# Report
# NRW Area Trials Action Learning Event
# Abergavenny 22 October 2014

*This report was compiled by Rowena Harris, the independent facilitator, from notes made by volunteers on the day.*

**Aims for the day**

- To capture learning points from the work of the trials to date
- To reflect on the experiences of the trial leads to date
- To focus on three challenges (one posed by each of the trial leads) and to explore ways forward
- To help each lead develop a focussed action for the next steps of the trials
- To help inform the Programme Review – in relation to supporting the implementation of the trials

**Summary of key learning points**

- There are still different perceptions of what the trials are about. The fact that each trial is approaching different issues is a strength, but we need to better communicate the overall purpose.
- The Trials are an opportunity to be innovative and take risks: freedom is frightening but that's OK! It's OK to fail.
- We don't need to know the answers to everything: identifying gaps is a good result.
- National policy direction needs to bring clarity and context for local decisions. Policy represents the views of stakeholders that aren't there (democratic political system)
- We should focus on the big issues: the differences between the 3 trials confirm that this is the right approach. There has been a lot achieved already.
- Great value from having interaction between a cross section of people in the room at this learning event from WG and NRW, particularly because people are working at different scales. A range of learning from different angles. The mists are clearing and it is more obvious how teams role needs to change.
- Outward facing staff need to be 'on message' and we need to be clear about our message.

**Introductions round**

People were invited to choose a picture which expressed where they are on the Area Trials 'journey. Everyone was asked to briefly explain their choice. Below is a selection of the comments made:

'*I chose the picture of rope: it's strength lies in getting the fibres lined up - avoid the knots'*

*'We're on a journey and the direction can be changed by others and unforeseen circumstances.'*
*'Next Spring will be the important time for the learning to be gathered'*
*'A leap into the unknown.'*
*'A bird's eye view is important to take a strategic approach.'*
*'We have the tools to open the window to a better way of working.'*
*'We are building something new and it's all about people.'*
*'There are opportunities to build bridges between functions and organisations.'*

**Leads of each Area Trial gave an update of progress and learning to date.**
Dyfi –Patrick Green, Rhondda – Christian Servini, Tawe - Jerry Griffiths

**Key discussion points during the morning:**

KEY POINT- Communications – why are we doing the trials? Keen that we develop a consistent message between NRW and WG – this is a new approach – it's about doing things differently – we need to create a buzz and a brand around this. It's never been about bridging a funding gap or shortfall but providing seed funding. We have a licence to fail – it's a trial.

Resilience is a key issue and common across all three trials. Looking at the longevity of some of the projects funded through transition fund – we need to be clear that we're maximising chances of long-term sustainability by working through existing partnerships and not parachuting in.

GIS very helpful but needs expert resource. We need to assess a range of tools during these trials.

WG estate provides the setting for much of the work in the Rhondda but we need to bear in mind the national policy position – this is a productive forest. If timber is a key opportunity to support the rural economy then how does this strategy come together with other activities and engagement at the local level? Rhondda project is facilitating grazing opportunities between graziers and local authority land – this enables and supports the local economy as well as wider community and biodiversity benefits.

Trial Leads act as key knowledge transfer links / providers. Having good evidence is all very well but having local knowledge and interpretation of that evidence is vital.

Each trial has had stakeholder meetings and workshops but there are limitations to those workshop formats – you can't have experts from all parts of the business on all tables (*note from facilitator: there are ways of designing workshops that overcome these problems!). F*ocus group meetings are being used in Tawe and this is helpful in concentrating on a particular theme or issue. NRW isn't always the right organisation to be convening meetings - we wear many hats and are stakeholders as well. e.g. difficult to engage with industries we regulate. External governance - could we involve external partners to take the lead sometimes?

Talking around a place – that place needs to be small and recognisable (Tawe catchment too big or very difficult for some issue based working). The bigger the area the harder the challenge to gain consensus and buy in. Beware also of stakeholder fatigue.

What does success look like? Issues led plans may miss ecosystems services opportunities?

A glossary of common terms and acronyms would be useful.

Internal challenges:

- With respect to having the processes needed to spend money – we make it very difficult for ourselves to spend money.

- need for training for people to become NRW advisors/plan coordinators?

- internal communication and engagement is changing and will lead to different ways of working – need to be able to recognise the elements of that change – bottle it, and do more of it.

- do we have significant skills and resources to both facilitate engagement and influence others at a strategic level?

We do have skills – there are plenty of people that get this – need to give those people the opportunity to do it. It more a question of priority and pace. In January we'll be creating 20 area teams – let's give them this remit.

**Action Learning Sessions**

Each Area Lead presented a 'challenge' to a small group. Each Lead summarised their learning and their next step and volunteers made notes of the group discussions as follows:

**1. *"How do we maximise the ecosystem services from the NRW estate in the Rhondda".***
**Lead: Christian Servini,**

Christian's next steps are to

- meet with Michelle & Bill Macdonald, Dai Harris (WG: Carmarthen) to discuss economics & evidence base (SoNaRR)
- find out more and understand role & vision of in context of Rhondda strategy

The following questions from the group seemed to be most useful.

- what is the long term vision?
- where does this fit with the national picture?
- put simply do we just want to do more on our estate?
- what is the impact of taking Rhondda woodland on rural economy?

Useful advice:

- it's not just forestry versus no forestry, it could be better management of WGWE
- we need to look at the science, the economics, the environmental impacts

**Notes of the group discussion**

We discussed the challenge and thought it would be better rephrased as "How do we *realise and understand* the ecosystem service *potential* from the NRW estate in the Rhondda".

- What do we mean by Ecosystem service potential? Is this the economics, sustainability, worth to the local people?

- Consider the Wales wide perspective - 60% of Welsh timber is used in Wales. 44% of the NRW estate is economically productive forestry, therefore this would indicate that there is a significant proportion of land which is not managed properly.

- Essential to understanding the potential in ecosystem services is to have a clear idea of the cost benefit of this land use to give more information to decide the best options for the land.

- As part of the trial NRW are looking for innovative ways of better managing the land, to demonstrate best practice. It also is essential to be able to demonstrate that we have looked at our own land management and weighed

up the benefits for different options to identify the most appropriate option. We need to get our own house in order.

- What do you mean by NRW estate? This is all land owned and managed by NRW, including; flood defence assets, ex CCW nature reserves and forestry land. Whilst we should demonstrate on all NRW land what can be done, the forestry estate potential offers the most opportunities due to the large amount of land. 40% of the Rhondda is NRW forestry estate.

- In order to understand the benefits and opportunities for Ecosystem Services the land should be mapped and opportunities will become apparent from overlapping different data.

- Recommendation - Use National Ecosystem Approach (NEA) – The Integrated Model (TIM) - this could give information about different land use benefits identified on a Wales wide scale.

- What is the best use of the NRW estate, is it over all most beneficial to leave as Forestry or is there a more locally and on a national level use for the land?

- The National context of Forestry needs to be considered in addition to the local benefits and plan. The forestry resource in the Rhondda inputs into the Wales model and therefore any changes will need to be considered on a Wales scale. There also needs to be a balance between the National Wales policy and the local stakeholder engagement. There may be occasional "trade-offs" but this needs to be evidence based.

- At present the extent of the forestry in the Rhondda isn't always appropriate, there are areas which are not productive forestry land or the forest has not been managed. This is often due to difficulty accessing the land or anti-social behaviour. Therefore is it appropriate to plant forestry there if it cannot be harvested?

- When assessing the potential benefits for ecosystem services we need to understand the wider issues and then prioritise changes based upon the merits. This all comes down to money.

- Action to have a meeting between the Rhondda Trial and the National Wales Forestry Policy.

**2. *How much can we tell stakeholders about how the area statement will be delivered?***

**Patrick Green, Dyfi**

Next steps as a result of today's session?

- stakeholders to suggest solutions not just present problems
- communications and optioneering pioneer new ways of delivery

- recommendations at the end of gaps for delivery

Most useful question? Why we need to provide all the answers. We might not be best placed.

Useful advice: not to try to think of all the solutions - this is about managing 'our' natural resources

**Notes made of the group discussion**

People have been asking: “this is all very ambitious but how is it going to be delivered?”

*What has Patrick been saying to people so far?*

It will be partly delivered through existing mechanisms – may need some new ones, or may need alternative approaches. Definitely need more collaboration.

*What would your preferred approach be?*

Not sure a whole new action plan is the right answer – but existing mechanisms certainly need to evolve.

*Have stakeholders expressed a view?*

Yes – that the existing system needs tweaking and changing

*Is uneasiness around providing clarity for stakeholders constraining the trial?*

Not really, but the main issue there is ensuring integrity, credibility and trust when NRW are speaking to people.

*Are stakeholders clear about the role of area statements?*

Possibly not – they know it’s about thinking about issues in a more integrated ways, but it’s more a question of how ambitious do you want to be?

*What would help Patrick in terms of communications to stakeholders about the role of the area statements or the trials?*

Not much – although there is a fear that we are giving a message about new ways of working but then not following through. We need to be clear about the end game – what success looks like.

*Have stakeholders been asked that question?*

Yes and it’s a challenge / balance to manage expectations.

*Are gaps in delivery mechanisms being identified?*

Yes – and we acknowledge that this is ok – essential to our learning. How could we best present these back to stakeholders and Welsh Government. What about failures of existing mechanisms?

*Is there much scepticism / negativity amongst stakeholders?*

Some, but more are generally positive about the opportunities – but people do think it is a big ask.

*Would more evidence help?*

Possibly, but mainly in the form of case studies / business models that work or have worked elsewhere – nobody is going to take a leap of faith.

*Is it landowners that are the root of the question, and do we need to bring a mixture of people together?*

**3. *How do we achieve consensus on a large scale?***

**Jerry Griffiths, Tawe**

Next steps as a result of today's session:

- different groups to convene with different themes based on ecosystem services or pressures or opportunities: combine the outputs/visions form these groups
- building small scale visions on different scales to build up into a bigger picture

Useful question: Does it need to be one vision or lots of visions (tied together by a narrative)?

Useful advice

- it's perfectly acceptable if area statements come up with contradictions or problems that we can't solve
- freedom is frightening but that's OK
- Societal choice works in a developing world: perhaps NRW are the voice of societal choice through WG and the democratic process?
- we should see societal choice as something that's beneficial to the process, not a necessity
- a pear works as an analogy for a catchment
- the trials are 'trials'! - we can make them what we want and what we see works for the place
- some things will work and some won't and that's fine - nobody knows what they look like!

**Notes from the group discussion**

Using a pear as an analogy for a catchment, Jerry Griffiths posed the question about consensus on a catchment wide scale. The surface of the pear represented the catchment and the label a feature e.g. a lake of local interest to some parties within the catchment. He asked how to go about achieving a catchment scale consensus for a part of the catchment that was of interest to some, but not to others within the catchment. Must everyone in the catchment agree with all decisions/actions/plans within it?

The questions opened with – Why do you feel you need large scale consensus?

Following the ecosystem approach the principles such as stakeholder engagement and delegation of decisions to the lowest level place boundaries on the way we work. Groups of people tend to get involved and voice opinions over small areas such as Kilvey Hill, however workshops at a whole catchment level have been less productive. Trying to find a manageable scale as conflicting views come into play at a large scale.

Can you scale up and then down? No. Community buy in and the bottom up approach, is it a problem or an opportunity? Maybe consensus at a catchment scale isn't achievable.

The end point is an Area Statement and it can show where there is consensus and where there are different views. WG and NRW are the accountable decision makers.

Liz Felton produced a flow chart to show the path that the action learning session took. For technical reasons it is provided as a separate PDF.

**Feedback on the Event**

Everyone completed a feedback form which also asked them to say what they might do differently as a result of learning gained from the event. Most people said they had valued the session, wanted more time for informal networking over lunch and would like to attend a similar event in the New Year. A full type up of the forms is available as a separate document.

**Attendees**

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|---|---|
| Rowena Harris | Dialogue By Design Independent Facilitator |
| Russell De' ath | NRW |
| Steve Spode | WG |
| Emily Finney, | WG |
| Dai Harris | WG |
| Nicola Thomas, | WG |
| Moira Reynolds, | NRW |
| Bill Purvis, | NRW |
| Andy Robinson, | NRW |
| Daron Herbert, | NRW |
| Jerry Griffiths, | NRW (TAWE lead) |

Christian Servini, NRW (RHONDDA Lead)
Patrick Green, NRW (DYFI Lead)
Michelle Van-Velzen, NRW
Alun Davies, NRW
Ged Davies, NRW
Heilyn Williams, NRW
Russell Elliott, NRW
Jennifer Dack, NRW
Liz Felton, NRW
Becky Davies NRW (Scribe)