

Green Futures Project

Working together to shape a better future



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

www.cymru.gov.uk



Bron Afon - Community

Overview

Green Futures is a programme of engagement, consultation and education aimed at Bron Afon's staff, tenants, members and partners. The involvement of tenants, members and partners – and their feedback – was crucial to its success and shows that sustainable development is a process that is done with people (not to them).

Background

Bron Afon is a not-for-profit Community Mutual Housing organisation - a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) (registered with the Financial Services Authority as an Industrial and Provident Society with charitable objects). It was founded to manage the social housing estate of the unitary authority, Torfaen County Borough Council, when tenants voted for a transfer to a new landlord on the 31st March 2008.

Membership of Bron Afon is free and open to all tenants, leaseholders and homeowners living in Torfaen. The membership is now around 1,800 people who are able to influence the way the organisation delivers its objectives.

Results

Identify outcomes that increase the wellbeing of Wales

Evidence

Make decisions using better information

Collaboration

Work with others across boundaries

Long term

Fix the causes rather than the symptoms

Connect

Focus on the economic, social and environmental benefits

Transparency

Measure and report on the difference you make

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

The organisation manages around 30,000 pieces of land of various sizes equating to 763,000 square meters.

Why

The Welsh Government's 'Welsh Housing Quality Standard' required all social landlords to improve and maintain their homes to a set minimum condition, ensuring they are safe and attractive (this refers to the building itself and the locality its built in).

The Green Futures programme was intended to be a precursor to the development of environmental management, sustainability and open space strategies that would integrate people, housing and open green spaces.

The aim was to develop key principles for how Bron Afon dealt with their open spaces and the facilities management service. This was done by involving a wide range of stakeholders. The work took place in the context of global issues, such as climate change, population rise and the growing scarcity of natural resources. As well as addressing these environmental issues, the approach has delivered important social and economic benefits.

“We manage a massive land portfolio but up until now have just been cutting the grass - spending the money on maintaining without visible gain for our communities. We wanted to explore how these spaces could evolve, improve and deliver better long-term outcomes.”

Barbara Castle, Director of Community Involvement and Investment

What they did

The idea evolved within the Community Involvement Team and was led by Director of Community Involvement and Investment, Barbara Castle, and Environmental Manager, Simon Morgan.

The Green Futures concept was approved by the Membership Committee and Board as well as the staff and management team. Next, a programme was developed that would enable a broad range of people with a vested interest in Bron Afon to be part of long-term planning and decision-making about the use of land and space.

In 2009 an eleven-month programme of talks, training sessions, seminars and workshops for tenants and staff was designed, covering a wide range of issues, from climate change to encouraging healthy growing of food, to how young people are dealt with unjustly in their use of open spaces.

The programme was designed in collaboration with partners including: Science Shops Wales, Sustainable Wales, Cardiff University, Torfaen County Council, Cynnal Cymru, Valleys Kids, Federation of City Farm & Community Gardens, Keep Wales Tidy, Centre for Regeneration Excellence in Wales and The Design Commission for Wales – all of whom contributed support in kind.

In 2010 the programme was accredited by Agored Cymru, under the UK's Qualifications and Credit Framework and implemented.

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

Each session enabled participants to share ideas through facilitated group discussions and themed debates. These ideas helped to develop the future strategy – as well as improving future engagement sessions.

The £6,000 budget was small relative to the scope of the project and had to be spent within a single tax year so it was vital to make decisions with the support of the intended beneficiaries and partners. The sessions enabled people to share their views.

A task and finish group used the feedback from the programme to establish principles that would guide the development and implementation of strategy at a corporate level.

What obstacles existed

Programme accreditation took a while but the lead partners, WEA and Agored Cymru, had considerable experience and resources as well as a strong partnership.

The sessions were well attended but it was necessary to arrange transport for people who had mobility challenges or who did not own a car.

Some resistance was encountered when new ideas were implemented. For example, the reduction in frequency of grass cutting to boost biodiversity caused concern because it was not the norm and, because wild flower areas took time to grow, people did not see instant results when mowing stopped.

A lack of money can be a barrier to implementing new ideas but in this case this was partly overcome by working in partnership to achieve shared goals.

What changed

Through the Programme, tenants clear they wanted stewardship not costly infrastructure – the Grounds, Facilities and Estates Team now work in collaboration

with tenants to improve environmental management. Open space management is now one of the key performance indicators for several teams.

“Green Futures has expanded the horizons of tenants and members. From this, new ideas have come.”

Simon Morgan, Environmental Manager

- 96 participants (from the board, local partner bodies, schools, youth club, youth forum, the local authority and national agencies) attended the Programme.
- 45 received accreditation certificates from the Open College Network (Agored Cymru).
- 24 speakers from national and local organisations took part in the presentations and discussions.

The Green Futures Programme led to the development of principles, which now determine how Bron Afon approaches a range of issues: Management of open spaces, contract and procurement of services, management of facilities and construction of new buildings.

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

This new approach has brought a number of benefits:

- Torfaen Council could not collect recycling from flats before but, after Green Futures, Bron Afon has established a mechanism for collecting recyclable material. The use of 'green' bin stores trialled in the St Dials area, saw a 75% decrease in fly tipping between February and June 2010.
- A land audit helped identify how open areas should be best managed. The Board approved the release of land for tenants to manage with Bron Afon's support. As a result, there are 14 community growing groups in the Borough and the facilities management team are trialling three biodiversity areas.
- 10,200m² of wild grass has been created or enhanced, encouraging bees and other wildlife.
- The volunteering programme has adopted six retirement scheme gardens and volunteers are working with older residents to plant and grow food, as well as running their own allotment project.
- A cleaning service was set up for day-to-day block cleaning using 100% natural cleaning products based on essential oils.

Bron Afon now has 17 community teams to address people's concerns through practical action. One of the most engaged groups is Bron Afon's youth forum, now part of a programme to design and build low-cost sustainable housing for young people.

There is also a community caretaking service, which supported fifty skip amnesties in 2011, diverting clothes, bikes and furniture from the waste stream by donating them to charity or furniture recycling partners.

What they learned

Working with statutory organisations and those with a specialist national or regional perspective ensured that decisions were based on sound evidence and knowledge.

Involving tenants, members, staff and local partners ensured that decisions didn't just have local support but that the support was well informed too. The messages of environmental stewardship resonated most with the oldest and youngest. As a result these very different generations have worked on projects together such as the Belle Vue garden.

Because there is always a natural turn over of staff, it will be necessary to repeat programmes like Green Futures but the original programme has resulted in changes to the organisation's long term policies.

Contact and Links

Simon Morgan - Environmental Manager

Simon.Morgan@Bronafon.org.uk

Barbara Castle - Director of Community Involvement and Investment

Barbara.Castle@Bronafon.org.uk

Bron Afon

"Don't expect linear outcomes. Accept that outcomes will be dispersed and unpredictable in a web-like way."

Barbara Castle

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>