

North Wales Libraries and Planting for Pollinators 2013

1. Project

Libraries and Planting for Pollinators, a project somewhat unusual for libraries to undertake, involved working with four primary schools, Conwy and Denbighshire Youth and Justice Service, Scouts, and Cubs, to transform areas of library grounds into wildlife friendly zones (see section 4 for list of partners). With grant funding from the former Countryside Council for Wales and contributions from many external bodies (see section 5), the project was implemented in eight of the eleven libraries suggested:

- Gwynedd: Bethesda, Dolgellau
- Wrexham: Brynteg, Chirk, Gwersyllt, Rhosllanerchrugog
- Conwy: Penrhyn Bay, Penmaenmawr

Relevant staff members in council environment and grounds departments were approached for help with ecological surveys and recommendations for plants. All departments proved supportive of the project, as environmental sustainability and conservation falls in line with departmental and organisational objectives. As a result, council departments carried out elements such as ecological surveys and preliminary grounds preparation free of charge.

All areas chosen were of little biodiversity value. The majority of the plants were native species, with some non-native species recommended by botany/ biodiversity professionals, and personal research. Plants in most locations will provide year round food/shelter for pollinators and other wildlife.

To promote the library, staff identified nature websites and provided various activities relating to pollinators, nature, biodiversity and the environment. Activities included arts and crafts, crosswords, word-searches, making puppets, and creating PowerPoint presentations and computer projects from information found in literature displays and online resources. Snowdonia National Park Authority and Bangor University's Brambell Museum provided specimens for a butterfly and moth exhibition for the children to examine and Gwersyllt library staff asked a local amphibian, arachnid and reptile enthusiast to attend with his pets.

The project proved a success, with positive feedback from participants, over 3000 square metres covered with wildlife friendly plants and seeds, including four caterpillar cafes, though excluding climbing plants and 2 bug hotels. Relationships have been initiated and developed with schools, community organisations, and public bodies, awareness of the project has proved far-reaching and libraries have engaged a hard to reach group on a long-term basis. Weather proved the largest challenge, though other minor problems were encountered (outlined in section 7).

The project continues to evolve, with many organisations eager to work with libraries to deliver similar projects.

2. Aims:

- Meet as many library and governmental objectives as possible with one project – engage wider audiences, target hard to reach groups, community engagement, collaboration, sustainability, environment, equality, and information literacy;
- Raise awareness of libraries and library offerings;
- Improve sustainability; benefit the environment and pollinators; raise awareness of environmental matters; highlight important issues;
- Reduce maintenance costs, carbon footprint and fuel consumption of heavy machinery through less upkeep and annual flowering;
- Provide an attractive, colourful space;
- Develop collaborative projects with external agencies and communities to encourage community spirit;
- Lay foundations for promoting libraries as centres of sustainability; provide enhanced access to relevant information; gently educate;
- Proactively engage with Welsh Government, EU, and local, regional and national library sustainability objectives.

3. Target Audiences

The NWLP were keen to target a broad array of partners, with a focus on children and young adults for the reasons outlined below.

- To inspire ecological and environmental interests and introduce libraries from a young age;
- By creating a garden, the children take ownership of the project and the library, which in the first instance means that over 100 children returned home and told their parents about the project in the library. Ownership would also encourage children to ask their parents to view the results of their work, which, in turn, brings adults into the library.
- Environment and sustainability are topics covered by the national curriculum. The project allowed children to gain hands on experience of an environmental project alongside their schoolwork and increase their knowledge through online research. Cubs and Scouts used the project to gain environmental badges.
- Working with Tŷ Meirion allowed libraries to connect with special needs children who enjoy and benefit from practical projects.
- Young offenders are a hard to reach group that could benefit from libraries and library services. Conwy and Denbighshire Youth and Justice Service (YJS) responded immediately to the ‘cold call’ request and were eager to work with the NWLP. YJS leaders recognised the benefits of bringing their clients into libraries and at the initial meeting, leaders offered to maintain the library grounds for the long-term, enabling them to bring their clients directly into a library on a regular basis. YJS leaders also asked if their clients could research ecological and practical aspects of the project within the library, e.g. why particular plants were chosen, the benefits to wildlife, suitable soils and aspects, etc. Knowledge gained through implementation and research would be nurtured and grow alongside the gardens, providing skills and improving information literacy amongst YJS clients.

Project ‘planting partners’ (see section 4) were selected in the respective areas through liaising with library staff to identify whether the service wished to engage with a particular

party. For example, Bethesda library staff wished to strengthen newly formed relationships with Ysgol Pen y Bryn; Dolgellau library staff wished to engage Ysgol y Gader's Tŷ Meirion Special Needs Unit and Ysgol Llanfachreth. Wrexham and Conwy library services were open to working with any suitable local group or organisation. Conwy and Denbighshire YJS were chosen in Conwy, and two primary schools, a Scout group and a Cub group were chosen in Wrexham. The NWLP worked with teachers/group leaders to identify the most appropriate classes/age groups.

Generic risk assessments, programmes and activities were compiled and sent to planting partners for consultation and agreement prior to project date and leading adults were issued a template to complete and return. The template recorded the number of children, their age, valid insurances, acceptance of tasks/activities and the risk assessment.

4. List of Planting Partners

- Bethesda Library: Bethesda library staff, Ysgol Pen y Bryn
- Dolgellau Library: Dolgellau library staff, members of the public, Tŷ Meirion Special Needs Unit at Ysgol y Gader, Ysgol Llanfachreth, Snowdonia National Park Authority
- Penrhyn Bay and Penmaenmawr Libraries: Conwy and Denbighshire Youth and Justice Service (YJS)
- Brynteg Library: Brynteg library staff, Brynteg County Primary School
- Chirk Library: Ysgol y Waun
- Gwersyllt Library: Wrexham library staff, 1st Johnstown Scouts,
- Rhosllanerchrugog Library: 1st Penycae Beavers

5. Funders and contributors:

Internal

- Welsh Government.
- North Wales Libraries Partnership.
- Conwy Library Service.
- Gwynedd Library Service.
- Wrexham Library Service.

External (i.e. non-library) funders and contributors:

- Countryside Council for Wales:
 - Grant award £1,289;
 - 4 x Ecological survey.
- Snowdonia National Park Authority:
 - £150;
 - 1 x Ecological survey;
 - Bird boxes for other libraries participating in the project;
 - Donation of 4 large cases of butterflies for an exhibition supporting the project;
 - Material for the bug hotel.
- Friends of the Earth Wales: £50.
- Huws Gray: £50 of materials and significant discount for the size of the order.

- The Co-operative Bee Plan: 200 x packets of wildlife friendly seeds.
- Conwy and Denbighshire Youth and Justice Service (YJS): 4 x large planters and materials.
- Tidy Towns Conwy: funded materials for further planters built by YJS.
- Ferndale Home and Garden Centre: plants.
- Library staff, members of the local communities and local businesses: plants, seeds, materials for bug hotel.
- Gwynedd Council:
 - Municipal Works Service
 - Preliminary clearing and ground preparation; all topsoil removed was relocated on site or to areas such as verges and graveyards;
 - Materials for the bug hotel;
 - Biodiversity Unit – 1 x Ecological survey.
- Conwy County Borough Council: Highways & Infrastructure Services, Rural Community Development, Environment & Technical Services:
 - 3 x Ecological surveys.
- Wrexham County Borough Council Community Wellbeing & Development Department; ‘Streetscene’ at Wrexham County Borough Council:
 - Preliminary preparation.
- Bangor University: Treborth Botanical Garden, Brambell Museum.
- Dandy’s Topsoil.
- National Beekeeping Centre, Conwy.

6. Resources and Materials

If all elements of this project had been paid for, it is likely it would have cost in excess of £15k.

- NWLP Support Officer time and expenses approximately £3,000.
- Total cost of materials and signs: £1,543.52
 - Mulch – 7 bulk bags, 14 small bags;
 - 77 bags of compost;
 - 2 rolls of weed membrane and pegs;
 - 11 bags of slate chippings;
 - 2 bags of grano dust;
 - 3 bags of gravel;
 - Plants, shrubs, specialist seeds etc.;
 - Tools;
 - Bug hotel materials.
- Total cost of project: £4,543.52.

7. General Problems Encountered

- 2 sites rejected due to the need for traffic management systems, which are expensive and require extra insurances. Public footpath closure notices may also be required.
- 1 site too overgrown; clearing would have led to enormous amounts of waste disposal.
- Access for diggers on one site meant having to dig large beds by hand.
- Adverse weather led to 5 sites being postponed. This had 3 repercussions:

- Organising a second date suitable for library staff and planting partners at short notice proved problematical. In 1 instance, the original planters identified could not find a suitable date and another planting partner had to be found at short notice;
- Seeds in some locations were planted later than recommended;
- Some plants purchased for sites that had dates postponed died due to the cold and an adverse reaction to Baby Bio, which the project manager was using in a bid to keep them alive.
- Lack of outside taps. Overcome using buckets and borrowing watering cans from library staff and families.
- Concern that the wildflower beds would decrease work for council employees. However, the larger the areas selected, the less fuel powered machinery needed, so saving cost, which in turn can go to retaining manpower required to maintain shrubs, bushes, plants etc.
- Library heads of services not responsible for library grounds maintenance therefore the service was unable to participate in the project, despite wishing to be involved.
- Initially, some heads of service did not consider the project 'library' enough, though the exhibition, computer projects, activities, literature/leaflet displays and successful outcomes have assuaged doubt.
- Presence of cables/pipes; lack of documentation recording cables/pipes. Council departments can CAT scan the areas.

8. Lessons Learned

- When organising a date, make a second as a plan B, so if the first one is cancelled due to weather, it saves a few headaches!
- Children aged 7-13 are the easiest ages to work with. Split children into groups of between 3 and 6. Allocate a task/activity to each group and work on a rotational basis. Work with small groups for younger children.

9. Feedback

- Tŷ Meirion Special Needs Unit – “Diolch o galon i ti am wythnos diwethaf. Roedd y profiad a gafodd pob un o'n disgyblion yn arbennig. Pawb wedi mwynhau a chydweithio yn dda mewn awyrgylch braf, diogel a chyfeillgar. Mae'r profiad wedi ehangu eu gwybodaeth am bwysigrwydd amgylchedd creaduriaid bach yr ardd ar gloynod byw.”
- 1st Gwersyllt Scouts – “Thank you so much for inviting us! They all really enjoyed it, learnt something and helped their own community!”
- 1st Johnstown Beavers group – “The beavers from 1st Johnstown scout group thoroughly enjoyed the experience they got from helping Claudia Howard planting at Rhos library. They are looking forward to watching the garden plants grow and mature. Thank you again Claudia for inviting us to help you.”
- Dolgellau library manager – “Roedd hi'n bleser o gael bod yn rhan o'r prosiect yma, a braf oedd gweld cyn gymaint o blant a phobl ifanc oedd wedi cymeryd rhan. Hoffwn ddiolch yn arbennig i staff y llyfrgell, am eu gwaith caled o gynnal y gweithgareddau crefft. Hoffwn hefyd ddiolch i Claudia Howard, Gethin, Ysgol Llanfachreth a Thy Merion am wneud y diwrnod yn gymaint o lwyddiant.”
- Gwynedd Council's Cabinet Member for Customer Care, Councillor Ioan Thomas – “I am delighted that Gwynedd Council libraries are involved in this project. It is an

excellent example of partnership working and great to see children getting involved to improve the local environment.”

10. Publicity

- Welshlibraries.org.
- Press releases
 - Holyhead and Bangor and Anglesey Mail;
 - http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/council/news/buzzing_13.htm
 - http://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/gwy_doc.asp?doc=30049&Language=1&p=1&c=1
- Other websites also picked up the story
 - <http://www.wrexham.com/news/wrexhams-libraries-experience-wildlife-transformation-33046.html>
 - <http://www.minutemanpress.co.uk/news/wrexham/wrexham-libraries-hold-planting-session-8040.html>
- Project manager invited to speak on Calon FM.
- NWLP Support Officer delivered a presentation on collaboration at the CILIP Cymru conference in 2013, which addressed the Planting for Pollinators project.
- Further press release commending the YJS due during Conwy’s environment week.

11. Successful Outcomes

- 107 children helped to plant. 30 adults participated on the planting days, though this number will have increased as a result of YJS’s ongoing maintenance (see below).
- Conwy and Denbighshire Youth and Justice Service continue to maintain library grounds in both Conwy libraries, allowing them to bring their clients, a hard to reach group, into libraries on a regular basis. YJS leaders consider their clients putting something back into their local communities and seeing the fruits of their labour as an important aspect of their work. It is common for local people to thank YJS for their work, which, in turn, has a positive impact on YJS clients.
- Tidy Towns Conwy have funded more planters for Conwy libraries.
- Wrexham libraries and Wrexham Parks and Estates will be working more closely together in future, and are considering adapting more library grounds for wildlife.
- Newport Library is taking the project forwards with Friends of the Earth Bee Worlds project.
- Following the project, Snowdonia National Park Authority staff have built further relationships with Tŷ Meirion, Ysgol y Gader’s Special Needs Unit. The pupils now visit the library and participate in nature rambles and activities with National Park staff.
- NWLP mentioned in Welsh Government policy document and project manager asked to feed into the national WG strategy ‘Action Plan for Pollinators’.
- Library staff members have reported seeing an increase in the number of butterflies and bees and the number of species.

12. Further Developments

- The project has generated significant interest from numerous organisations external to libraries. Future potential partners for carrying out similar projects include Groundwork

North Wales, COFNOD, Dŵr Cymru and the Black Environment Network. Further collaboration is being examined, in the hope that libraries can provide locations for the organisations to implement projects themselves. Each organisation, including libraries, would fulfil objectives relating to community engagement, collaboration, environment, sustainability etc., and there are cost savings benefits.

- Project funding is available from the WG Nature Fund and Dŵr Cymru can provide smaller sums for a project called 'RainScapes', which can reduce costs for libraries as well as provide habitat for pollinators. If Groundwork Wales implement 'Libraries, Rainscapes and Planting for Pollinators', objectives as outlined in section 2 will once again be fulfilled, as Groundwork works with volunteers to help them into work/gain qualifications/expertise. Therefore, future collaborations actively support wider agendas of helping people back to work and encourage more people into libraries (similar to the Youth and Justice Service now maintaining Penrhyn Bay and Penmaenmawr). It would also help Groundwork Wales secure funding, maintaining jobs and enabling the provision of volunteering opportunities to continue.
- Dŵr Cymru consider the project with libraries and Groundwork ideal. Dŵr Cymru can produce a pop-up exhibition of RainScapes in action. The exhibition focuses on STEM subjects, with hands on experiments of engineering and scientific elements. They would be very keen for libraries to host this and can also send Dŵr Cymru officers to some locations to demonstrate and explain the reasoning and benefits should libraries wish to invite schools in. It helps them to increase awareness of the project and helps them to meet education agendas, whilst attracting further audiences.
- There may also be a small sum for plants from other external organisations. The project would also meet objectives of 'Bee Worlds', a Friends of the Earth Wales project, for which seeds are available free of charge.