



# Sêr Ffermio y Bannau

Report on discussion between Bannau  
Brycheiniog and farming allies in support of  
nature recovery through sustainable farming.

June 7th 2023 at the Barn at Brynich, Brecon



# Purpose of the Meeting

The purpose of this meeting was to seek advice from farmers, as the biggest collective group of land managers in the Park, on how to improve collaboration in delivering the management plan.

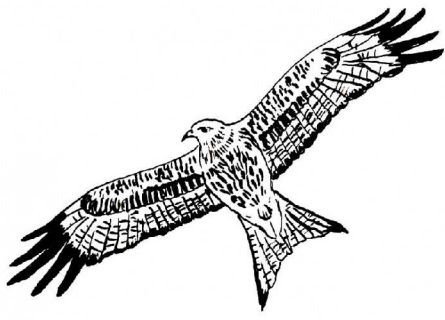
The meeting consisted of an introduction by the Chief Executive, Catherine Mealing-Jones followed by an overview of the Management Plan by Helen Lucocq.

Jonathan Davies organised participants into 4 groups for discussion, facilitated by Helen Roderick, Nicky Davies, Naomi Davies and Toby Small. The discussion revolved around 3 questions:

1. What parts of the management plan are of common interest for farmers and graziers?
2. What on-farm actions contribute to nature recovery, including improved water quality?
3. How can the National Park support farmers to contribute to delivering the management plan, individually or collectively?

## Summary of the welcome remarks from Catherine Mealing-Jones:

The Management Plan, Y Bannau, sets out an ambitious vision for the future of the National Park that can only be delivered through a wide range of partnerships. Farmers manage 80% of the Park and they are crucial to everything outlined in the Management Plan. Some farmers already manage their land in ways that contribute to the goals of the Park and many are keen to do more. Y bannau is a call to collaborate and a call to inspire action as much as it is a statutory plan. So, how can we work together to get that collaboration right? How can we work productively with the farming community to support nature recovery through sustainable farming?



# Summary of Recommendations

The importance of farming to the character and the future of the Park was recognised by all participants.

Delivery of the 5 Missions—Nature, Water, Climate, people and Place—is only possible by working closely with and supporting farmers. This includes both protecting habitat on farms and farming in ways that contribute to the nature and character of the landscape.

Several participants noted that relations between the National Park and farmers have historically been poor and that trust needs to be rebuilt. The group discussions generated considerable feedback which has been clustered into the following recommendations:

1. Improve communication to increase openness, transparency, and build trust.
2. Assign dedicated staff to liaise with farmers.
3. Streamline planning processes and reduce red tape to enable diversification.
4. Provide support to protect the commons.
5. Support actions for nature recovery, including water retention and quality.
6. Provide support to collaborative & group actions in the Park.
7. Strengthen the role of the Park as an interface with Welsh Government.
8. Enhance visitor management.
9. Provide support for funded projects.
10. Protect the character of farming landscapes by helping to keep farmers on the land.
11. Facilitate access to environmental payments and investments.



# Detailed feedback from the discussion groups

The feedback from the 4 groups was reorganised according to where it aligned best with one of the 5 Missions from the Management Plan.



# Question 1: What parts of the management plan are of common interest for farmers and graziers? Which goals or targets stand out as priorities?

Mission	Feedback from Participants
Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less people = nature recovery</li> <li>• Hedgerow scheme very good</li> <li>• Need farmers on the ground</li> <li>• "Productive herbal ley" – not the Welsh government recommended ones</li> <li>• Have to think about the common land and under grazing</li> <li>• Look at breeding stock and what farmers do right</li> <li>• Issues with viability and succession</li> </ul>
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water is a priority</li> <li>• Phosphates – community/future planning</li> <li>• Watercourse margin management – buffer zones</li> </ul>
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewables</li> <li>• Sort out the confusion around carbon neutrality, what the best methods are, different opinions/ advice</li> <li>• Conflict with carbon neutrality and productivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Quantifying tool</li> <li>◦ Unknown carbon value</li> <li>◦ Don't know where we are at the moment</li> <li>◦ Have to look at an area as a whole</li> <li>◦ Depends on what type of business you run and what you want</li> <li>◦ Skewed metrics at the moment</li> <li>◦ Need to separate priorities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have to be economically viable, so how do we monetize the elements in the management plan</li> <li>• Profitable farming: you can't go green if you are in the red.</li> <li>• Incentivise government payments</li> <li>• Marketing/ branding</li> <li>• Community schemes</li> <li>• What is 'sustainable' tourism e.g., glamping pods being shut down in winter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Planning policy</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Farms need to be financially stable- think of next generation</li> </ul>
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local food production – difficult to make it pay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Local procurement</li> <li>◦ Abattoirs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Common land representation – dialogue must increase with commons</li> <li>• Infrastructure needs more attention</li> </ul>

## Question 2: How is nature recovering on farms in the National Park? What on-farm actions contribute to nature recovery, including improved water quality?

Actions carried out on farms
Riparian buffer zones.
Valuing our hedgerows. Hedgerow planting – habitat for birds. Hedgerow funds is a positive
Controlling vermin to encourage ground nesting birds – gamekeeping. Funding needed. NRW licencing is a massive barrier.
Ask for 3% instead of 10% on farmland.
Buffer strips
Reducing dipping.
Low input does not necessarily equate to more nature / better hedgerows.
Marshy grassland – reintroducing cattle improves land.
Weather stations on farms.
Bird cover crops in selected areas.
Planting more trees – what are the alternatives? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Manage existing trees.</li> <li>o Climate change, carbon storage, supporting leasing land.</li> <li>o Commercial.</li> <li>o Leisure.</li> </ul>
Watercourse buffer zones need more management and financial support.

Requests to the Park and other partners
Supporting knowledge – sharing (we need).
Need access to real time data to make informed decisions.
No more poultry units on Usk.
Nutrient management plan – support.
Need commercial forestry in the right places.
More evidence – baseline.
Organic farming – barriers.
Research into grassland sequestration.
More farming input into future schemes and more of a say on what they can do on their farms.
Farming advisors.
Conflict on animal health and environment.
Tree mapping – need another layer of removing productive land.
Phosphates – how can the Usk be worse than the Wye! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Testing kits for farmers.</li> <li>o What is the time scale?</li> </ul>

**Question 3: What barriers make it difficult for farmers to contribute to the management plan? How can the National Park support farmers to contribute to delivering the management plan, individually or collectively?**

**“The National Park is seen as the enemy. Let's move forward!”**

**“Farmers versus National Park, have historically been very separate: trust needs to be rebuilt.”**

**“Need a hook to get farmers back on board: use the brand to bring in income.”**

The following table shows the comments from the 4 discussion groups in the left column, the recommendations that these comments support, and the proposed responses from the National Park.

Comments from participants	Recommendation	Proposed response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Park farmers WhatsApp group.</li> <li>Approachability and point of contact within the National Park Authority.</li> <li>Need good news stories and shout about success.</li> <li>Farmers need to get their voices heard.</li> <li>Farmers time, they are a one man unit and don't get paid to attend meetings</li> <li>Improve notification of events.</li> </ul>	Improve communication to increase openness, transparency, and build trust.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show case work of farmers through the Sêr network.</li> <li>Focus on farming in the next park newsletter.</li> <li>Establish a communication channel (e.g. email list) to improve outreach to farmers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff need to get out there and use common sense.</li> <li>Senior management need to get out there.</li> <li>National Park staff need to go out to farms.</li> <li>Consultation &amp; farmer input.</li> <li>Wardens are valuable – need more as first point of contact.</li> </ul>	Assign dedicated staff to liaison with farmers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Warden's already spend time liaising with farmers but staff resources are scarce. The NP will lobby Welsh Government for support to NPs to help deliver the SFS.</li> <li>Strengthen presence of the NP at local agricultural shows.</li> <li>Explore further options to work with farmers in target landscapes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversification needs planning permission. For example, polytunnels, green energy, holiday homes, affordable homes for local people, barn conversions.</li> <li>Conflicts between 1st and 2nd purposes.</li> <li>An adopted LDP is a priority for the National Park</li> <li>Affordable housing.</li> <li>Abattoir / local processing.</li> <li>Low-cost housing – no staff for hospitality.</li> <li>Ring fence tourism tax within park for benefit of the park.</li> </ul>	Streamline planning processes and reduce red tape to enable diversification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NP is reviewing Farm Diversification Supplementary Guidance.</li> <li>Work on the new LDP will commence in 2024 and will include attention to local housing.</li> <li>Create a small-scale horticulture local development order to facilitate permitted infrastructure such as polytunnels.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commons – do not lose them to trees: Look at benefits of agroforestry, such as shade for animals.</li> <li>Support Commons associations.</li> <li>Bovine TB – common land: advocate for more flexibility over TB testing.</li> <li>Visitor management needs to be improved – damaging verges, dog mess, sheep attacks, damaging common land</li> </ul>	Provide support to protect the commons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue support for meetings of commons associations.</li> <li>Support fire load management through animal husbandry in partnership with Fire and Rescue Service and Dŵr Cymru.</li> <li>Coordinate fire management planning across the Park.</li> </ul>



Comments from participants	Recommendation	Proposed response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage phosphates and improve water quality through riparian buffer zones, nutrient management plans, and testing kits for farmers.</li> <li>• Explore organic farming and research grassland sequestration.</li> <li>• Promote hedgerow planting, managing hedgerows, and supporting hedgerow funds.</li> <li>• Encouraging bird cover crops, commercial forestry in appropriate locations, and marshy grassland reintroduction with cattle.</li> <li>• Accessing real-time data and weather stations to make informed decisions.</li> </ul>	<p>Support actions for nature Recovery, water retention and improved water quality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement water retention pilots with long term view to scale up.</li> <li>• Include nature-based solutions for retaining water in landscapes as part of the phosphate mitigation strategy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support Young Farmers' Clubs.</li> <li>• Need for community schemes where grid infrastructure is concerned and renewables.</li> <li>• Big companies buying land could pay levy to put back into local community: Partnerships-ESG fund.</li> <li>• Other farmers, more collaborative schemes within the neighbourhood. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Graziers especially</li> <li>◦ Work with people that want to be worked with and want to cooperate – requires facilitation and respect.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Trusting the organisations that farmers work with.</li> </ul>	<p>Provide support to collaborative / group actions in the Park.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NP to organise an annual event with farmers and farmer networks.</li> <li>• Explore investment opportunities.</li> <li>• Develop guidance and support for establishment of Community Interest Companies or Charitable Incorporated Organisations.</li> <li>• Recommend to Welsh Government that NPs are resourced to develop collaborative actions under the SFS.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NRW all the major barriers – less red tape.</li> <li>• Welsh government needs to get out there.</li> <li>• Improve guidance and response times from the Welsh government.</li> <li>• National Park need stronger relationships with NRW and to facilitate partnerships for funding opportunities.</li> <li>• Guidance from Welsh government is too slow.</li> <li>• Schemes are very prescriptive, must allow flexibility.</li> <li>• Need recognition of what farms have already done and not be penalised when new schemes start – e.g. a trading tool for existing assets versus new schemes.</li> <li>• National Park should have all the money for giving to farmers in grant form for conservation schemes, not Welsh government.</li> </ul>	<p>Strengthen the role of the Park as an interface with Welsh Government.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use communication channel (first point above) to feedback on the Park's input to Welsh Government on the SFS.</li> <li>• Lobby Welsh Government for more resources to support collaborative actions in the Park under SFS.</li> </ul>

Comments from participants	Recommendation	Proposed response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address issues such as damaging verges, dog mess, and sheep attacks.</li> </ul>	Enhance visitor management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the communication of advice on dog walking and other communications for visitor management.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need actions and financial support for high level visions.</li> <li>Need long term consistency of schemes, recognising what has been done in the past to take things into the future.</li> <li>Need to evolve the vision into a clear plan with resource allocation. How do we finance this vision? National Park needs to have effective links with Welsh government to deliver on these points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Markets;</li> <li>Government;</li> <li>Private finance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Provide support for funded projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support aspirations and project development by local groups – e.g. community Interest Companies.</li> <li>Develop long term of support for farmers' groups to avoid being purely project.</li> <li>Ensure all projects have a clear exit strategy to avoid project-dependency.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keeping farmers on the land = community (farmers spend locally).</li> <li>Needs young people.</li> <li>Need to know where the farm is going, future planning.</li> <li>People/ farmers focused on their own business. Measures need to be viable/ profitable</li> </ul>	Protect the character of farming landscapes and help to keep farmers on the land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This should be a guiding principle for the National Park rather than a specific measure. This principle is upheld by this report.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Threat from carbon credits.</li> <li>Expertise and knowledge – carbon and other credits and farming systems.</li> <li>Water management.</li> <li>Hold water on farms: ponds, scrapes.</li> <li>Opportunities- hydro ponds, DCWW, IBERS.</li> </ul>	Facilitate to environmental payments and investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide advice to farmers on the opportunities and risks for environmental payments and avoiding greenwashing.</li> <li>Explore options for an event with private investors and farmers to share information and create new opportunities in the Park.</li> </ul>