed one community to reduce its carbon emissions by 37%.

GH closed his presentation with 3 points to consider:

1. Communities can move quicker than Government
2. The approach deals with local concerns but is replicable and scalable and is linked to regional, national and international concerns
3. The approach has wider benefits than traditional businesses

The group briefly discussed EAW's (lack of) capacity to approve hydro schemes.

***GH** said that they now had a special relationship with the organisation having gained expertise in the planning area. All the hydro installs delivered by TGV are the same so the group knows the planning pitfalls and how to avoid them. **JCgvp** saw a key role for Local Authorities to work as conduits on the issue.*

***GL** called for a Service Level Agreement between government and agencies like Environment Agency Wales on such matters. He also mentioned the fact that the only energy tariff not recently published by DECC was Hydro because it had been miscalculated. DECC were made aware of the issue by the TGV.*

Llangattock Green Valley Project

Michael Butterworth introduced the Llangattock scheme. Llangattock he said was a typical rural community. The scheme is one of the Green Valley project hydro schemes. In Nov 09 it also won funding from British Gas. It has a total budget of £210k for this year. **MB** spoke of the need to break funding reliance. He explained that his organisation is a Community Interest Company not a social

enterprise, and said his vision is to create a carbon negative community in 5 years.

The project has:

- 46 allotments
- A Community Hall
- Re-instated community loos
- Llangattock Litter Pickers group
- Bio-diesel pump
- Energy assessed the local school which will lead to cavity wall insulation and other efficiency measures
- A solar PV system is on the way
- A woodlands group is currently building partnerships locally
- Households have been energy assessed and monies spent on improvements. Under British Gas' Green Streets scheme 41 council houses are to be checked and improved.

MB went on to talk about the group's plans for a Food and Energy hub which will include a district heat pump scheme using heat from an anaerobic digester. He mentioned also that they are in talks with Brains about the community pub. **MB** said the community anticipates the eventual closure of the local school, as such all the schemes mentioned are geared to supporting the school.

Cwm Arian

Cris Tomos introduced the Cwm Arian scheme. Context: The local pub closed in 2000, using an 'Awards for All' grant the community bought a marquee to use as a community space. In 2003 under a Community Land Trust Initiative 6 community plots were due to be bought but the land was lost to a developer, that development was subsequently blocked by the community. Ysgol Hermon was then closed but the community was galvanised during the fight to save it and developed a community action plan with PLANED which they have followed since 2005 (currently being updated).

The Cwm Arian Forum was established in 2005; a Local Community Forum that covers the three North Pembrokeshire villages of Hermon, Glogue and Llanfyrnach.

Amongst the activities run by the Forum are:

- the Blue Rock Festival (10,000 capacity 2010)
- a credit union (inclusive share loaning for the community & finances new social enterprises)

It is currently attempting to purchase a Community Resource Centre in order to retain community assets.

Energy: An £8k feasibility study into wind, water and biomass sources to generate electricity locally and implement energy efficiency measures in the home has been carried out by Dulas. It identified possible income of £330k from wind and plans are underway to take the project forward.

Awel Aman Tawe

Jenny Carlisle introduced Awel Aman Tawe. Established in 2000 it is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. They are Community Energy Specialists and a Social Enterprise Hub. Their wind project has been 5-6

years in the planning process, having been through an appeal and a judicial review against the local authority. The project was able to move forward when WAG stepped in and threatened the local authority.

*The group discussed whether the planning problems were community or local authority-based. **MAB** in response outlined ATT's detailed approach to community development, awareness raising and consultation, and disclosed that the local authority interpreted the lengthy award-winning engagement process as 1 consultation response.*

Identified projects stemming from wind revenue for ATT include:

- Healthy eating café and the allotment in Cwmllynfell
- Help put other existing social enterprises on a sound financial footing – including crèche, lifelong learning, community workers and mentors
- Leverage additional support from volunteers and industry
- Environmental education and exhibitions.

Other community benefits include:

- replicate and extend AAT approach – networks, mentoring, direct implementation etc.
- Won tender to deliver WAG/EST Community Renewables programme in Heads Of the Valleys and Neath Port Talbot /Swansea

Going forward, ATT aims to create a specialist energy hub in the Swansea valleys using the expertise built up during the planning process to develop renewables in other areas. ATT aim to run an energy performance certificate service, bio-fuel pump and use buildings as assets in order to avoid grant dependency, however the wind farm is their big prize as it ensures the sustainability of the rest of the organisation's projects.

AATs funding needs (**£6,277,000**) and governance structure were outlined, and the ownership of the land the windfarm is to be built upon was questioned (mix of commons and farmland). Access paths had been an issue for ATT since separate agreements are needed. Only one farm has asked for rental payment.

Summing Up

SRH led the summing up, drawing together some commonalities between the projects. The most striking commonality was found to be the way that each project is to some extent re-imagining the countryside. It was concluded that it appeared to him that a fundamental change of relationship with the land and the built environment was needed. Commonalities between the social and economic regeneration aspects of the projects were also noted. Particular challenges included the demographic and socio-economic differences between the projects; the challenge of including differently-abled and disadvantaged people and the need to preserve and build local infrastructure and facilities. Consensus on the need to share technical knowledge had been established, along with the need to share knowledge on organisational structures and financing.

Discussions moved on to measure interest in joining forces as a network. **CT** drew attention to the southern-bias of the projects (which is circumstantial since they are all LCC or NESTA winners).

Schemes such as the Future Jobs Fund were mentioned in relation to staffing projects, **JCgvp** sounded a note of caution here on the added complications that rurality bring to participation in such schemes. **MB** suggested that the groups look into [CERTs](#) (Carbon Emission Reduction Targets) and [CESPs](#) (Community

Energy Saving Programme) – the obligations on energy agencies to reduce impacts.

GH said his observations from the day were that those present all demonstrated that their strength is their ability to get things done for themselves. This though is also a threat as it is isolating and as such they should look to see if they can join forces. He said their common ground was the generation of energy and re-investment in communities. He called on the group to create their own Welsh Energy Company, to take ownership back and closing the loop. The idea was discussed lightly between the group.

There was a round table discussion to identify needs and priorities for the group. Issues that were raised included:

High-level skills sharing

Access to Legal services;

Insurance;

Energy Retailing / Wholesaling as a consortium;

Raising Finance on the money markets;

Access to capital funding possibly through a Welsh Eco-Investment bond;

State subsidies for green manufacturing;

Jobs training and skills through a 2-year training scheme aimed at bringing young people to work in rural communities

Exerting leverage over local authorities and quangos particularly with regard to their public accountability.

MAB said that she favoured a group forming around component-based peripatetic style of modular learning with time spent at each project. **GL** asked how information could be shared without creating bureaucracy and a discussion around the structure of such a group ensued. It was felt that it needed to be designed to fail if it isn't functionable. **SRH** said the shape could be mapped out over a more focused programme of events. **PW** spoke about the group being able to call structures to account as a collective through the Communiversity.

Next Steps

A report drawing together the findings of the day would be made available; to include inputs from **LB, ULT & SRH**.

There was strong consensus around the proposal to form a network to benefit the projects, but further discussion is needed to develop consensus **over a structure and to identify its purpose**.

It was agreed that the logical next step would be to meet at one of the project sites - in-keeping with Communiversity principles.

SRH offered SSW's help in arranging the meetings whether or not **ULT** is able to raise funds to support the work (as indicated earlier) if the group wishes to move forward with SSW's involvement.

GL asked if the meetings could be themed, **CB** said that it was vital to keep some open space also. **PW** wanted to explore involving other pioneers.

MAB suggested a fully facilitated meeting next time, and when asked, the group favoured a focus on structure development for this meeting.

It was agreed that contact details will be shared and notes of the meeting would be circulated. Participants will respond by both checking for accuracy but also sending their thoughts on what they want the next meeting to be.

ACTION: Please respond to this by 4/5/10