



Creating a 'Wild Pathways' strategy A policy brief for Local Nature Partnerships

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Creating a 'Wild Pathways' strategy

A policy briefing for Local Nature Partnerships

Summary

- Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) need to collaborate with multiple partners to achieve the LNP Cymru vision of a nature recovery network.
- Recent research in Wales (Woodcock, 2022) identified multiple constraints on the capacity of networks to include diverse partners, typical of the early experiences of LNPs:
 - Strategic – limited knowledge-sharing across specialist organisations,
 - Governance – restrictive hierarchical management practices,
 - Operational – a lack of managers' time to work with other partners,
 - Community – a lack of skills to work with the local community.
- The research project created a specific strategy, called 'Wild Pathways' to enhance network partners' capacity to collaborate, by:
 - Combining the key strategies (principles they use to design projects) of multiple partner organisations,
 - Motivating mutual accountability,
 - Creating mutual benefits,
 - Building community assets.
- This policy briefing explains how the LNP can use the Wild Pathways strategy to extend the partners working for nature recovery by creating links with programmes for ecological resilience, public health and community development.
- An accompanying policy briefing 'Crafting a collaborative LNP culture' explains how action research (a participatory form of learning through action) can help the LNP to broaden the network to other partners.

Collaboration and the LNP Cymru vision

LNP Cymru aims to achieve a Wales rich in nature through a network of Local Nature Partnerships. Collaboration with both environmental and ‘non-nature’ partners is essential for the LNP vision to:

- Engage people, communities, businesses and decision-makers,
- Achieve both practical action and strategic planning,
- Create a healthy, resilient and nature-rich Wales.

Collaboration challenges for the LNP

Studies of cross-sector networks have shown that they need to create a joint decision-making culture which enhances partners’ capacity for collaboration at multiple levels:

- **Strategic** – structures to enhance mutual understanding and creativity,
- **Governance** – processes to support joint oversight of performance,
- **Operational** – practices to facilitate joint planning and delivery of programmes,
- **Community**¹ – skills to involve communities.

Recent research in Wales (Woodcock, 2022) identified constraints at each of these levels on the capacity of multi-partner networks to agree joint plans for action.

Strategic – organisations’ specialisation reduces understanding of each other’s priorities and strategies (the principles they use to design work programmes).

Governance – hierarchical (top-down) processes and resource dependencies exclude some people from decision-making and give others more influence.

Operational – a lack of time allocated to partnership working and accountability to a ‘lead’ partner’s aims restrict opportunities to co-design projects.

Community – increased professionalisation of roles reduces volunteers, communities and organisations’ confidence, skills and assets to work together.

¹ ‘Community’ is used to refer to a geographical location at various scales or an interest group.

Action Research findings

The research project established two temporary multi-organisation networks to find out whether and how partners could reduce the constraints on collaboration.

The networks engaged in action research (a participatory form of learning through joint action) and produced two main findings which can help the LNP to develop joint plans for action with diverse partners.

Finding 1: Using action research methods can create a collaborative network culture.

Finding 2: Creating a 'Wild Pathways' strategy can help environmental networks to extend their partnership to include public health, local government and community groups.

The first finding is explained in the policy briefing, 'Crafting a collaborative LNP culture'.

This policy briefing focusses on the second finding, to explain how the LNP can create a 'Wild Pathways' strategy to change the constraints on collaboration.

A Wild Pathways strategy for the LNP

The LNP can include partners from public health, local government and community groups by creating a Wild Pathways strategy that is specific to the LNP's local context, its needs and assets.

The Wild Pathways strategy changes multiple constraints on collaboration:

Strategic – Wild Pathways combines the key strategies of multiple partner organisations in one strategy for joint action.

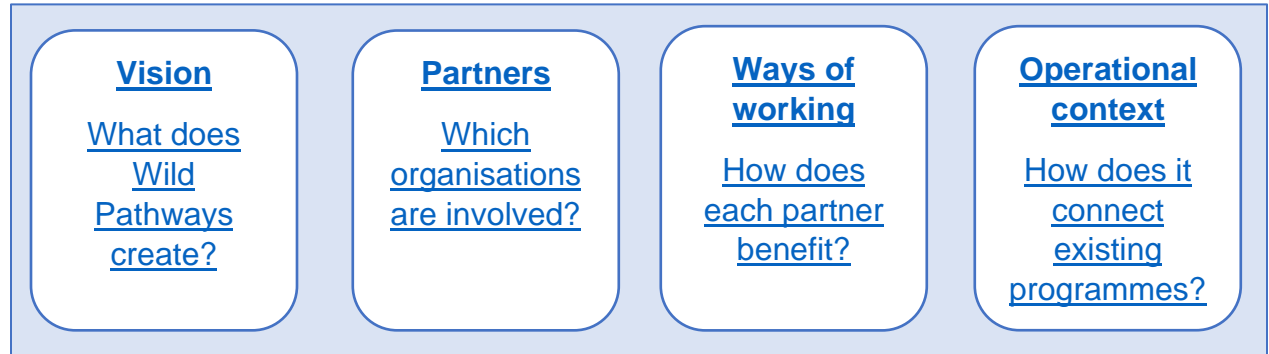
Governance – the joint strategy means each partner benefits from including other partners' concerns, motivating shared accountability.

Operational – the strategy connects existing work programmes to create mutual benefits to the partners from working together.

Community – involving communities builds additional skills and assets to sustain the long-term benefits to each partner organisation and communities.

How does a Wild Pathways strategy work?

This section sets out briefly how the LNP can create a Wild Pathways strategy. LNP Coordinators can support each other in this process in their shared learning 'check-ins'.



Vision



The aim of Wild Pathways is to create a network of pathways that:

- improves ecological connectivity,
- enhances doorstep activities for public health and well-being,
- builds community assets.



Each Wild Pathway network will differ according to the specific place-based ecological, health, and community needs and assets of the LNP's area.

Partners

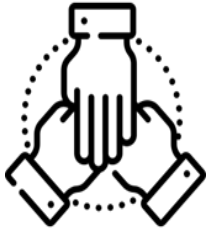
The main partners involved in creating the Wild Pathways strategy were:



Wildlife Trust	County Voluntary Council
Public Health	County Council
Primary-care Cluster	Natural Resources Wales
Green health community group	



Each LNP can include a similar mix of local partners by building on the connections of its existing members and sharing LNP Coordinators' knowledge.



The Wild Pathways strategy includes each partner's strategic objectives (the principles underlying their ways of working). So, each partner benefits from the strategy. And each partner **also** contributes to the other partners' priorities.

The ways of working in Wild Pathways are:

Ecological connectivity

Wild Pathways link local natural habitats to create landscape scale connections for ecological resilience.

Doorstep activities

Wild Pathways create opportunities for physical and social activities near people's homes, to enhance public health and well-being.

Assets-based development

Wild Pathways involve communities in identifying, creating and monitoring connections between local places, to build up skills and assets in the community.

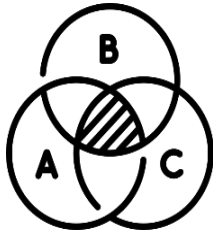


Combining these strategic objectives creates **reciprocal relationships** between LNP members, so each partner benefits by contributing to the other's aims:

A focus on **ecological** connectivity enhances the **well-being** value of doorstep activities (Wildlife Trusts Wales, no date).

A focus on **doorstep** activities enhances the **skills and physical assets** in the community (Lunt, Bainbridge and Rippon, 2021).

A focus on developing **community assets** enhances the sustainability of **ecological interventions** by creating a positive impact of social systems on ecological resilience (Latham *et al.*, 2013).



Partner organisations create a network of Wild Pathways by connecting projects in existing work programmes.

They connect projects by adapting them to include the 3 strategic principles and by taking a co-productive approach (working with local communities at all stages of Wild Pathways).

The research partner organisations identified multiple work programmes based on each of the strategic principles which could work together, for example:

Ecological connectivity e.g., Wildlife Trusts' 'Living Landscapes'.

Doorstep activity e.g., Primary-care and Public Health 'Exercise by Referral'.

Assets-based development e.g., County Councils' 'Active Travel Plans'.



To connect their projects and adapt them to include all 3 ways of working, LNP partners need to involve the local community, to identify, create and maintain a network of Wild Pathways.



The LNP can connect to a local 'Social Prescribing' scheme to create an assets-based approach to involve communities in a Wild Pathways strategy.

Social Prescribing enables primary-care professionals to refer people with non-medical needs to a range of local, non-clinical services (Primary Care Hub, 2018).

Social Prescribing often centres on a 'link worker' who can discuss what matters to the individual and connect them to local groups and services. In an assets-based scheme, the link worker also supports the individual to contribute to local groups, so creating further community assets of skills and amenities.



Combining their strategic principles and working in co-production with communities creates **shared responsibility** amongst the LNP's organisations, instead of accountability to a lead partner's priorities.

About the research

The author is a long-standing member of the LNP Cymru Advisory Board. She is currently an associate researcher with the leading local government research institution, Inlogov at University of Birmingham. This briefing is based on her doctoral thesis for which she undertook an extended piece of action research between 2016 and 2019 with collaborating research partners Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board and North Wales Wildlife Trust. The latter contributed towards research expenses. The research underwent rigorous peer review as the basis for her PhD in Sociology and Social Policy at Bangor University. The full research is available at:

[https://research.bangor.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/crosssector-collaboration-for-wales-national-wellbeing\(a935f539-869b-4be5-a41b-38f91ee738d5\).html](https://research.bangor.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/crosssector-collaboration-for-wales-national-wellbeing(a935f539-869b-4be5-a41b-38f91ee738d5).html)

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