

# Cambrian Mountains Community Action Plan for Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni, Llanfihangel-rhos-y-corn and Llanybyther Mountains

## Executive Summary

Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni Mountain form the south western end of the Cambrian Mountain range. The aim of the Cambrian Mountain Initiative is to support the communities in the Cambrian Mountain region to build a robust, prosperous, local economy based on the attractiveness of the landscape. The partners supporting the Initiative are the Welsh Assembly Government, Forestry Commission (Wales), Countryside Council of Wales, and the county councils in the area. The president of the Initiative is HRH The Prince of Wales.

Visit Wales is responsible for promoting Wales as a tourist destination internationally. The Cambrian Mountain Range has been selected by Visit Wales as one of 12 areas within Wales for which a tourism destination program will be developed in accordance with the best practise demonstrated by the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Carmarthenshire County Council and WAG have successfully supported regeneration of the Brechfa forest and Llanllwni Mountain area by focusing on the tourism and recreational opportunities presented by the open access status of both areas. As a consequence of the success of these projects, this area has been selected to be a pilot project for Wales to test and report on the success of community led activities to develop the economic benefit of the attractiveness of the open access forest and mountain. The key elements of the pilot project are :-

1. Supporting the community to produce and lead the undertaking of a 5 year action plan to increase the prosperity of the area linked to the attractiveness of the open access land and local landscape.
2. The area of economic benefit for this project extends 10km beyond the outer boundary of the open access land and to the 'Gateway' towns of Carmarthen, Llandeilo and Lampeter.
3. The contents of the action plan will be used to lead the development of RDP grant applications for this area of the Cambrian Mountain Region.
4. The success of the projects undertaken will be monitored and the results published so that they can be implemented in other areas of Wales. This project is being monitored by the Ecosystem department of Bangor University. It also involves collaborative projects with the tourism and outdoor education departments of Trinity St David University.

The Cambrian Mountain Initiative has 4 major themes:

- *Environment - projects that seek to improve, interpret, celebrate, or create access to the special landscape of the Cambrian Mountain, as well as measures to lesson the carbon footprint of communities.*
- *Tourism - projects that help develop the sense of place of the Cambrian Mountains and create an attractive tourism product based around interaction with the landscape, culture and heritage of the area.*
- *Local produce - projects that promote local food and craft products and an appreciation of local sustainability*
- *Communities - projects that aim to safeguard the character, feel and prosperity of the towns and villages in the region.*

## **Introduction.**

The south western end of the Cambrian Mountain range consists of a number of settlements encircling a large area of open access land consisting of both Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni, Llanfihangel-rhos-y-corn and Llanybyther Mountains.

The settlements, Rhydargaeu, Pontarsais, Alltwalis, Gwyddgrug, New Inn, Llanllwni, Llanybydder, Rhydcymerau, LLansawel, Abergorlech, Gwernogle, Lidiad Nenog, Nantylfin, Brechfa and Felingwm Uchaf each have a strong community but also have strong ties to their neighbours.

The area of economic benefit is described as being a 10km area extending beyond the settlements, with Carmarthen, Llandeilo and Lampeter forming the three 'Gateways' into the region from the major transport routes.

The modern day Brechfa Forest is a 6500 hectare area consisting of a mixture of ancient woodland and conifer plantations. The whole forest is open access land managed by the Forestry Commission Wales. Walkers, cyclists and horse riders have the freedom to roam throughout the forest, and there are three world class mountain bike trails.

Llanllwni, Llanfihangel-rhos-y-corn and Llanybyther Mountains are adjoining areas of ancient common land. Owned by the Crown Estates, they form an area of common land managed by local grazers which is also open access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

This action plan has been produced through :-

- Developing a website for the purpose of circulating information on the CMI, and the local action plan process.
- Publicising the website and action plan through articles in the local press.
- Circulating copies of the action plan template produced by the CMI to community groups.
- Setting up online surveys on access, tourism, and community initiatives.
- One to one interviews.
- Drawing on existing strategies and agreements already in place with community groups.
- Gathering information from outside agencies on existing projects which are compatible with the CMI.

A copy of the draft action plan was published on the website for comment. The action plan is under constant review with the latest version always being available on the [www.cambrian-sw.co.uk](http://www.cambrian-sw.co.uk) website.

## General

### Strengths

The area has a long heritage of being dependant on the attractiveness of the landscape to visitors. The area was a Royal hunting forest, and some of the settlements were established over 700 years ago to provide accommodation for visitors to the forest.

Carmarthenshire County Council has supported a number of regeneration programs for the area linked to the attractiveness of the open access land for tourism and recreation. These regeneration programs have been highly successful. The Brechfa Forest Tourism Cluster Group is working in partnership with the Tourism Department of the County Council Research to quantify the value of tourist accommodation within the economic area designated by the CMI, early estimates suggest that there are over 300 tourism accommodation providers in the area. A program of research is being developed with Trinity St David University to research the value to the local economy of local products, (both food and crafts) and methods of increasing sales of both to tourists. Recent research undertaken by Carmarthenshire Riders values the equestrian economy in the area at £29.5 million per year.

The Rights of Way improvement plan for Carmarthenshire recommends making the most of open access land within the county to compensate for the limited number of bridleways in the county and a long backlog of obstructions on the Rights of Way network. Brechfa Forest and the mountains are the largest of the open access areas in Carmarthenshire. There are car parks and picnic sites around both. Unfortunately due to the many access points from each community, no mechanism of recording the number of day visitors is in place.

The Forestry Commission has a long track record of working closely with the local community on supporting recreational use of the forest.

A joint concordat between Forestry Commission Wales and The British Horse Society Cymru 2008 exists to strengthen the collaboration between Forestry Commission Wales and The British Horse Society Cymru in promoting responsible equestrian access to Welsh Assembly Government Woodlands. It also aims to provide opportunities for horse riding and pony trekking businesses, particularly in remote rural areas, in support of the Visit Wales (formerly the Wales Tourist Board) Horse Riding Tourism Strategy “Saddling up for Success”, and in conjunction with other recreational and commercial developments and tourism strategies.

The Llanfihangel-rhos-y-corn/Brechfa Community Association and Brechfa Mountain Bike Club came up with the idea of mountain bike trails which was carried forward by the Forestry Commission in Brechfa East as part of the Carmarthenshire County Councils regeneration strategy for the area.

The common land is owned by a combination of the Crown Estate and grazers. Over 140 properties have grazing rights on the common land. The grazers own the top soil of the common land and are very keen to manage the land sensitively and in a manner which supports the local economy.

The tourism department of Carmarthenshire County Council already promote the forest and mountain as tourist attractions based on the open access status and attractive landscape.

### Weaknesses

The area has been designated as a strategic search area under TAN8 for wind farm developments. Three planning applications for wind farms in the forest and mountain with a total of 61 turbines each 147 meters high are being prepared by two separate wind farm companies. Further planning applications for additional wind farms in the forest and on the common land are expected if planning permission is granted for any of the first three planning applications.

## Opportunities

The communities encircling Brechfa Forest and the common land have a strong community spirit. The vision presented by the action plan template by the CMI is a very close match to the vision for the area which the communities and outside agencies have been working to achieve over the last decade.

Voluntary groups representing Rights of Way users and tourism businesses in the area are already working with outside agencies, departments within Carmarthenshire County Council and community groups to develop the potential recreation and tourism potential for the area.

The area falls within the area of economic impact of the Brecon Beacons National Park and agreements have already been reached to research opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration projects.

There are already strong links between the area and the tourism and outdoor recreation departments of Trinity St David University. These will be strengthened by joint projects identified in this action plan.

The community is very keen to support any projects which record the value of the open access land to the local economy, and a high level of response will be expected from local businesses to research on this topic.

Projects involving low capital investment, but with the potential to increase the economic benefit from the tourism and recreational use of the open access land will be particularly interesting to local businesses.

## Threats

Local business owners and individuals in the area are sceptical of the wisdom of investing further in businesses in the area. They have been encouraged to invest in developing businesses linked to the attractive landscape as a result of previous initiatives. There is a strong level of resentment that the agencies which encouraged people to invest in these businesses are not taking an active stand to support the community in opposing inappropriate planning applications.

The most common issue that has been raised when asking input into this action plan has been :- What are the CMI going to do about the wind farms?

Local businesses, individuals and groups representing users of the open access land have all stated that responding to the wind farm planning applications has to be the highest priority for voluntary effort.

## ACTIONS

1. Information for this area within the CMI will be published on our website Cambrian-SW
2. A Facebook group has been set up for this area.
3. We will set up a community liaison group.
  - The size of the area makes it difficult to ensure good communication between all involved in the action plan without setting up a formal structure.
  - Each community council in the area have been asked to nominate a community liaison representative for their area. The role of the community liaison representative will be to publicise in their own area the opportunities available through the CMI, report on the progress on the action plan, and gather information on proposed projects or opportunities or issues in their area.
  - Each organisation representing a group of users of the open access land has also been asked to provide a representative with similar responsibilities.

- It is intended that the community representatives will meet every two months initially, but will be in regular communication via email.
- 4. We will arrange for a training session for community groups with staff within Carmarthenshire County Council to ensure they have the right structures in place to access grant funding once it becomes available.

**Community: Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni, Llanfihangel-rhos-y-corn and Llanybyther Mountains - Action List Summary.**

Activity Theme and ref no.	Current Situation	Future Actions	Year	Years	Years	Outcomes & Progress Indicators	Notional costs	Funding sources
			1	2 - 3	3-5			
<b>Environment</b>								
1.1	Three ramblers clubs who regularly hold walks in the area and inform CCC of obstructions. The Bridleways Group also report obstructions on Bridleways and Byways.	Work with Carmarthenshire CC to record and resolve obstructions on Rights of Way within the 10km area of economic benefit.	X			List of problems and schedule of work.	0	
1.2	Published circular walks in forest which start from car parks.	Develop and publish circular walks which start from communities.		X		Circular walk published from each community	0	
1.3	Road based cycling events held in the area	Contact organisers and assist in increasing publicity	X			Include in PR schedule	0	
1.4	Mountain bike trails	Improve to increase income for community.		X	X	Construction work completed.	?	Grant apply
1.5	Limited number of bridleways and off road routes to reach forest or mountain	Undertake Lost Ways project	X	X		Claims submitted, routes added to definitive map, usable on ground.	£500	Grant apply
1.6	No promoted circular rides for horses.	Way mark routes within the forest and publish ride leaflet	X	X		Leaflet published	?	RoW/ Tourism department
1.7	Majority of RoW do not meet usability standards	Identify key routes used by tourists to travel to open access land from accommodation, improve way marking and remove obstructions.	X	X	X	Tourist accommodation providers confirm no problems.	0	
1.8	Limited promotion of forest garden	Produce interpretation and promote forest garden		X		Forest garden promoted as tourist attraction.	?	Forestry C / Tourism dept.
1.9	No interpretation of common land.	Produce interpretation leaflets and panels for common land		X		Leaflets printed, panels installed.	?	
1.10	No display boards in forestry car	Install display boards in car parks which	X			Boards installed		

	parks.	provide interpretation and advertising space for local businesses.					?	Tourism dept. grant
1.11	Victoria Park, Brechfa, currently planning for next 5 years.	Replace play equipment, renew fencing,, create circular path, benches, rubbish bins, BBQ area and enclosed ball playing area.	X	X	X	Refurbishment completed.	?	?
1.12	<i>Forest School play days in forest. Held during school holidays. Since August 2010</i>	Increase publicity, and number of places. Resolve funding for disadvantaged families.	X	X	X	TBA	TBA	TBA
1.13	<i>Grazers manage the common land.</i>	The development of a plan to improve habitats and re-introduce bird species.	X	X	X	<i>Milestones to be included in the plan.</i>	TBA	TBA
1.14	No information for families on activities in the area.	Produce a set of leaflets for family groups on nature walks and low cost outdoor activities.	X			Production of the leaflets	TBA	Tourism dept.
1.15	Some aspects of the MTB trails require improvements.	Move sections of the trails off bridleways. Make additional parking facilities available . for equestrians Move the start of the Raven trail to Brechfa Village.	X	X		<i>Trail re-routed.</i> <i>Parking available for horse boxes</i> <i>Raven trail start in Village.</i>	TBA	TBA
<b>Tourism</b>								
2.1	No figures available for value of tourism to the area.	Calculate the current value of tourism and then monitor each year to identify outcome of other projects.	X	X	X	<i>Publication of the results.</i>	TBA	<i>Effort provided by Trinity Univ.</i>
2.2	No information on occupancy trends.	<i>Survey tourism businesses to identify periods of availability and marketing campaigns.</i>	X			<i>Publish results.</i>	0	<i>Voluntary effort.</i>
2.3	No information on current market	<i>Survey current visitors, what draws them to the area?</i>	X	X		<i>Publish results</i>	0	<i>Voluntary effort</i>
2.4	Marketing of the area principally undertaken by local businesses.	<i>Identify existing research into what attracts walkers, cyclists and riders to an area. Survey through national user organisations to expand on this info.</i>		X		<i>Publish results - by-product is publicity for area.</i>	0	<i>Voluntary effort.</i>
2.5	Limited PR on area.	<i>Tap into PR networks by Visit Wales</i>	X	X	X	<i>Increase in articles in press</i>	0	<i>PR staff of TPMW,</i>

						<i>on area.</i>		SWW, CCC
2.6	No library of photographs for PR	<i>Have professional quality photos and videos produced from view points.</i>	X			<i>Library available.</i>	TBA	
2.7	Tourism cluster group website maintained by volunteers.	<i>Arrange training for businesses on setting up a Web4-u profile, Purchase template.</i>	X			<i>Courses held.</i>	£800	TBA
2.8	No marketing material for area.	<i>Produce poster/picture of area with ideas for activities and viewpoints.</i>	X			<i>Copy available for tourism businesses and pubs.</i>	TBA	Tourism dept.
2.9	User organisations host walking, cycling, riding events.	<i>Provide promotion and support to increase links to local community and size of events/area events promoted in.</i>	X	X	X	<i>Increased program of events.</i>	0	PR resource.
2.10	No geocaches in area.	<i>Create geocache trail</i>		X		<i>Trail added to geocache websites.</i>	TBA	TBA
2.11	No orienteering course in forest	<i>Create orienteering course</i>		X		<i>Orienteering course created suitable for all user groups.</i>	TBA	PR resource.
2.12	No promotion of forest garden to visitors to National Botanical Gardens.	<i>Promote Forest Garden to draw visitors to nearby National Botanical Gardens of Wales to CM.</i>		X		<i>Leaflets at gardens, info on CCC tourism website.</i>	0	TBA
2.13	Tourists call in at local churches when passing.	<i>Develop leaflet on sites of faith/worship and circular walks linking them.</i>	X			<i>Leaflet published.</i>	TBA	PR resource.
2.14	Interpretation of Forest Jill has been produced	Include information in PR program	X			<i>PR schedule to be agreed with PR agency's</i>	0	Volunteers
2.15	No other local history interpretation in place.	Request assistance from local historians to research local legends and historical events.	X			<i>Depends on outcome of research</i>	0	Trinity.
2.16	Not currently working with the Trinity St David's university Creativity and Innovation in Micro Enterprises.	Publicise the CIME scheme.	X			<i>Pass out information via community liaison rep.</i>	0	
<b>Local Produce</b> <i>(food and crafts)</i>								
3.1	<i>Brechfa Community Stores has been running for 8 years.</i>	TBA		X		<i>Publish results</i>	0	



3.2	<i>Holiday Cottage guests have food orders delivered by Tesco or Coop.</i>	<i>Trial a method for advance orders for local produce.</i>		X			TBA	<i>Part of research effort provided by Trinity St David</i>
3.3	<i>No formal program of encouraging joint projects between tourism/local producers.</i>	<i>Research the views of local businesses on the support they would like</i>	X					
3.4	<i>The tourism cluster group use the Web4-u package using one of the standard templates.</i>	<i>To include local producers on the website a custom template will be needed and training for producers.</i>	X			<i>Producers added to website.</i>	TBA	?
3.5	<i>Mutual support network between producers</i>	<i>Inclusion in CISNET Creative Industries Support Network.</i>	X			TBA	0	<i>Project run by Trinity St David University.</i>
3.6	<i>Small number of specialist livestock producers.</i>	<i>Hold an event for farmers and catering businesses on the legal / health and safety requirements of increasing local produce sales.</i>		X		<i>Event held.</i>		<i>Farming Connect?</i>
<b>Communities</b>								
4.1	<i>The county council propose closing public toilets unless communities arrange to take over the costs of running them.</i>	<i>The community councils are in negotiation with the county council to do this.</i>	X			<i>Agreement reached to keep toilets open</i>	TBA	?
4.2	<i>Brechfa Church hall has solar panels installed</i>	<i>Plans to increase insulation, install ground source heat pumps, toilets and refit kitchen.</i>	X			<i>Renovation completed</i>	TBA	?
4.3	<i>Forest Arms, Brechfa has been closed for some years.</i>	<i>The community wish to take it over as a community pub combined with mountain bike trail centre.</i>		X		<i>Agreement with estate in place.</i>	TBA	?
4.4	<i>No local cycle hire company</i>	<i>Create a network of cycle hire points.</i>		X		<i>Locate cycle hire company to work in partnership with.</i>	TBA	?
4.5	<i>The Rhydcymerau village school will close this summer.</i>	<i>Turn building into a community enterprise centre.</i>		X		TBA	TBA	?
4.6	<i>Monthly farmers market held in LLansawel</i>	<i>Increase to fortnightly with wider range of stalls</i>	X			TBA	TBA	?
		<i>Create cycle hire point.</i>						

4.7	Abergorlech no bike hire			X		TBA	TBA	?
4.8	Pre national grid each communities electricity generated by hydro generators.	<i>Locate original sites, and research re installing.</i>		X		<i>Sites located, feasibility study carried out.</i>	TBA	?
4.9	No music festival	<i>Create Dinefwr Music Festival</i>		X		TBA		
4.10	Glyn Cothi annual festive now principally craft fair.	<i>Return to marque hosting performances of Welsh music, seminars, workshops and dympath.</i>		X		TBA	TBA	
4.11	No facilities at Abernant	<i>Set up mobile catering and info centre.</i>		X		TBA	TBA	
4.12	No support to promote local wood crafts.	<i>Create a forestry demonstration area and wood crafts demos.</i>	X	X		TBA	TBA	
4.13	Members of the community working self build renewables projects.	<i>Brechfa forest east. Work with the Centre for Alternative Technology to establish a centre.</i>		X		TBA	TBA	
4.14	Not involved in Hercules project	<i>Include in Heritage and Culture for Learning, Empowerment and Sustainable Tourism project.</i>	X			TBA	0	Trinity St David University
4.15	Not involved in ACTION project	<i>Include in Active Communities project.</i>	X			TBA	0	Trinity St David University.

## **Activity Theme Environment**

Many of the actions on access and tourism are interrelated. For the purposes of this action plan, projects linked to recreation by local people which may also benefit businesses are in the Environment section and projects specifically targeted at tourists are in the economic section.

### **Current Situation**

#### **Walkers**

There are three separate ramblers clubs within the area, each regularly hold walks. There are also a range of published circular walks by both the rights of way department of the county council and the Forestry Commission.

#### **Cyclists**

Road based cycling events are held regularly in the area. The development of 4 mountain bike trails within Brechfa Forest has been funded as a regeneration project for the area. A total of £504,000 has been spent on the trails, each of which is at a different level of difficulty.

#### **Equestrians**

This is the largest area of off road riding in Carmarthenshire. Within Carmarthenshire 93.8% of the public Right of Way network are merely footpaths, available only to walkers. The Rights of Way improvement plan for Carmarthenshire published in 2007 also acknowledges that there has been a build up of obstruction problems on the ground. The performance Indicator Survey Results carried out by the National Assembly for Wales identified that only 30.6% of the Rights of Way network in Carmarthenshire was both open and signposted from the road.

Where there is no safe off road riding, horse riders are forced to use sealed roads and routes where vehicles can create serious danger. As a result it has been Carmarthenshire County council's policy, with the agreement of the Forestry Commission and grazers to designate this area as a centre of excellence for equestrian use. In addition to local riders and individuals who travel to the area to ride in the forest or on the mountain, the bridlemay association, equestrian endurance clubs and the pony club all regularly hold events in the area. Local charities hold pleasure rides in the area to raise funds. Carmarthenshire Riders and the commoners association have agreements in place to work together for mutual benefit. The concordat between Forestry Commission Wales and The British Horse Society Cymru 2008 encourages bona fide horse riding associations to source funds, in conjunction with Forestry Commission Wales, for the development and extension of access for horse riding in Welsh Assembly Government Woodlands.

The mountain provides long tracks of old turf, and some of the old forest tracks are also soft surfaces. These provide not only a pleasant resource for leisure riders but also an important training facility for racehorses. A number of racing stables bring their horses to the area for training each day. A fondly remembered winner of the Gold Cup trained on the turf of Llanllwni Mountain and the number of horse trainers using the mountain on a daily basis, as well as the number of horses exercised here each day has increased as a result of the promotion of horse racing in Carmarthenshire following the opening of Ffos Las Racecourse.

The policies of Carmarthenshire County Council to develop this area as a centre of excellence for equestrian use are one of the reasons that the level of skilled trades in this area is higher than other areas. The encouragement to local landowners to diversify into equestrian services has brought with it the benefits of the wide range of skilled employment involved in caring for horses. The equestrian industry is recognised as the second largest industry in rural areas. The costs of keeping a horse cover accommodation, feed, vet, farrier or hoof care professional, dental care, alternative health care, worming, clipping, tuition, bedding, tack,

rugs, riders equipment, labour, repairs, maintenance, field management. There have been four separate bodies of research into the annual costs of horse ownership. The most recent research identified the average cost of caring for a horse (excluding transport) as £4,752. This figure is consistent with the average from all 4 published researches, taking into account the age of each record and the impact of inflation. The requirement for all horses to have a passport means that there is now a database showing the number of horses owned in any given area of the country. The British Horse Society is one of the organisations able to request this information. In October 2009, the number of horses in this area is 6,222, just under a third of all of the horses in Carmarthenshire. **Hence we can calculate the value of the equestrian use of this area to the local economy at £29.5 million per year.** As horse owners tend to use local services usually within 20 miles of where they live, much of that expenditure benefits the local economy.

The area is within easy reach of a large number of towns and cities. There are good public transport links, both by bus and train to Carmarthen. There is a regular bus service between Carmarthen and the settlements along the A485. There is a bus service for those wishing to spend a day in the area via the B4310.

There are car parks and picnic sites around the area, there is a network of country lanes running across the common land linking settlements. These enable those who are less mobile and families with young children to enjoy the experience of being on a mountain without the physical barrier of a long steep walk up a mountain.

### **Strengths**

The area currently scores well with the Hall tests (Motivations for visiting the area) identified by the Welsh Tourist Board.

It is a large area, so there is still a sense of peace and quiet even when a number of people, or events are being held in the area.

It is easy to reach the area from the M4 corridor, or Mid Wales.

Many of the local residents have chosen to live here because of the peace and quiet, the landscape and outdoor recreation opportunities and they are happy to encourage visitors to enjoy doing the same.

### **Weaknesses**

Three planning applications for wind farms are currently being prepared by two developers. One is for 28 turbines to be built on, or immediately adjacent to the forest tracks in Brechfa Forest West. The Forestry Commission, Carmarthenshire County Council and the local community have an agreement in place that this area of the forest is designated as the area which would be retained for activities where peace and quiet is particularly valued.

This second area where a planning application for a 12 turbine wind farm on the forest tracks has been submitted to Carmarthenshire County Council includes the mountain bike and equestrian trails area. The current application includes building turbines on the mountain bike trails and bridleways.

The third planning application is for a 21 turbine wind farm on Llanllwni Mountain.

In all three cases if granted planning permission, the developers plan to close the open access land to the public for up to 2 years whilst constructing the turbines.

### **Opportunities**

There is an existing network of voluntary groups representing the interests of walkers, cyclists and horse riders who use the open access land.

A number of local farmers have diversified into holiday accommodation or livery yards and are therefore supportive of the RoW network.

A number of the people with grazing rights on the common land run holiday accommodation businesses.

## **Threats**

The projects listed have been proposed by user groups, who rely on volunteers. Safeguarding the facilities currently available is a higher priority for these groups.

## **Future Actions**

### ***Development of interpretive material around ROW in your area;***

1.2 Volunteers have offered to produce a number of circular walks linking the communities to the open access land and each other. These can be published via Walking World website. The use of this site saves the cost of printing leaflets, visitors to the area can print off their own copy of the walk before visiting the area. Alternatively the community stores have internet connection and a printer, and could print off a copy of any walk for sale to those without internet access. Costs - The site provides free membership to the author of each walk. It also pays a small fee to the author of each walk for each copy downloaded.

The tourism department of Carmarthenshire County Council will publish circular walks on their website for download.

Discuss with the Forestry Commission and Rights of Way department installing way markers for circular routes within the forest.

1.6 The tourism department and Carmarthenshire Riders are working together to publish circular trails which can be used by riders. The first stage of this project will be to publish the routes on their website, but leaflets will also be printed in the future. A grant application is being prepared to assist with way marking.

### ***Improvements to ROW infrastructure;***

An online survey has been produced to gather information from residents on obstructions and areas they would recommend to visitors. Further promotion of the existence of this survey will be done over the course of the next year. - Costs -The survey has been produced by a volunteer, and the licence for a year's use of the survey software was purchased as part of the process of developing this action plan.

Arrange a meeting between the representatives of the user groups and the Carmarthenshire County Council Rights of Way team to develop a plan of response to the survey and information from their own research. - Costs. The outcome of this meeting will include developing a plan to funding of the work identified.

1.5 Volunteers within Carmarthenshire Riders have offered to undertake a 'Lost Ways' project in the area. Researching historical routes which exist in law but are missing or are misrecorded in the county council records and then submitting a claim to the county council to update the county council records. Such projects are particularly helpful in identifying additional routes for riders and cyclists which are currently only footpaths as well as increasing the number of routes available. There will be costs involved in this project for the volunteers. The local archives do not hold a full set of key historical maps. Copies will need to be purchased from the public archives in Kew and deposited in the Carmarthenshire archives. The list of maps needs, and therefore the costs of this project need to be gathered. The method of submitting these claims and processing them are set out in RoW legislation.

1.7 Encourage members of the local tourist cluster group to identify key Rights of Way frequently used by their guests and discuss with the landowners and Rights of Way team improving the number and location of

markers along those routes to ensure that guests can find their way even if their map reading skills are limited. In the past the Rights of Way team have been able to supply additional RoW markers for free. Improving the visitors experience is beneficial for accommodation providers and is good for neighbour relations.

***Improved interpretation at sites of environmental interest;***

1.8 There is an area known as the forest garden within Brechfa Forest. This is an area which was a research project by the Forestry Commission growing different varieties of trees to test methods of responding to climate change. The area is included in a booklet of walks in the forest, but with improved interpretation this resource could become a tourist attraction in its own right. The forest garden is only about 10 miles away from the National Botanical Gardens of Wales who have expressed interest in such a project.

1.9 The grazer's society would like help in producing interpretation of the common land, display boards at the car parks, leaflets, and information to publish on websites.

1.10 It was agreed at a meeting between the tourism cluster group and CCC tourism department to install display boards in the forestry and mountain car parks which contain local information, including space for advertising by local businesses.

***Improvements to green spaces such as local parks, recreation facilities and local habitats;***

1.11 The Victoria Park committee run the Brechfa village park. They are currently costing their aims for the next 5 years for inclusion in this action plan. New equipment, renew fence, create circular path, install benches and rubbish bins, BBQ area at the top of the site and an enclosed ball playing area on the old coits ground.

1.12 Forest School – Play days in the Forest

For children aged 8 – 14 yrs living within reach of Brechfa Forest. Building on 10 years experience of developing forest schools and outdoor play provision, Play Days in the Forest has been set up in the Brechfa Forest to provide an outdoor play environment that is appropriately managed in order to introduce children to the delights of adventurous play, to encourage and support access to a fantastic local resource and to provide a foundation of play skills that can be transferred into any setting.

Following a very successful pilot in August 2010 funded by WAG Rural Development Program we now have funding from Awards for All to enable us to guarantee a minimum number of sessions in the coming year, so that families can plan their holiday periods in advance and get used to the idea that there will be a reliable, exciting adventure play scheme available at half terms and holidays. The scheme will always need some financial support in order not to exclude anybody.

Our two volunteers from last year have gone on to train as Forest School practitioners (OCN Level 3 leader and level2 assistant), and one of our new volunteers this year has already asked to be trained.

The play days will encourage up to 200 family visits into the Brechfa Forest in 2011 and will give children and young people the knowledge and skills to return with their families to enjoy the forest at any time. There is a growing body of research that supports the view that children who have meaningful experiences in nature during their childhood, grow up to care for the natural world.

This project encompasses a wide rural area of farmland and small isolated villages plus the hub towns of Lampeter, Llandysul, Llandeilo and Carmarthen.

1.13 The Grazer's committee have plans for supporting the reintroduction of black grouse to the common land.

1.14 The Brechfa tourism cluster group have agreed with CCC tourism department and the outdoor education department to develop leaflets for family groups on nature walks and family activities. The focus of the leaflets will be low cost or free activities in the outdoors designed to encourage people to engage with the nature and the landscape. The work to develop the leaflets will be undertaken as an assignment by students on degree courses with guidance by the tourism department.

1.15 Some aspects of the design of the mountain bike trails are causing, or have the potential to cause, conflict with other users of the forest. The mountain bike trails include some sections built on bridleways. This is a breach of the concordat with equestrian users who are required to stay off the mountain bike trails. It has the potential to cause conflict if we wish to hold MTB events held using the trails. The legislation on bridleways requires cyclists to give way to riders. The MTB trails could be re-routed onto forestry tracks.

Carmarthenshire Riders have requested that the number of car parks for the forest are expanded and layout changed as was agreed as part of the original plans for the mountain bike trails. The car parks which were commonly used by horse riders visiting the area are now shared with mountain bikers. There often isn't space for the larger vehicles in the car parks, or they get blocked in by cars that do not leave space for larger vehicles to turn. We would like to see a system with parking on one side of the track, and the other side left clear for vehicles to pass to a turning circle. With the layout of the car park clearly marked out. Layouts for the car parks where vehicles and horse trailers have to reverse in the car park should be avoided as they tend to be linked with vehicles getting blocked in.

The plans for the mountain bike trails agreed with the community saw the trails starting from the villages, rather than from a car park a mile outside the village. The trail from Abergorlech does start from the village and therefore provides income for the village pub and allows the cyclists to use the public toilets in the village. The Raven trail does not start in Brechfa so the community get no benefit from day trippers the community would like to see the trail modified to link with the village.

## **Activity Theme Economic - Tourism and Access**

Research on tourism covers both day trips and overnight stays. In an area where there is a strong overlap between recreation for local residents as well as visitors the boundaries can become blurred. Therefore in this section of the action plan we have focused on the economic benefits of the open access land.

### **Current Situation**

#### **Strengths**

The majority of local tourism businesses are family run businesses, some involve farm diversification based on the initial research we believe there are over 200 accommodation providers in the area of economic impact.

The area also boasts the only hotel in Wales in the Sunday Times list of the top ten independent hotels in the UK in 2010.

The southern communities of the area fall within the 'Brecon Beacons economic area'. It is recognised that the tourism industry in the area close to but just outside the boundary of a national park benefits economically from its proximity to the national park.

One of the advantages of Llanllwni Mountain is easy access, unlike the nearby mountains in the BBNP. The country lanes linking communities around Llanllwni Mountain mean that those not physically capable of climbing a mountain, including families with small children or more mature walkers can still enjoy the experience of spending time on a mountain by driving to car parks near the high points of the mountain.

Carmarthenshire County Council and the Welsh Assembly have supported regeneration projects in the area. There is a wide range of accommodation types, Hotels, boutique and traditional B&Bs, holiday cottages, bunkhouses and group accommodation. Some tourism businesses within the area have received grant funding from Carmarthenshire County Council regeneration schemes to support job creation. The process of applying for a grant included providing business plans which identified the mountain and forest as the major tourist attractions in the area and were audited by WAG before EU funds were allocated.

#### **Weaknesses**

The three planning applications for wind farms have been having a negative impact on the local economy for the last two years. Research shows that a substantial percentage of people are unwilling to consider purchasing a house within 5 miles of a wind farm and that this drop in house sales starts from the time when planning applications are being prepared. Existing local tourism and equestrian businesses near the open access land who have been trying to sell since the planning application process started have been reporting difficulties in finding buyers. Other businesses which were interested in investing in expansion have decided to put their plans on hold in case planning permission is granted for the wind farms

If planning permission for the wind farms is granted, no compensation will be paid to the businesses which will no longer be viable. Research in other countries identifies that wind farms cause 'migration' with tourists for whom the landscape is important migrating to holiday in areas without wind farms

This threat is not limited to this area of the Cambrian Mountain region. The proposed turbines are 147 meters tall and if planning permission is granted they will be sited on the ridge of the mountain range. They will have visual impact on a large area of south west Wales including other areas of the Cambrian Mountain region. The Welsh Tourist Board commissioned independent research into the impact of wind farms on tourism. Tourists visiting the Cambrian Mountain region were interviewed - 266 completed interviews with an average length of 40 to 50 minutes. When shown images of wind turbines with a visual impact level equivalent to the visual impact in Llandovery and Lampeter of the proposed turbines in Brechfa Forest or on Llanllwni Mountain, 65% of respondents reacted negatively, 35% were positive or neutral.

#### **Opportunities**



This region falls within the area covered by three organisations responsible for PR for the tourism industry. Tourism Partnership Mid Wales, South West Wales Tourism and Carmarthenshire County Council tourism department all have staff responsible for promoting the area through PR. The selection of this area as a test bed area provides potential for increased PR for the region. Even the process of researching what is attractive to visitors will provide opportunities to raise the profile of the area.

The existing range of events held on the forest or mountain could be expanded as part of the promotion of the area to visitors.

In the past community groups have provided volunteers for larger commercial events held in the forest in return for a donation to the community funds.

Trinity St David University are willing to undertake research into the success of projects undertaken by this action plan.

## **Threats**

We understand that the contract between the Forestry Commission and the wind farm developers require the Forestry Commission to seek the permission of wind farm developers for any improvements or events to be held in the forest.

We have been informed by the local Forestry Commission staff that they have no funds available to support this project.

We understand that the contract between the developers and Forestry Commission allow the developers to reapply for planning permission when a planning application is unsuccessful. We have been unable to ascertain if there is a time limit in the contracts or a limit on the number of applications.

## **Future Actions**

2.1 Calculate the current value of tourism in the area.

- Identify the post codes covering the area of economic impact.
- Research the businesses supplying services to day visitors
- Research the current value of local produce sold to tourists.

The process of calculating the value of tourism to the economy used by the Welsh Assembly and Carmarthenshire County Council consists of three elements. The value of overnight stays, the value of day visitors and the value to the local economy of local produce and crafts. The company which produces the reports on overnight accommodation for Carmarthenshire County Council can do a report for this area, if provided with the post codes which match the area of economic impact.

The process of calculating value of day trips to the area would depend on accurate capture of the number of people spending time in the forest or on the mountain. However, this is not practical due to the number of access points. The alternative option is a research program gathering the views of the businesses. The University of Wales, Trinity St David is currently costing a 5 year work experience program for their tourism students to research the current value of local produce sold to day visitors and gather information from businesses on projects they would like to see to support or increase the value of this market as well as monitoring the success of these projects each year.

Information on the progress of the action plan including the results of the research and methods used will be published, in sufficient detail so that other communities can copy our successes, on our Cambrian-SW website.

- 2.2 Survey the tourism businesses within the economic area, to identify dead spots in year, marketing campaigns they would like to have taken forward and how they would like to improve contacts with local producers.
- 2.3 Survey of visitors to area, what do they enjoy. It is easy for us to make assumptions on what attracts people to the area based on our interests.
- 2.4 Survey through national user organisations and specialist press the key markets of – walkers, cyclists and riders about what draws them to an area and what facilities they would like to have available. This survey will act as both a marketing campaign as well as gathering information.
- 2.5 Visit Wales work with a network of PR companies. Research shows that editorial content is more trusted and cost effective than advertising. While it may be practical for volunteers to submit stories to the PR consultants, arranging itineraries for visiting journalists would require dedicated support.
- 2.6 One of the principle features of this area are the views and landscapes. We will need a library of professional quality high resolution photographs and videos for use on websites and press releases. The tourism department has recently taken promotional photographs of the area.
- 2.7 The existing website for the tourism cluster group is developed using Web4-U, an award winning system specifically designed for the tourism industry. The same system is used by Llandoverly and the tourism association in the Brecon Beacons. It is free for small businesses to enter and update their information. There is an annual fee to create a website with the package. To incorporate businesses that do not have their own websites, minibus companies, pubs, village stores we would need to provide training for these businesses. Web4-U charge £300 per day for this course.
- 2.8 Produce a poster which can be distributed to accommodation providers and pubs showing the area, with ideas for activities and viewpoints.
- 2.9 Support the user organisations to promote the existing events they hold in the forest and mountain. The promotion to include not only help to advertise the events, but also articles about the events and linking community groups willing to supply volunteers for a donation or provide catering or photography to raise funds for community projects. Over the course of the 5 years increase the size of events by :- working with the user groups, working with local branches of national charities to put on events which attract people from a larger area, working with professional events organisers who arrange events for national charities.
- 2.10 Set up a geocache trail.
- 2.11 Set up an orienteering course.
- 2.12 There is an area within Brechfa Forest known as the Forest Garden. This is an area which was used by the research department of the Forestry Commission to test the growth of alternative tree species on preparation for climate change. These tests are now over, and the area has been returned to the local office to manage. With increased interpretation and promotion, this area could be developed as an attraction to help raise the profile of the Cambrian Mountains to visitors to the National Botanical Gardens of Wales and Aberglasny as the sites are only a few miles apart.
- 2.13 Develop a leaflet showing all sites of interest to ‘faith’ tourists. The local churches are interested in setting up a program of open days with walks between churches, this will need promotion.

2.14 During the WWII the forestry work was undertaken by a group of women known as Forest Jills. There are projects across Wales to celebrate and record the life of Land Army Girls, but little has been done to remember the small group of women who laboured in the forests of Wales.

2.15 Request assistance from local historians to research key legends and historical events as the start of a project to develop these into themed events.

2.16 To work with Trinity St David university on their creativity and innovation in micro enterprises project.

### **CIME – Creativity and Innovation in Micro Enterprises**

#### **Aim**

- Cultivating creativity, the micro-enterprise sector
- Provide businesses with new approaches to strategy development

#### **Activity**

- Development of Innovation Network and Creativity Workshops

[www.cimeproject.com](http://www.cimeproject.com)

## **Local Produce**

### **Current Situation**

There is a monthly farmers market in the area. Also the Brechfa community stores stocks some local produce and some products from local craftsmen. There is an annual craft fair held in the church hall each September.

### **Strengths**

There are no supermarkets in the area.

We have the support of a range of academic organisations who are willing to undertake research projects gathering information from existing producers on their ideas for increasing sales and monitoring the results of these projects.

### **Weaknesses**

Many people are working on a tight budget so products will be price sensitive.

### **Opportunities**

The PR companies representing Wales both within the UK and overseas all say that the important issues are an authentic experience and opportunity to meet local residents.

One of the nearby towns, Llandeilo, is a slow food town providing retail additional retail opportunities for local produce.

### **Threats**

We understand that we would need to develop additional markets for products such as Cambrian Lamb before local farmers can be admitted to the scheme as it is fully subscribed on the present contracts.

### **Actions**

3.2 Many of the self catering properties find their guests use the Tesco or Co-operative home delivery service. We will trial a method for accommodation businesses to pass on advance orders from holiday makers of local produce.

3.3 Research will be undertaken into the views of the local producers and tourism businesses on what support they need to develop this sector off the economy. The tourism cluster group, Trinity St David University tourism department and the tourism department are currently putting together a 5 year program for undertaking this research.

3.4 We are using the Web4-U tourism community system for the tourism website for the area. This is the same system being used by Llandovery tourism group and the tourism association covering the Beacon Beacons. It is free for businesses to set up and maintain information on their services which can be pulled in to be a page on a website developed through this system. Funding will be sought for a training day for local craftsmen and food producers on making the most of this system. Also training on taking digital photos to showcase their products on the web.

3.5 To work with Trinity St David University on their creative industries support network.

## **CISNET – Creative Industries Support Network**

### **Aim**

To support creative industries develop/explore new products and knowledge transfer between universities, creative industry SMEs and the heritage sector.

Activity

Networks, workshops, trade fairs and knowledge transfer opportunities and virtual city.

3.6 Organise an event for farmers to supply information on the legal requirements when supplying produce direct. Set up a network to link pubs accommodation providers and restaurants with local producers.

## Activity Theme Community

### Current Situation

Traditionally while communities have worked with their immediate neighbours on projects benefiting them all, but there is no formal structure for joint projects. This is a large area covered by 6 community councils.

The communities have been losing facilities, post offices have been closed, public toilets are threatened with closure as are village schools. The communities have already started to take over running key facilities for themselves. There is a community store in Brechfa, and discussions have started with the County Council to take over the management of the public toilets..

### Future Actions

4.1 CCC have proposed closing public toilets in each of the communities unless the community councils agree to take over paying for the maintenance contracts, rates, insurance, etc. The community councils are currently negotiating deals.

4.2 Brechfa church hall has recently had solar panels installed. Plans are being developed for additional renovation. Increasing insulation, installing ground source heat pumps for under floor heating, installing toilets, refitting the kitchen.

4.3 When proposals were initially raised for mountain bike trails in the forest the Brechfa community identified this as an opportunity to combine the need for a visitor centre with reinvigorating the village pub – the Forest Arms. The Forest Arms closed 4 years ago, and is in a poor state of repair. The Community Council has recently contacted the owner to express an interest in exploring the support from Pub is the Hub to run the pub as a community venture. The community association recently voted to set up a sub committee to undertake further research into the possibilities for a 'Pub is the Hub' project. Ideas include development of a pub/café/visitor centre, with meeting room, facilities for local craft producers to sell their wares, toilets and showers and bike wash down facilities for mountain bikers. It is important to the community that this facility is created in Brechfa village and that the employment opportunities created remain in the area. Support for the mountain bike trails was provided by the community on the basis that they would be used to support the local economy.

4.4 Create a network of cycle hire points, so that bikes can be hired from one location and dropped off at another. A luggage transfer scheme between accommodation providers for touring walkers, cyclists and riders could be incorporated.

4.5 Rhydcymerau. The village school will close at the end of summer term 2011, the possibility of turning it into a community enterprise centre with :-

- Continental Cafe bar with performance area.
- Community shop in conjunction with Sainsbury's / Pioneer
- Community Area for Classes, Welsh / Yoga etc.
- Cycle Hire Centre
- Objectives tourism centre, Young Music Talent, Community Activities.

Work required. Turn playgrounds into parking area, internal division of school and portacabin classrooms for activities.

4.6 Llansawel - Identify possibility of markets and fairs using village Hall and existing parking area. During 'summer' fortnightly markets and fairs. Market stalls in existing car park, with space left for disabled

vehicles. Hall used for fair and country craft displays. Themes bee-keeping, wood turning, antiques, sports clubs, local music, equine, poultry and game fair etc.

Work required. Identify parking areas, school playground, other open spaces. Provisions of refrigerated stall(s) Cycle Hire Point

Objectives Tourism, local produce, local craft businesses, Leisure.

Create a picnic and mobile catering area. Ideally situated close to the start of the Abergorlech to Rhydcymerau Cycle, Bridle and Ramblers Trails. Cycle hire point.

4.8 A number of the communities had hydro generators providing electricity before the national grid came to the area. There is interest in locating the sites of these generators and investigating which could be used to generate electricity to feed into the national grid.

Dinefwr Music Festival Identify site and promote local band and talent festival.

4.10 Rebuild the Glyn Cothi annual festival, now only an autumn craft fair in Brechfa, it used to include a marque hosting performances of Welsh music and entertainment, seminars, workshops and art exhibition and dymyth.

4.11 Rhydcymerau Group. Abernant Car Park Mobile catering and information centre. Cycle Hire Point.

4.12 Rhydcymerau Group. Create a forestry demonstration area and wood crafts / local furniture demos.

4.13 Rhydcymerau Group. Brechfa forest east. Work with the Centre for Alternative Technology to establish a centre on the mountain.

4.14 To work with Trinity St David University on implemented in the area their current Hercules project.

## **HERCULES - Heritage and Culture for Learning, Empowerment and Sustainable Tourism**

Aim:

- to pilot an innovative education and community development approach to empower communities to develop sustainable cultural tourism products built on a 'Sense of Place'. Combining training and community capacity building with a cross-border regional social network to create new sustainable tourism business opportunities and jobs.

Activity:

- Conduct sense of place research in cross-border region to identify assets and growth areas
- Pilot an online sense of place and associated media training programme targeted at communities, tourism related SME's and entrepreneurs
- Create a sustainable online sense of place social network
- Unite community/ SME tourism/ public sectors within the project and social network

1. To work with Trinity St David university on implementing in the area their Action project

## **ACTION – Active Communities**

Aim

- The project will work with community and social enterprises to investigate community/ social enterprise success and produce template business concepts to enable replication in the cross-border region.

Activity

- comparative analysis between both regions, identify community and social enterprises or entrepreneurs who show potential to become 'social franchisors or franchisees', create, trial and review 'social franchise' formats.

[www.action-project.com](http://www.action-project.com)