Coed Lleol/Small Woods Stakeholder Consultation Report 2024

Exploring Personal, Community and Environmental Wellbeing

Prepared by: Helen Hedworth and Amy Lewis

Date: 18th November 2024

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Table of Tables

1. Introduction

1.1.   About Coed Lleol/Small Woods

Coed Lleol/Small Woods was established as Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) in 2002, the Welsh branch of the Small Woods Association, an organisation supporting woodland practitioners in sustainable woodland management since 1988 (originally as National Small Woods Association). In 2010, Coed Lleol/Small Woods launched a successful woodland health and wellbeing programme, known as Actif Woods Wales. The programme ran for a decade and established the charity's expertise in social forestry, connecting people with their local woodlands and natural spaces, whilst promoting healthy and sustainably managed woodlands. Since that time, Coed Lleol/Small Woods has expanded to deliver woodland wellbeing sessions in most counties of Wales. At time of writing, Coed Lleol/Small Woods is working on the Isle of Anglesey, and in Conwy, Pembrokeshire, Powys, Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Blaenau Gwent and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Small Woods also delivers social forestry work over the border, in Shropshire.

The woodland wellbeing programmes predominantly engage adults and children who live in areas with high health needs, low employment rates and poor access to services. Additionally, it encourages and supports social prescribing by working in partnership with health services and general practice surgeries, which refer people to programmes. Coed Lleol/Small Woods has actively professionalised and promoted social prescribing to outdoor health activities through the development of outdoor health clusters in four areas in Wales: the Dyfi Valley; Pembrokeshire; Gwynedd; and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Coed Lleol/Small Woods also has an established and well-respected training programme for staff, leaders, providers and health professionals to up-skill and embed wellbeing in nature into their everyday practice.

Coed Lleol/Small Woods aims to protect and develop woodlands for current and future generations by encouraging the use of woodland resources for the long-term health and wellbeing of people and the environment – creating healthy woodlands and healthy people.

1.2.   About consultation

Since its inception, Coed Lleol/Small Woods has relied on core grant funding for staffing and delivery costs, to run its programmes. Coed Lleol/Small Woods has successfully received and increased its funding for over 10 years, enabling the growth and expansion of its programmes across Wales.

Stakeholder consultations are key to Coed Lleol/Small Woods's development strategy. The organisation undertakes an annual consultation exercise that focuses on key issues and exploration points to help us understand our stakeholders and impacts of our work better and guide us in future research and areas of development.

2. Methodology

The 2024 consultation involved a series of live events across Wales, between May and September, attended by stakeholders that included professionals working in social, healthcare or environmental roles, and Coed Lleol/Small Woods's volunteers and participants. At the events, participants were invited to give their thoughts on three categories of wellbeing. Each category used a standardised set of questions to allow analysis of responses across all events. Information was also collected during small group discussions.

In September, an online survey went live to collect the thoughts of those unable to attend events and those who preferred to complete the survey in this manner. Online respondents included those known to Coed Lleol/Small Woods and those who had not previously engaged with the organisation.

Responses were collected anonymously, to promote openness and honesty. Respondents were offered the survey questions in Welsh and English and could respond in either language. Any Welsh responses quoted in this report have been given in their original form, with a translation into English.

2.1.   Standardised questions

A standardised set of eight questions was used across all events and in the online survey. Questions fell into three categories: personal wellbeing; community wellbeing; and environmental wellbeing. Categories were chosen to gain a better understanding of the meaning of 'wellbeing' to stakeholders at the individual level, expanding to consider those living around them and the area in which they live.

In the category of *personal wellbeing*, consultees were asked:

1. What does wellbeing mean to you?
2. What negatively affects your wellbeing?
3. What positively affects your wellbeing?

In considering *community wellbeing*, consultees were asked:

4. What do you think are your community's challenges around health and wellbeing?
5. What is good about your community, e.g. organisations, nature sites, buildings, activities, skills of local people?
6. What could Coed Lleol/Small Woods be doing to support your community?

To clarify what they meant by 'community', in terms of location or another identifier, stakeholders were also asked *where* or *what* they considered their community to be. We felt this was important to understand more precisely any needs arising from the exercise.

To explore the broader theme of *environmental wellbeing*, consultees were asked:

7. What issues concern you about nature and your local environment?

8. What would you like to see happen in your community that could improve nature and the local (and global) environment?

2.2. Events

Events were held in some of the areas in which Coed Lleol/Small Woods has been working during 2024: Ynys Môn/Isle of Anglesey; Abertawe/Swansea; Sir Benfro/Pembrokeshire; Sir Gaerfyrddin/Carmarthenshire; and Blaenau Gwent. A description of each day is given, by region, below.

2.2.1. Ynys Môn | Isle of Anglesey

The first consultation event was held on the Isle of Anglesey on 31st May, at Heulfre Gardens/Coed Franco in Llangoed. It ran from 10.30am to 2.45pm. The event was an extension of a regular Friday group meeting and therefore brought together participants and other interested parties, including healthcare/social prescribing professionals. The day began with a welcome and then the first activities were a *green gym*, a fitness session in the woods, and orienteering. After a tea and coffee break, the consultation activity was carried out and attendees wrote out their answers to the three categories of questions on slips of paper. The next activity was a scavenger hunt, followed by a presentation from the Coed Lleol/Small Woods Communications Project Officer. Attendees then enjoyed a lunch around the fire. The final two activities were making a wooden whistle and printing with plant dyes.

A second stakeholder event then took place on the island, as part of the Wild Health event in Breakwater Park on 18th July. This built on the success of the same event run in the previous year, which marked the end of the Outdoor Health project (and was delivered in Treborth Botanical Gardens, Bangor). There were stalls set out by a number of different organisations, offering activities and information-sharing. Those attending the Wild Health event were invited to complete the online survey and were given a QR code to access it.

2.2.2. Abertawe | Swansea

The Swansea consultation event was held on 25th June at the training centre at Penllergare Woods, from 10am till 4pm. Attendees included professionals working in health and social care, volunteers, participants and some passing individuals previously unknown to the organisation. Given the layout of the venue, attendees moved in a single direction from the top to the bottom of the site, entering the training centre, moving out to the garden patio, taking a path down to the fire pit and finally to the woods. Consultation therefore happened at three different stations, one for each category of questions, to disperse it among the other activities of the day. After being welcomed with a drink and conversation, they answered the questions on personal wellbeing. They then moved to the patio, where they could grind rocks to make pigments and paint with these pigments. The second consultation station then followed for questions on community wellbeing. Attendees then made their way down towards the woods, where they could sit around the fire and do another activity: pen-making. The third consultation station was based in this location, on environmental wellbeing. The fourth activity was held further into the woods. A member of staff was positioned at each station and could help with scribing responses.

2.2.3. Sir Benfro | Pembrokeshire

The Pembrokeshire consultation event was held on 8th July at Kilgetty Village Hall, from 10am to 2pm. Attendees were welcomed with a hot drink, biscuits and fruit. A presentation was given with information about the background of the organisation and what was being delivered by the new team in Pembrokeshire this year. Data collection and the approach to monitoring and evaluation was outlined and the significance of the work in social prescribing was discussed by various people in the room. After the presentation, a choice of two activities was offered to attendees: a foraging walk; and a green-woodworking workshop. After this, lunch was provided and attendees were asked to give their responses to the consultation questions in each category on slips of paper, as the final activity.

2.2.4. Sir Gaerfyrddin | Carmarthenshire

The Carmarthenshire consultation event was held on 11th July at the University of Trinity Saint David's Cynefin site, just outside of Carmarthen. It ran from 10am to 3pm. There was a reception room in the centre, where a film of Coed Lleol/Small Woods's work with participants was playing. There were flyers and other information leaflets in here. A member of staff was present to welcome arrivals. A track outside the centre led up to a clearing, surrounded by woodland, where a yurt and fire pit could be found. This was the location of the day's activities. Activities on offer included cordage, weaving and fire-lighting, and lunch was warmed on the fire. Attendees were invited to respond to the consultation questions across the day, between the activities.

2.2.5. Blaenau Gwent

The Blaenau Gwent consultation event was the final one of the year, held on 17th September at Bedwellty House and Park in Tredegar. It ran from 11am to 3pm. As the newest of Coed Lleol/Small Woods's area teams, after the welcome and drinks, a presentation was delivered by the Social Forestry and Wellbeing Manager, giving a history of the organisation and its achievements and aspirations. A local activity leader then presented to the group about his work, introducing some of the tools used in green woodworking. After a break, attendees were split into three groups and each sat at one of three stations, in a 'world café' setup. Each station focused on one of the wellbeing categories: personal wellbeing; community wellbeing; or environmental wellbeing. Attendees were asked to give their individual thoughts on slips of paper first and small group discussion followed, with scribing of the key ideas by a staff member. The group then moved to the next table. After the world café exercise, lunch was brought out, and the afternoon was reserved for activities. Two activities, green woodworking of bench legs and building a survival basket, were delivered by two leaders. The group was split into two and then rotated at the half-time point. This was the final part of the day.

2.3.   Online survey

An online survey was created and opened to public responses for a period of nineteen days at the end of September. Those invited to complete the survey were people living or working in Wales or the English county of Shropshire (the areas in which Coed Lleol/Small Woods operates its social forestry programmes). The form could be completed

anonymously but, as an incentive for sharing information, responders could opt to leave their email address and be entered into a prize draw. The online survey contained the same questions as the paper surveys, however additional demographic data were collected. These included, gender, age, ethnicity and whether that individual was new to Coed Lleol/Small Woods, as well as their county of residence, so that their responses could be correlated with those attending our events.

2.4. Analysis

As all questions were open questions, respondents were free to answer with as much detail as they wished. Consequently, there was some variation in the amount shared; there were a few null responses or one-word answers, but most people responded in a way that could be interpreted in the analysis.

The content of each response was used as the basis of the analysis. Topics were grouped into themes and the number of times each was mentioned was counted. For example, the category, *personal wellbeing*, had themes such as *happiness/contentment* and *relationship issues*, while the category, *community wellbeing*, had themes such as *isolation/loneliness* and *addition*. The environmental wellbeing category had more range, and themes were, therefore, subdivided. For example, the theme *litter, pollution and vandalism* contained sub-themes such as *plastic waste*, *dog waste* and *poor treatment of waterways*. Counts were then correlated with region and demographics, to identify trends.

3. Results

3.1.   Engagement

In total, 180 people were engaged by the consultation exercise: 97 through the online survey and 83 through in-person events. The highest number of responses came from the Isle of Anglesey (n=53, 29%) and Swansea (n=46, 26%). See Figure 1 for a map of all engagements from online and in-person events across Wales and border counties and Table 1 for a summary.

Figure 1   No. individuals (n=176) responding via in-person event or online survey, by county. Note, four respondents chose not to disclose their home county and cannot be shown on the map.

Table 1   Total individuals (n=180) responding via in-person event or online survey, by county.

County	Responses	County	Responses
Ynys Môn | Isle of Anglesey	53	Gwynedd	3
Abertawe | Swansea	46	Shropshire	2
Sir Gaerfyrddin | Carmarthenshire	30	Caerdydd | Cardiff	1
Blaenau Gwent	14	Herefordshire	1
Sir Benfro | Pembrokeshire	13	Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr | Bridgend	1
Ceredigion	4	Tor-faen |Torfaen	1
Castell-nedd Port Talbot | Neath Port Talbot	3	Sir y Fflint | Flintshire	1
Conwy	3	*Not disclosed*	4

From the online consultation questionnaire, 97 individuals stated that they had previously engaged with Coed Lleol/Small Woods. A total of 28 online respondents were new to Coed Lleol/Small Woods, while 32 respondents had previous experience of our programmes. Additionally, we had 33 professionals responding, and three volunteers. See Figure 2 for a breakdown of the online responses.

We also captured demographic data from the online questionnaire. Most responses came from females in the age category 45-54, while the largest category of male responders was aged 55-64 (Figure 3). In terms of ethnicity, 87% of online respondents identified as White, 5% preferred not to say, 4% as mixed or multiple ethnicities, 3% as Asian or Asian British and 1% as another ethnic group.
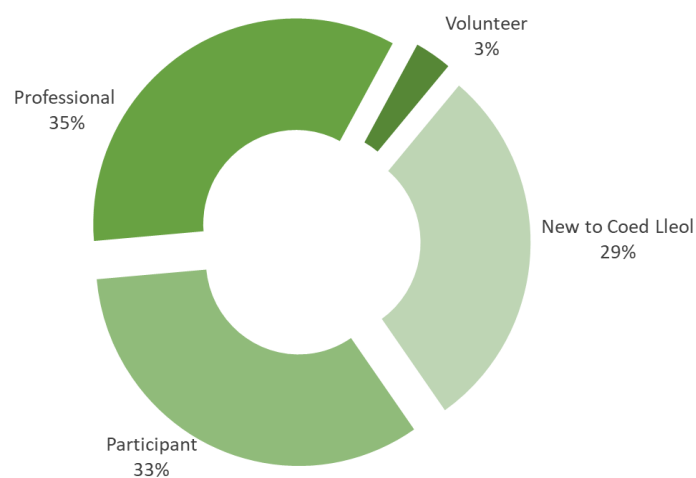

Figure 2   Results from the online survey showing percentage of responses from those previously engaged as well as 29% (n=28) of responses of people new to Coed Lleol.
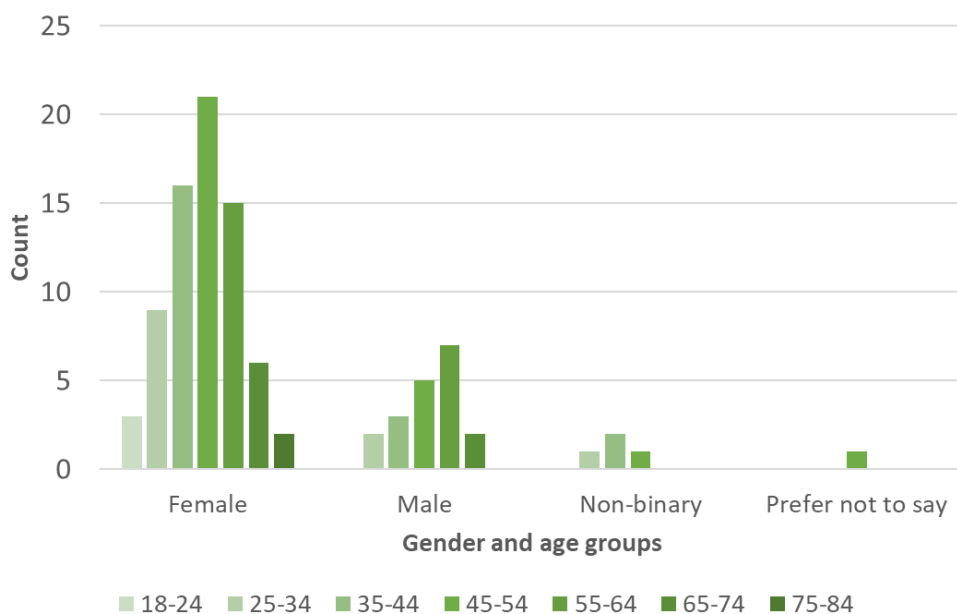
Figure 3   Demographic responses to the online survey.

3.2. Personal wellbeing

3.2.1. What does wellbeing mean to you?

The first question was intended to be open to interpretation. Some respondents gave a definition of wellbeing, while others gave examples of the things that ensure their wellbeing is high.

The responses to the question "What does wellbeing mean to you?" at the consultation event had some strong themes emerging. A total of 520 responses to this question were gathered, through group discussion, paper survey or online survey. Note that in some cases a single response generated multiple themes.

The most common theme was "happiness, contentment, and fulfilment", which received 110 mentions. Closely following this, "keeping well, staying healthy, and being physically able" was mentioned 86 times, which highlights the strong perceived link between people's physical and mental health. In 40 instances, these were mentioned at the same time, i.e. in a single person's response (see below for an example):

"A real sense of being OK in the world. Having mental, physical, and spiritual needs met."
[Respondent from Anglesey during an in-person event]

Mental health was also a key theme, with 62 responses within this theme, reflecting the importance of maintaining mental and emotional stability.

"Fit state of mind, ability to relax, enjoy surroundings"
[Respondent from Swansea during an in-person event]

Social factors played a significant role for our respondents with 31 responses emphasising social connection, underlining the value of relationships and community support in achieving wellbeing.

"Happiness, sense of purpose, good relationships"
[Respondent from Ceredigion, online]

In terms of nature and the environment, themes such as nature connection and spending time in green spaces received 18 and 12 mentions, respectively, indicating that time spent outdoors and feeling connected to nature are essential to some individuals' wellbeing. In Blaenau Gwent, the groups in the world café activity discussed how time spent in nature also needed to be technology-free.

"Finding happy places where there are no barriers (in nature, no phone, no people)"
[Blaenau Gwent group discussion]

3.2.2. What negatively affects your wellbeing?

The negative impacts on wellbeing identified by participants covered 25 themes. The main responses to these included stress (n=62), work-life balance issues (n=39), and relationship problems or unhealthy habits, such as addictions or poor health choices (n=29). Social isolation and health issues, including pain, were also significant concerns, each mentioned 24 times.

"Being alone for too long"
[Respondent from Carmarthenshire during an in-person event]

Other notable challenges included lifestyle pressures and time management (n=33), financial hardship (n=18), and anxiety (n=18). External factors like politics, climate change, and pollution as well as bad weather and lack of nature were mentioned less frequently but still contributed to wellbeing challenges for some.

"Nature depletion, biodiversity loss and stress of this. Lack of natural spaces to be in, financial insecurity, political instability, [injustice]"
[Respondent from Anglesey, online]

3.2.1. What positively affects your wellbeing?

Respondents identified 15 key themes that positively affected their wellbeing, with 'connecting with nature' emerging as the most frequently mentioned, by 117 respondents (Figure 4). This highlights the importance that time spent outdoors and in natural environments has for personal wellbeing. Additionally, social connection was an important theme, with 98 respondents mentioning this, underscoring the value of relationships and community in an individual's wellbeing. In over 60 cases these were mentioned in the same response:

"Nature, being outdoors, birdsong, laughter, good friends, proper hugs".
[Respondent from Swansea during an in-person event]

"Being outside, enjoying time with friends and family".
[Respondent from Conwy, online]
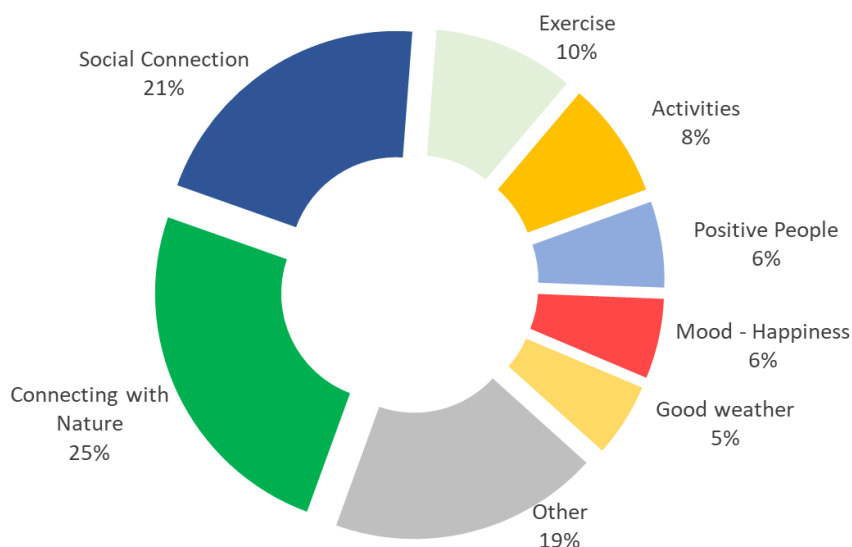
Figure 4   Responses falling into key themes emerging from the question "What positively affects your wellbeing?"

Nature connection was also the strongest theme even for those without any previous engagement with Coed Lleol/Small Woods, from the online survey. Over 50% of people (n=16) that were new to Coed Lleol/Small Woods mentioned nature connection as important to their wellbeing.

"Trees. Nature. Natural world. Laughter. Warmth. Tea and biscuits."
[Respondent from Cardiff, online; no previous engagements with Coed Lleol/Small Woods]

Regionally, we saw similar patterns to those across Wales and England; however, in Pembrokeshire over 91% of respondents mentioned social connection, which was significantly higher than all other regions. Additionally, while respondents in Swansea mentioned both social and nature connections as important, these respondents mentioned nature connection more frequently than those in other regions (69%). See Figure 5 and Table 2 for results from each region.
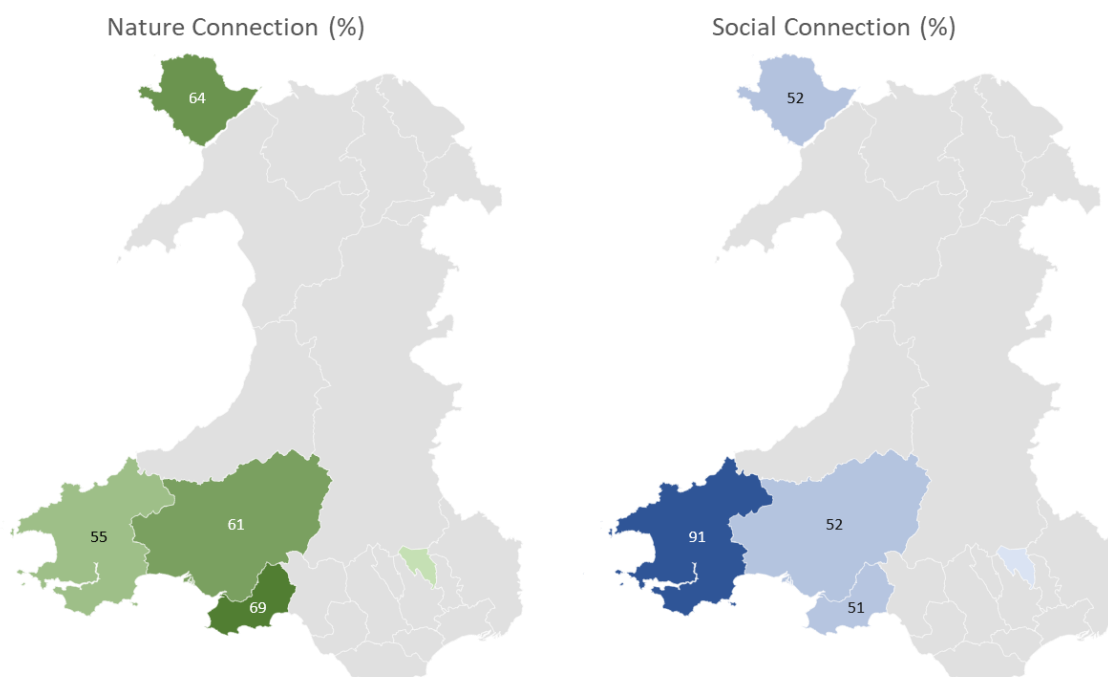
Figure 5   Regional differences between the two biggest themes in response to the question "What positively impacts your wellbeing?". These are % mentions in overall responses to the question, from in-person and online surveys.

Table 2   Summary of key theme responses to "What positively impacts your wellbeing?" for the five Welsh counties.

Location	Nature connection	Social connection
Abertawe | Swansea	69%	51%
Ynys Môn | Isle of Anglesey	64%	52%
Sir Gaerfyrddin | Carmarthenshire	61%	52%
Sir Benfro | Pembrokeshire	55%	91%
Blaenau Gwent	47%	40%

3.3.   Community wellbeing

3.3.1. What do you think are your community's challenges around health and wellbeing?

In discussing the challenges around health and wellbeing in the community, 19 themes emerged. Funding was highlighted most often by participants (n=51) as a significant barrier, reflecting the need for financial resources to support services and initiatives that promote health and wellbeing. Similarly, lack of activities or the continuity of activities was mentioned by 43 respondents, showing that inconsistency in the availability of programmes limits engagement. Access and awareness to resources was another key issue, with 44 respondents mentioning this, implying that many community members feel disconnected from or unaware of the services and support available to them. In seven cases, these were mentioned by respondents in a single statement.

"Lack of services due to funding. Lack of knowledge of services that are available."
[Respondent from Carmarthenshire during an in-person event]

Social challenges were also prominent, particularly isolation and loneliness (n=29) and the lack of support systems (n=23), mental health concerns (n=23) and physical health such as obesity (n=13; Figure 6). Broader issues such as poverty (n=18), cost of living and activity costs (n=18), public transport links (n=21) were also seen as contributing factors to reducing overall community wellbeing. Community-centred themes included community apathy (n=36), antisocial behaviour (n=9) and unemployment (n=4). These responses reflect the interconnected issues that affect both individual and community wellbeing.
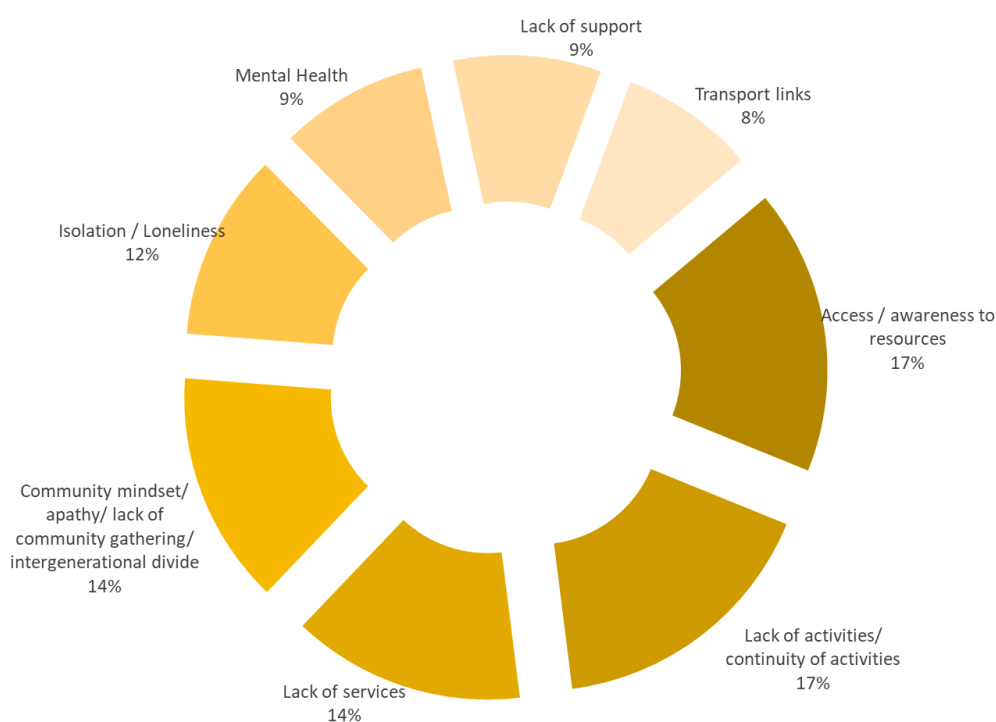
Figure 6   Key community challenges from responses across Wales and England. Over 19 themes were identified and the top eight themes have been illustrated.

3.3.1. What is good about your community?

In response to the question "What is good about your community?" participants highlighted six key strengths (see Figure 7 for an illustration of all themes). The proximity to nature spaces was mentioned most frequently by respondents (n=106, 33%). In addition, having a strong sense of community was a big theme (23%). In 40 cases, these were mentioned in the same response, again highlighting that social and nature connections came up in the individual's wellbeing.

"Community spirit, good local sites for outdoor recreation in nature."
[Respondent from Gwynedd, online]

The activities made available were highly valued (n=72), along with access to community areas like parks and local hubs (n=40). This underscores the importance of both community spaces and activities in fostering a strong sense of belonging and connection.
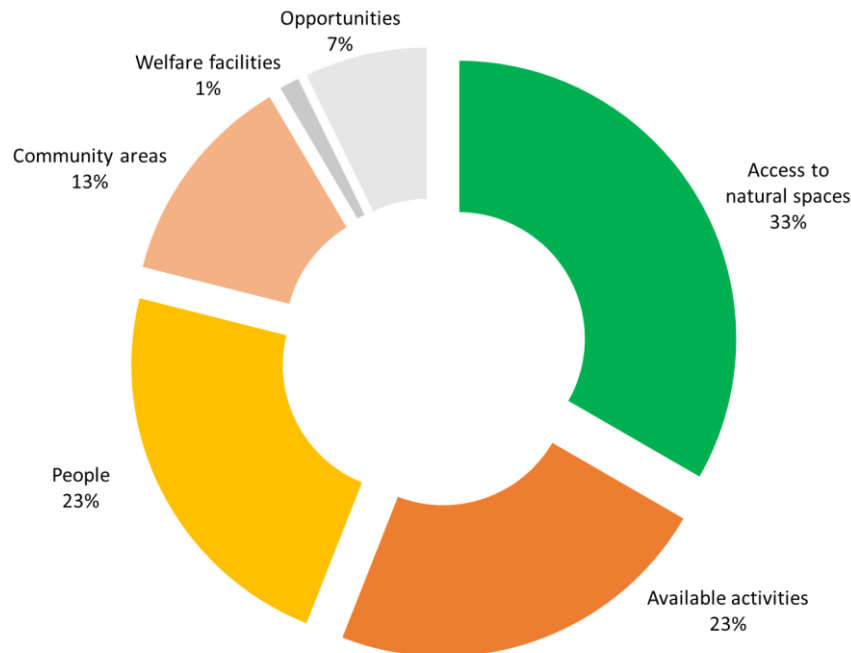
Figure 7   Key themes in response to the question What is good about your community?"

3.3.1. What could Coed Lleol/Small Woods be doing to support your community?

In response to the question "What could Coed Lleol/Small Woods be doing to support your community?", the most common suggestion was to increase the number of activities and events (n=87), reflecting a request for more opportunities for community engagement from Coed Lleol. This was in addition to positive feedback comments (n=32, 11%; Figure 8).

"Mwy o sessynau; mae 6 wythnos ddim yn digon hir!
(More sessions; 6 weeks is not long enough!)"
[Respondent from Swansea during an in-person event]
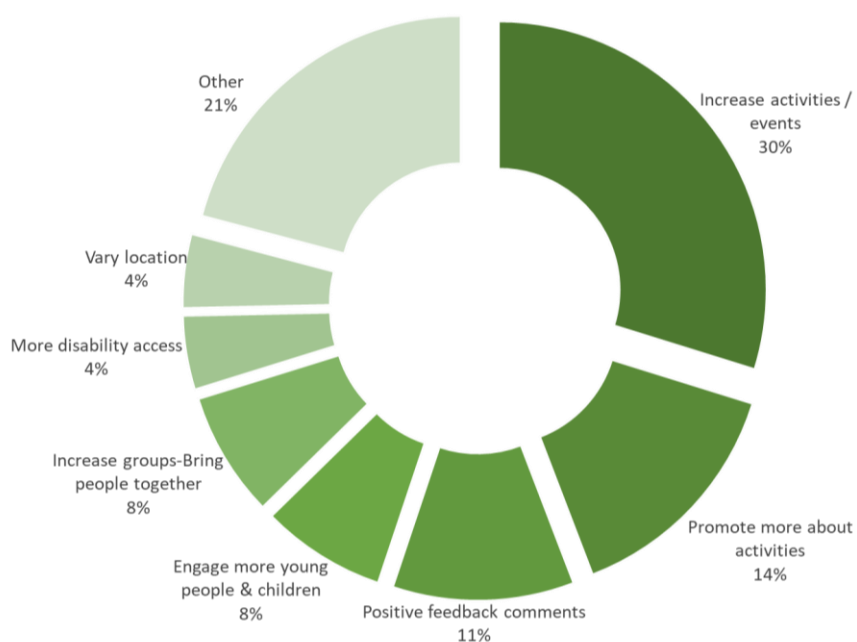
Figure 8   Responses to the question "What could Coed Lleol/Small Woods be doing to support your community?"

Another frequently mentioned need was to promote activities more effectively (n=42, 14%), indicating that improved promotion would enhance participation. Respondents also emphasised the need to engage more children and young people (n=22) and to increase the number of organised groups (n=22). There were also calls for improved disabled access (n=13) and a greater variety of locations and times for activities (n=13 and n=4 mentions, respectively), to accommodate diverse needs.

Other improvement suggestions included partnering with other organisations (n=11), offering more walks and education in the local area (n=12), and integrating woodland activities into schools (n=10). Lastly, there were smaller numbers of requests for transport services, bilingual activities, shelters, and maintaining a consistent local presence, rather than varying delivery locations.

Regionally, Pembrokeshire had the highest proportion of responses, with 26% of respondents suggesting increasing the number of activities offered (Figure 9). In Blaenau Gwent, there were not many mentions of improving promotion of activities, but 7% did still suggest increasing the number of activities in their community. See Figure 9 and Table 3 for summaries of all key regions.
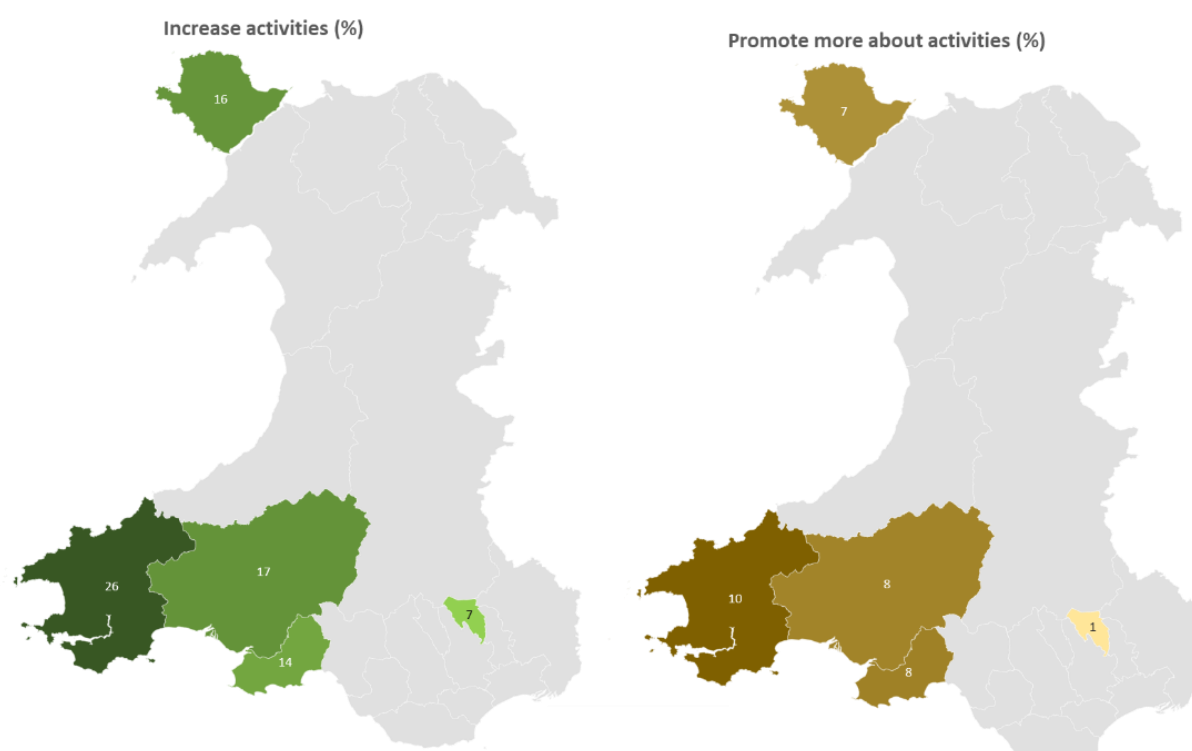
Figure 9   Regional differences between the two biggest themes in response to the question "What could Coed Lleol/Small Woods be doing to support your community?". These are % mentions in overall responses to the question. These responses come from in-person and online questionnaires in five key areas: Isle of Anglesey; Blaenau Gwent; Carmarthenshire; Pembrokeshire; Swansea.

Table 3   Summary of key themes in response to "What could Coed Lleol/Small Woods be doing to support your community?" in each of the five Welsh counties.

Location	More activities/ events (% of respondents)	More promotion (% of respondents)
Sir Benfro | Pembrokeshire	26	10
Sir Gaerfyrddin | Carmarthenshire	17	8
Ynys Môn | Isle of Anglesey	16	7
Abertawe | Swansea	14	8
Blaenau Gwent	7	1

A total of 32 responses to the online questionnaire came from previous participants with Coed Lleol/Small Woods. Over 40% (n=15) mentioned they would like to see more events.

"Carry on doing activities which people can attend. A variety of venues would help."
[Respondent from Swansea, online]

Only two volunteers contributed to this question, however both mentioned the need to work with partner organisations.

"Integrate/ hold discussions with local groups to offer workshops that fit the need of the group"
[Respondent from Swansea, online]

Over 30 respondents had a professional relationship with Coed Lleol and responded to the questionnaire online. They provided a diverse number of suggestions, with the most common being to increase the number of activities and events (n=16). Engaging more young people and being more involved in schools were mentioned by 33% (n=7 and 4, respectively). Other suggestions less frequently mentioned included promoting more (n=5), increasing disabled access (n=2), partnering with other organisations (n=3) and increasing the number of shelters (n=3; Figure 10).

"Opportunities for different ages to enjoy the outdoor space and learn new skills or just have fun and enjoy being outdoors."
[Respondent from Carmarthenshire, online]

Figure 10 Responses to the question "What could Coed Lleol/Small Woods be doing to support your community?" grouped by relationship to Coed Lleol/Small Woods.

3.4.   Environmental wellbeing

Responses to the environmental wellbeing questions covered many different topic areas and some were very specific or detailed. However, they broadly fell into one of four different themes. These were:

1) Aspects relating to destruction or poor care of the environment, such as littering, pollution and vandalism. This theme has been coded 'red';

2) Social aspects, such as community activities, access, environmental education and value, and connection to nature and to others. This theme has been coded 'yellow';

3) Aspects relating to provisions from local government, such as community services and planning decisions. This theme has been coded 'blue'; and

4) Environmental aspects, such as land management, protection of wildlife, and biodiversity and climate change. This theme has been coded 'green'.

3.4.1. What issues concern you about nature and your local environment?

Firstly, we asked "What issues concern you about nature and your local environment?" For 35% of respondents (n=154), the greatest concern was the negative impact of litter, pollution, and vandalism on the local environment (Figure 11).
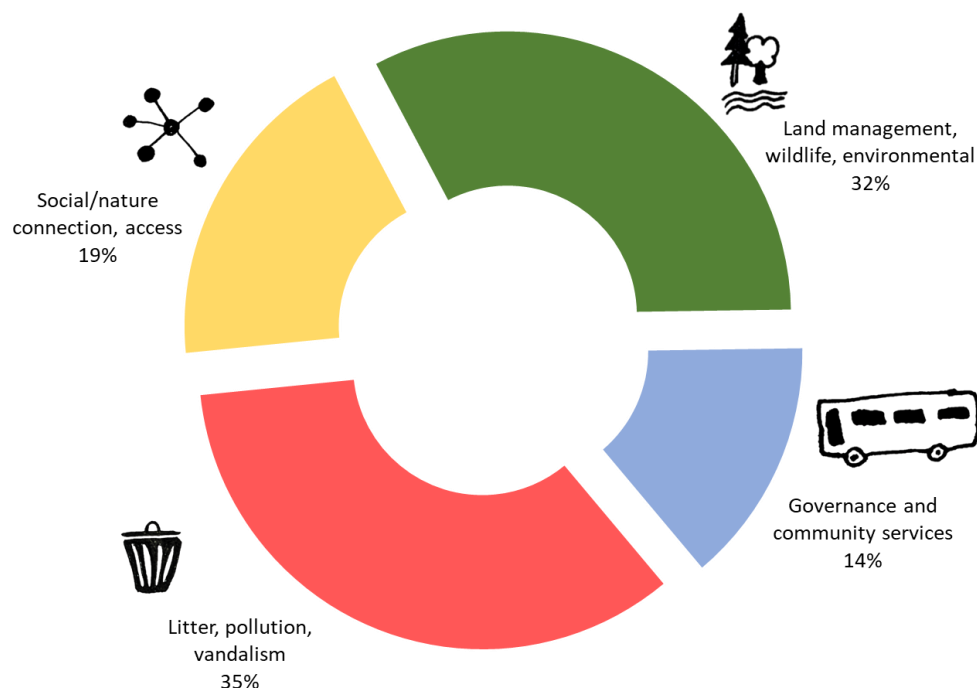

Figure 11 Key themes in response to "What issues concern you about nature and your local environment?"

Within the theme of litter, pollution, and vandalism, six sub-themes were identified, including litter (n=62), plastic waste (n=17), pollution (n=37), poor treatment of waterways (n=26), dog waste (n=5) and vandalism (n=7; Figure 12). In some cases, respondents mentioned multiple sub-themes:

"Rubbish dropped from take-away; river and sea pollution; sewage/farm run-off; not enough parks and green spaces just to hang out; not enough free activities for younger people".
[Respondent from Swansea during an in-person event]

Figure 12 Sub-themes within the litter, pollution and vandalism theme in response to "What issues concern you about nature and your local environment?"

The next most frequently mentioned theme included issues relating to land management or other environmental issues (32%, n=145). The sub-themes in the environmental theme reveal significant ecological concerns, with loss of habitats and biodiversity being the most pressing issue, highlighted by 48 respondents. Climate change and global warming was mentioned by 20 individuals. In nine cases, these two themes were mentioned together.

"Like most people I'm concerned about issues around climate change, pollution by air or in our waters. Local land use and the impact around the local biodiversity and dying habitats."
[Respondent from Anglesey online]

Other frequently mentioned issues included land management (n=19), the lack of maintenance in green spaces (n=16), and issues related to pesticides, herbicides and insecticides (n=10). Tree and hedge felling were also mentioned (n=9) as well as invasive or non-native species (n=8).

"Loss of hedgerows due to increasing size of machinery used by farming. Loss of veteran/ ancient trees. No hedgerow or tree officer in local council!"
[Respondent from Ceredigion, online]

Other concerns less frequently mentioned included noise and light pollution, as well as a lack of tree planting. Overall, there was a wide range of environmental concerns, with a particular focus on habitat and biodiversity loss (Figure 13).

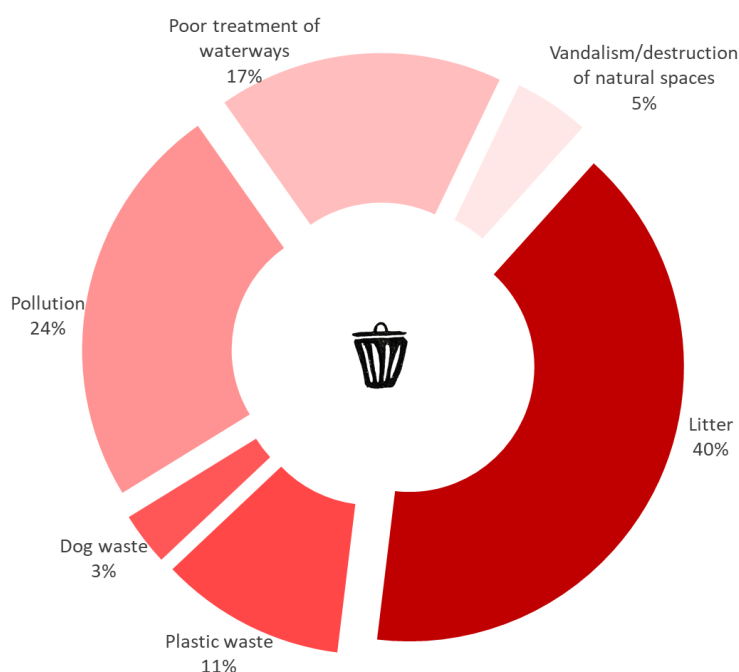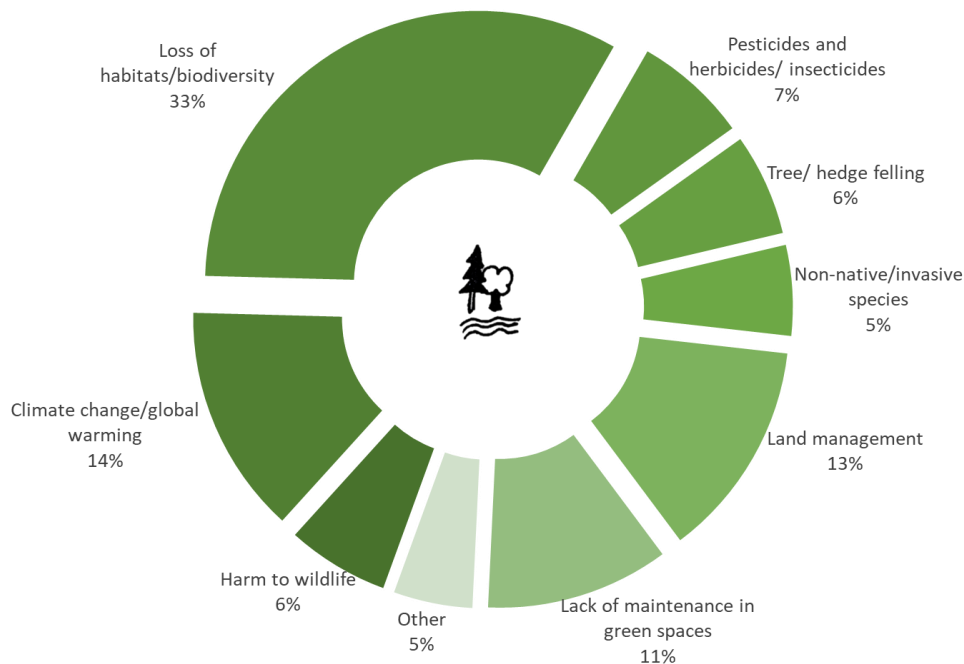*Figure 13 Key sub-themes within the land management theme in response to "What issues concern you about nature and your local environment?"*

The theme of social and nature connection and access was based on 84 responses, and this theme had sub-themes which highlighted barriers to engaging with natural environments.

The most frequently mentioned of these was a lack of appreciation and value for natural spaces (n=22), indicating that some respondents worry their community overlooks the value of nature. In seven cases this was mentioned alongside a lack of awareness or understanding.

"I don't think there is education available locally to help people take an interest in and care for their local natural spaces."
[Respondent from Cardiff, online]

Restrictions to engagement with the outdoors included poor access to rural areas (n=4), poor access for disabled individuals (n=3) and a lack of free activities for young people (n=7). A significant number noted a lack of accessible green spaces (n=17) in urban areas, and a loss of balance between humans and nature (n=2), emphasising the need for more natural areas that everyone can easily reach.

Lastly, 63 respondents mentioned issues related to governance and community services. The issues surrounding governance and community services reveal significant challenges, based on 63 responses. A majority of respondents expressed frustration with planning decisions (n=28) that often overlook the importance of integrating natural spaces into urban developments, indicating a need for more environmentally conscious approaches.

"Rubbish, building houses on nature, decline in habitat, loss of animals, no areas for people to enjoy."
[Respondent from Anglesey during an in-person event]

Some participants (n=11) also cited a lack of funding as a barrier to maintaining the local environment, as well as poor local and national governmental decisions (n=5). Other issues included the effects of tourism not being properly managed (n=9), as well as inadequate transport options (n=8).

"Lack of maintenance and pride by elected members. Underfunded public services."
[Respondent from Carmarthenshire during an in-person event]

Regional differences were noted in terms of environmental concerns (Figure 14). In Blaenau Gwent, over 20% of respondents mentioned litter as something concerning them about the environment, whereas in Anglesey the primary environmental concern was habitat loss (16%).
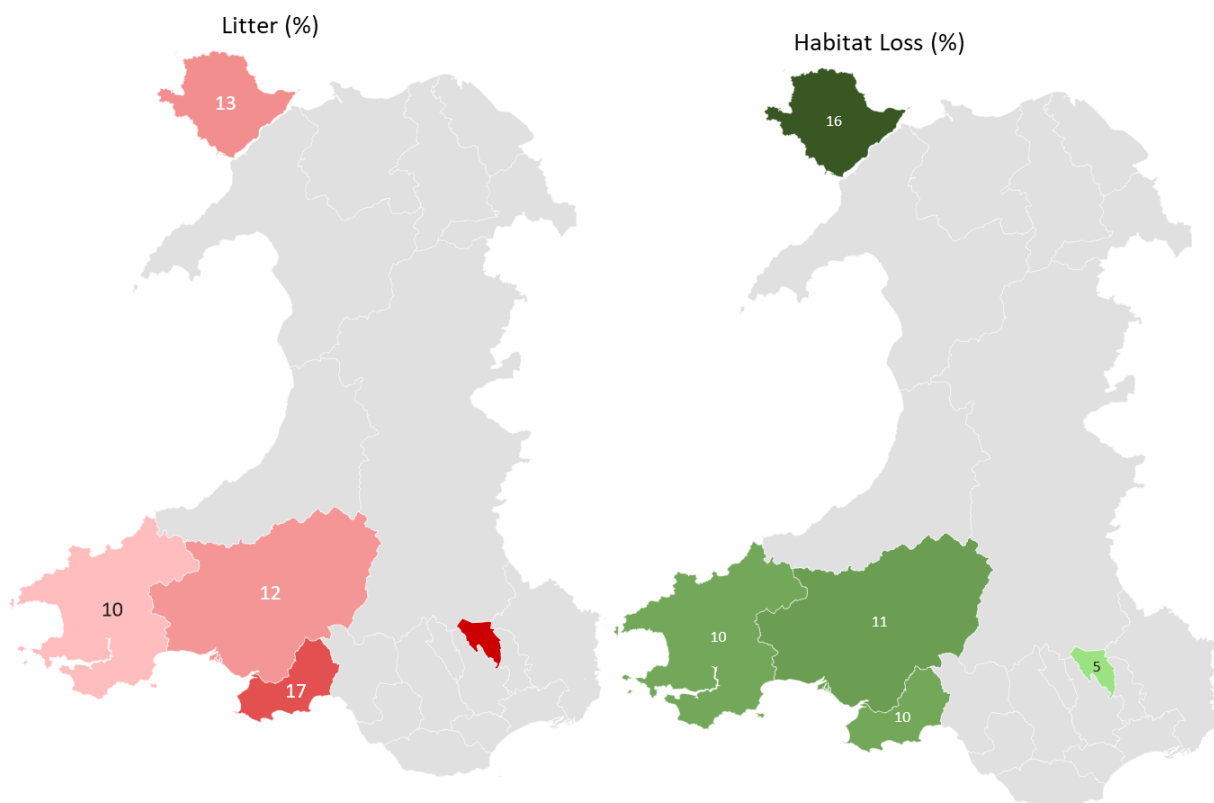

Figure 14 Regional differences between the two biggest themes in response to the question " What issues concern you about nature and your local environment?". These are % mentions in overall responses to the question. These responses come from in-person and online questionnaires in five key areas: Isle of Anglesey; Blaenau Gwent; Carmarthenshire; Pembrokeshire; Swansea.

3.4.2. What would you like to see happen in your community that could improve nature and the local (and global) environment?

To understand stakeholders' suggested solutions to environmental issues, we asked, "What would you like to see happen in your community that could improve nature and the local (and global) environment?". Responses fell into the four key themes as possible solutions, namely: litter picking and community events; social prescribing; improved community services; and supporting wildlife (Figure 15).
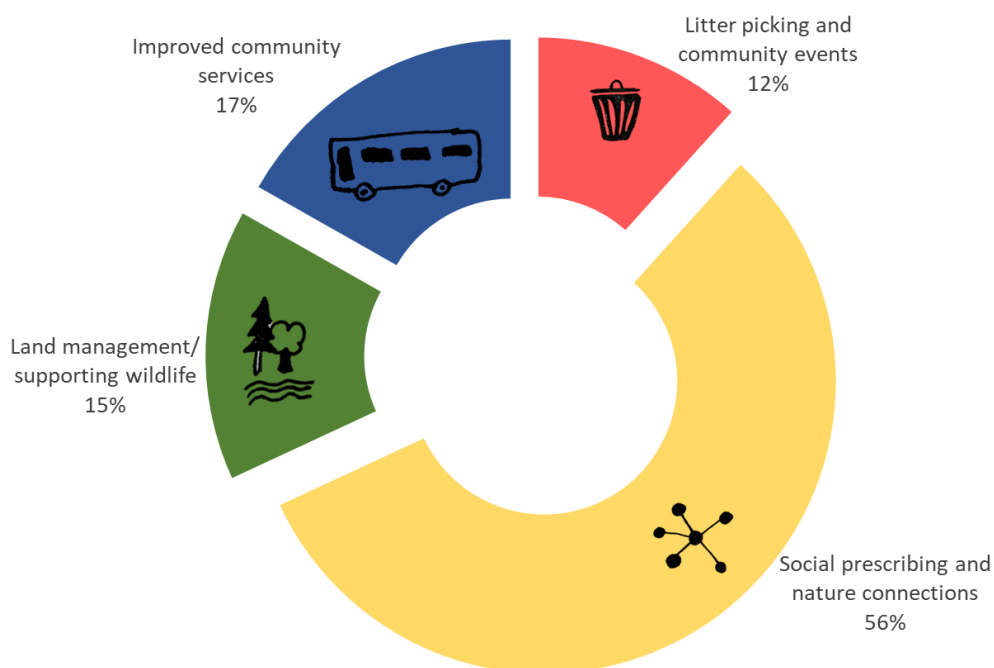
Figure 15 Key themes that emerged across respondents in response to "What would you like to see happen in your community that could improve nature and the local (and global) environment?"

The most frequently mentioned theme covered social prescribing and improved nature connections (56% of all responses). Within the social prescribing theme, the most frequently mentioned sub-theme was "more events to raise awareness" (n=40, Figure 16). This was closely followed by a strong call for environmental education (n=37), as well as encouraging community stewardship (n=24). In some cases, responses included multiple sub-themes:

"More awareness and accessible education for all. Possibly an interactive fun day or linking in with other local events. Public engagement, particularly with the younger generation (to instil ownership/pride)."
[Respondent from Swansea, online]

There were other sub-themes within this, including fostering greater respect for and valuing of nature (n=15). Respondents also expressed a need for greater community involvement in environmental issues (n=11) and called for better advertisement of outdoor spaces and activities (n=11) to increase participation. Respondents also stated the need for accessible

and consistent activities (n=6), as well as encouraging people to spend more time in nature (n=7). In terms of connections between communities, three respondents mentioned linking local and national communities, while five mentioned collaborating with local landowners. Other sub-themes less frequently mentioned included bilingual activities, practical workshops, as well as establishing outdoor community hubs.
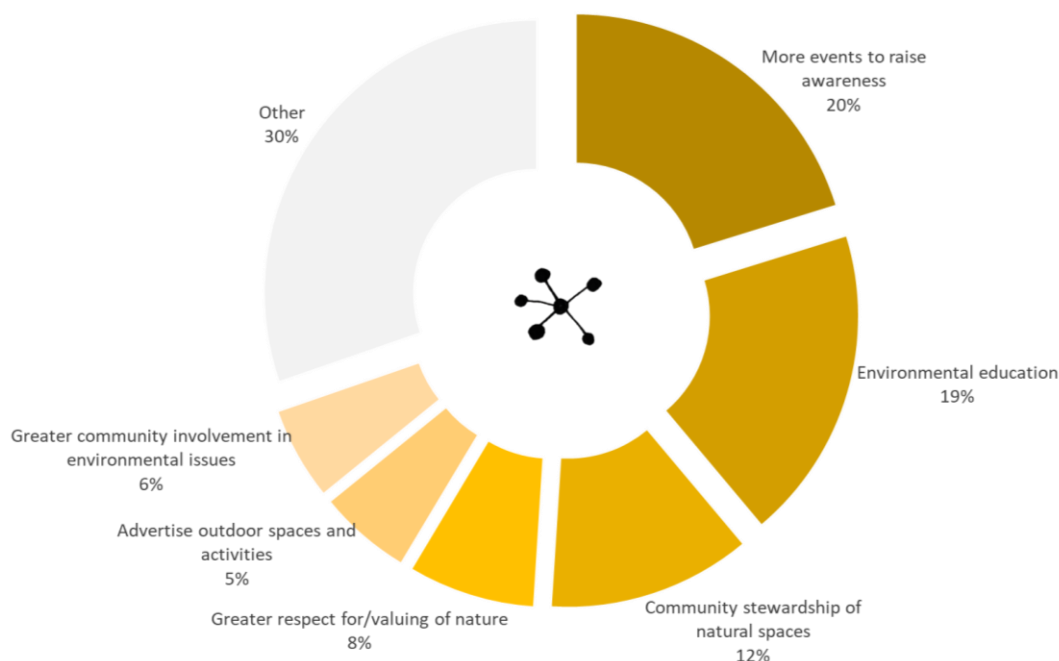
Figure 16 Sub-themes emerging from the social and nature connection theme in response to "What would you like to see happen in your community that could improve nature and the local (and global) environment?"

The next most frequently mentioned theme was improving community services. Within this theme, 11 sub-themes were noted. The most frequently mentioned more funding (n=16) as well as an emphasis on the local government doing more (n=10) and eight people suggested that change could happen through voting and politics (n=8). Other themes included local partnership building (n=8), supporting local businesses (n=3). Managing tourism, and fines for fly tipping were mentioned less frequently.

"More funding, resources and awareness."
[Respondent from Gwynedd, online]

Within the land management theme were nine sub-themes. However, the majority of these had tree planting as a particular focus (n=15) or other planting schemes (n=7).

"Group tree-planting or wildflower planting. Guerilla gardening in unused unsightly areas of land. Group insect and bird house making etc."
[Respondent from Anglesey, online]

Conservation of native habitats was mentioned by nine respondents as well sustainable use of woodlands (n=6) and community habitat management (n=6). Other sub-themes less frequently mentioned included reducing pesticide use, managing grassland areas better, and protecting trees and green spaces better.

"Rewilding/creation of areas to support insects and wildlife, education on our native flora and fauna to keep local people engaged and connected to the nature on their doorstep".
[Respondent from Anglesey, online]

The solutions for improving nature and the local environment also focused on litter. There was a strong call for litter picking generally (n=10) while six suggested forming community litter picking groups or events.

"Litter picking; tree planting"
[Respondent from Swansea during an in-person event]

There was also a call for better recycling (n=7) as well as five suggesting producing less waste or providing more bins (n=5). Less frequently mentioned sub-themes included less vandalism, free compost bins from the council, rubbish collection incentives and less environmental vandalism. Regionally, we noticed some differences between what people would like to see happening in their local community to solve their environmental issues (Figure 17). Blaenau Gwent had almost 20% of responses suggesting environmental education but fewer events suggested.

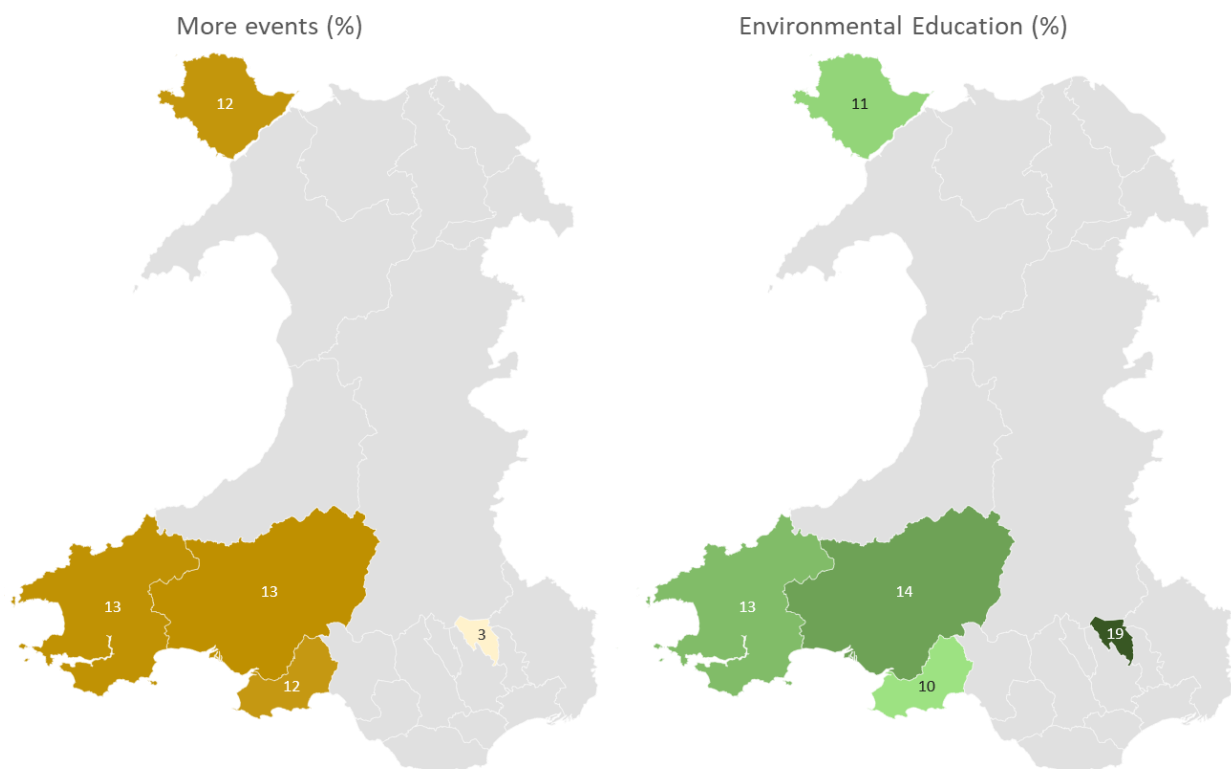*Figure 17 Regional differences between the two biggest themes in response to the question "What would you like to see happen in your community that could improve nature and the local (and global) environment?". These are % mentions in overall responses to the question. These responses come from in person and online questionnaires in five key areas: Isle of Anglesey; Blaenau Gwent; Carmarthenshire; Pembrokeshire; Swansea.*

Demographically, we saw similar responses across those with different relationships to Coed Lleol/Small Woods (Figure 18). For example, the highest number of mentions to "What would you like to see happen in your community that could improve nature and the local

(and global) environment?" was 'more events', as seen across the combined responses from all areas and event types. Interestingly, even those new to Coed Lleol/Small Woods most frequently mentioned more events and environmental educations as the top solutions to environmental problems, both locally and globally.

Professionals — More events (24%)

Participants — More events & environmental education (Both 28%)

New to Coed Lleol — More events & environmental education (Both 21%)

Volunteers — More events (100%)

Figure 18 Similar patterns of responses were found between groups with differing relationships to Coed Lleol/Small Woods in response to "What would you like to see happen in your community that could improve nature and the local (and global) environment?"

4. Summary

Coed Lleol/Small Woods engaged 180 people in the 2024 consultation activity, with responses to specific questions collected at in-person events and through an online survey. Questions fell into three categories: personal wellbeing; community wellbeing; and environmental wellbeing. The regions with the largest numbers of people responding were the Isle of Anglesey, with 53 responses (29%), and Swansea, with 46 responses (26%). These are two areas (the Swansea event also attracting those based in the neighbouring county of Neath Port Talbot), in which Coed Lleol/Small Woods has worked for a considerable number of years and has established strong networks. Most of the stakeholders consulted had previously engaged with Coed Lleol/Small Woods, professionally, as a volunteer or as a participant. However, the consultation also collected the views of 28 individuals (16%) with no previous connection to Coed Lleol/Small Woods. This highlights the success of our outreach in engaging both known and new respondents.

Mid-Wales was the focus of a separate study earlier in the year: a feasibility study for provision of outdoor and nature-based health activities, to complement clinical care at the Machynlleth Community Hospital and Wellbeing Centre. While the eight questions from the current process were not used in the feasibility study, an extensive consultation exercise was carried out. The majority of respondents felt that the outdoors helped their health and wellbeing, and that outdoor and nature-based activities should be made available on prescription. The final report[1] details the needs and aspirations of those living in and around Machynlleth.

The consultation on **personal wellbeing** revealed several key themes, with happiness/ contentment, and exercise/physical health being the two most prominent, highlighting the importance of both emotional/mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing. Social connection and a sense of community also emerged as important factors. Nature connection was particularly significant, with many participants emphasising the value of time spent outdoors. Stress, work-life balance, and relationship challenges were the most common negative impacts identified. Notably, even among those new to Coed Lleol/Small Woods, many people highlighted nature connection as important in improving their sense of wellbeing. Regional differences showed that respondents from Pembrokeshire emphasised social connection, while those in Swansea focused more on nature connection.

Within the **community wellbeing** category, the focus was on the challenges of funding and access to resources. Respondents highlighted the need for financial support for community services but also a lack of awareness of existing services for some people in their communities. Social challenges such as isolation, loneliness, and a lack of support systems were also often mentioned. Many respondents highlighted the importance of community spaces and activities, with nature and social connection being frequently mentioned as important for community wellbeing. Respondents also valued access to natural spaces and

---

[1] Coed Lleol/Small Woods & Ecodyfi, 2024. Feasibility of integrating outdoor health and wellbeing at the Bro Ddyfi Community Hospital. Available at: https://www.smallwoods.org.uk/assets/Bro-Ddyfi-Outdoor-Health-Feasibility-Study-2024.pdf

the community spirit within their local community. Suggestions for how Coed Lleol/Small Woods could better support communities included increasing the number of activities and events delivered, improving the promotion of activities to attract larger numbers of participants, and generally engaging more young people. Notably, even among those new to Coed Lleol/Small Woods, many participants emphasised the need for more activities and better communication of what is available. Regional differences also emerged, with most of the Pembrokeshire respondents highlighting the need for more activities to be made available.

The consultation on **environmental wellbeing** identified four key themes: litter, pollution, and vandalism; social and nature connection; governance and community services; and land management, wildlife, and environmental health. The top concerns across these themes included litter, pollution, habitat loss, and climate change. Respondents highlighted barriers to accessing green spaces and frustration over planning decisions and the underfunding of services. Proposed solutions focused on the delivery of more community events, such as litter picking, environmental education and tree planting. There was a strong desire for increased community engagement across all respondent groups, including those new to Coed Lleol/Small Woods. In Blaenau Gwent, over 20% of respondents suggested environmental education. The consultation underscored the importance of fostering social and nature connections across our work, highlighting that building relationships within the community and promoting access to natural spaces are essential for enhancing individual and collective wellbeing.

4.1. Regional summaries

4.1.1. Ynys Môn | Isle of Anglesey
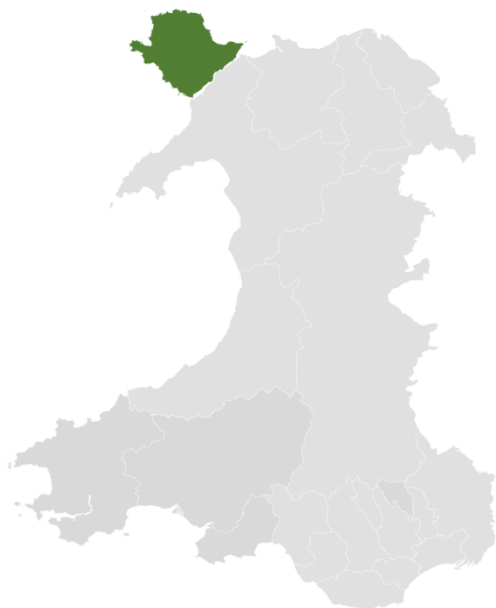
On the Isle of Anglesey, a total of 53 respondents contributed over 400 responses to the consultation questions. These came from the in-person event (n=16) and the online survey (n=37).

The most important environmental concern on Anglesey was habitat loss, with 16% of respondents mentioning this. Personal wellbeing was also strongly connected to natural environments, with 64% of responses mentioning this, while social connection also contributed strongly to their wellbeing (52%).

Suggestions for Coed Lleol/Small Woods mentioned increasing the number of activities (16%), while promoting more (7%). Increasing the number of events (12%) and

improving environmental education (11%) were also suggested as means to improve local and global environmental issues.

4.1.2. Abertawe | Swansea

In total, 46 people living in Swansea contributed to the consultation, answering a total of 365 questions via either the online survey or during an in-person event.

In Swansea, 69% of people mentioned nature connection as important to their wellbeing, which was the highest level of response amongst all regions. 51% mentioned social connections. There were similar patterns to those across the whole of Wales with 14% of respondents from this area suggesting Coed Lleol/Small Woods could increase the number of activities on offer. While the communities in Swansea thought habitat loss was an important issue in their area (10%), litter was mentioned more frequently (17%). To tackle local and global environmental issues, Swansea communities suggested most frequently that more events and community activities (12%) and more environmental education (10%) be offered.

4.1.3. Blaenau Gwent

In Blaenau Gwent, a total of 45 responses were collected via the in-person event and online survey. Group discussions also added 44 contributions to the personal wellbeing category, 52 responses to the community wellbeing category and 24 to the environmental wellbeing category.

The communities in Blaenau Gwent also valued nature connections (47%) and social connections (40%). Environmentally and across all regions, litter was the most highly mentioned issue in this area (22%), while habitat loss was the least frequently mentioned (5%). In terms of what Coed Lleol/Small Woods could do to improve their communities, the most frequently mentioned response was to increase the number of activities offered (7%).

4.1.4. Sir Gaerfyrddin | Carmarthenshire

In Carmarthenshire, a total of 31 respondents contributed 241 responses. Of these, 14 came from the online survey, with 17 from in-person events.

Nature connection was very important in this county (61%) but over half the respondents also mentioned social connection as being important to their wellbeing (52%). This was the second highest proportion of respondents calling for Coed Lleol/Small Woods to increase the number of activities to improve community wellbeing (17%), with 8% suggesting Coed Lleol/Small Woods could promote their activities more. Both litter (12%) and habitat loss (11%) were important environmental concerns in this area, reflecting the patterns seen across all regions. A similar number also suggested an increased number of activities (13%) and that environmental education (14%) could improve environmental wellbeing.

4.1.5. Sir Benfro | Pembrokeshire

In Pembrokeshire, 13 respondents contributed to the consultation. Two of these completed the online survey and 11 people gave responses at the in-person event. Social connection was mentioned most frequently in terms of what contributed most to their wellbeing (91%), while over 50% mentioned nature connection.

The overwhelming majority of respondents from this county suggested that Coed Lleol/Small Woods could increase the number of events to improve wellbeing in their community (91%). Both litter and habitat loss were mentioned by 10% of respondents in Pembrokeshire, and 13% suggested that more events and environmental education could improve environmental wellbeing in their area and globally.

4.2.   Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2024 consultation revealed some interesting patterns and common threads. While there were some different emphases between regions, it is striking that the following messages came through across all responses and all three categories. First, **nature connection and social connection** were mentioned most frequently, both as elements that influence personal wellbeing and also as the most positive aspects of communities.

Coed Lleol/Small Woods is a specialist in providing nature connection opportunities to those most in need of it. In our programmes, people come together in natural spaces and, therefore, feel the benefits not only of time spent connected to nature but also the forming of new social bonds in a secure environment. It might be argued that those answering this survey – mostly from the regions we have been working in this year and mostly known to us – are biased towards this type of thinking: a 'captive audience'. However, some of the respondents to our survey had not previously engaged with Coed Lleol/Small Woods's work and yet they too noted that these things were important to them. Rather than representing a bias, these results instead reinforce the benefits felt by those engaging in such programmes. This has been demonstrated by our evaluative work over the past decade of delivering social forestry programmes but also by an increasing number of peer-reviewed studies into the relationship between time spent in nature and human wellbeing.

For example, a longitudinal study of 2.3 million adults in Wales over a 10-year period showed that greater exposure to green spaces was associated with reduced risk of *future* common mental health disorders, especially for those living in deprived communities[2]. Health benefits associated with undertaking nature-based activities include statistically significant reductions in diastolic blood pressure, salivary cortisol and heart rate, and statistically significant reductions in the incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular mortality[3]. The long-established Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku, or 'forest bathing', has be shown to lower stress levels and improve immune function[4].

In terms of the greatest challenges to community wellbeing, the most common responses related to **limited funding and a lack of (or a discontinuity of) activities**. It, therefore, follows that the strongest response to the question of what Coed Lleol/Small Woods might do in communities was to increase the number of activities and events. When considering environmental wellbeing, litter ranked the most highly as a concerning issue, with possible

---

[2] Geary, R. S., Thompson, D., Mizen, A., Akbari, A., Garrett, J. K., Rowney, F. M., Watkins, A., Lyons, R. A., Stratton, G., Lovell, R., Nieuwenhuijsen, M., Parker, S. C., Song, J., Tsimpida, D., White, J., White, M. P., Williams, S., Wheeler, B. W., Fry, R. and Rodgers, S. E., 2023. Ambient greenness, access to local green spaces, and subsequent mental health: a 10-year longitudinal dynamic panel study of 2.3 million adults in Wales. The Lancet – Planetary Health, 7(10) E809-E818. Available at: https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(23)00212-7/fulltext

[3] Twohig-Bennett, C. and Jones, A., 2018. The health benefits of the great outdoors: a systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes. 166, 628-637. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935118303323

[4] Li, Q., 2010. Effect of forest bathing trips on human immune function. Environmental Health and Preventative Medicine. 15, 9–17. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12199-008-0068-3

solutions found in the social prescribing and nature connection theme, namely by providing more events and more environmental education.

According to the latest State of Nature[5] report, Wales – along with the other UK countries and most other regions worldwide – has experienced a significant loss of biodiversity. This includes 18% of species threatened, and a fall in abundance of terrestrial and freshwater species by an average of 20% since 1994. The report acknowledges that, to make significant improvements in this trend, it will be important to not just conserve and restore biodiversity but tackle the drivers of loss, and that all of society needs to be involved in these efforts.

Bringing people into connection with nature through green social prescribing can foster a greater understanding of and care for the natural environment. Connection to nature has been shown to correlate with certain wellbeing, educational, pro-environmental and pro-conservation behaviours or outcomes[6] and may, therefore, benefit both people and the natural environment.

Alongside and sometimes as a progression from our woodland wellbeing programmes, Coed Lleol/Small Woods offers opportunities for formal, certified education and training. Many of our participants go on to volunteer and then work in the sector, helping others to find their own connection to nature.

There is a strong message here that people across Wales (and in Shropshire) want **more nature-connection-related social events** to be held in their area. They see that these types of events would be beneficial not just for their own wellbeing but for the wellbeing of their communities. They also believe that **environmental education** is key to improving some of the environmental issues found in their communities. Possibly connected to the number of professionals responding to the consultation, there is an awareness that **external funding is a limiting factor** in making bigger strides in this area.

As the benefits of green social prescribing are more widely accepted and have been put into an economic context, in terms of savings for the public purse, improvements to the funding landscape are vital to ensure the continuity of delivering this well-evidenced line of work.

---

[5] Smith, A., Boswell, J., Halliwell, E., Birch, T., Bradfer-Lawrence, T., Burns, F., Hughes, J., Johnstone, I., Mancini, F., Mordue, S., Oates, J., Pescott, O. L., Phillips, A., Simkin, J., Stanbury, A. J., 2023. State of Nature Wales/Sefyllfa Natur Cymru, the State of Nature Partnership. Available at: www.stateofnature.org.uk

[6] Seers, H., Mughal, R. and Chatterjee, H., 2022. Connection to nature, Natural England Evidence Information Note EIN068. Available at: https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5777215462834176