

# The Penpont Project.





# The Penpont Project is the UK's first intergenerational nature recovery project of its kind, located on the Penpont estate within the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park.

## Forrest Hogg

Project Manager  
Penpont Estate

---

Launched in 2019 on the 2,000-acre Penpont estate in the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, the Penpont Project is an intergenerational nature recovery project bringing together young people, farmers, foresters, landowners, artists and ecologists to revive biodiversity, Welsh cultural heritage and to connect local people with nature, with all the benefits this brings.

In Wales, the 2019 State of Nature report found that 1 in 6 species are at risk of extinction. Whilst conservation action is vital today, we need to ensure our solutions that are long-term, inclusive and strengthen diversity at all levels. This is why we are working across generations at Penpont.

At the heart of this approach is the recognition that, as poet Gary Snyder wrote, “the wild is not about pristine landscapes. Instead, it’s about landscapes that are rich and diverse enough to be interesting for everybody, human and non-human alike.” In other words, we recognise that land and waterscapes are deeply invested with cultural meaning, and as such, empowered and inclusive social processes are central to achieving lasting ecological regeneration and resilience. Through this work, we are creating new opportunities for young people and the local community to revive natural processes.

## A Shared Challenge

We are living in one of the most biodiversity depleted lands in the world, and climate breakdown is beginning to have serious impacts on all living beings. We have seen unprecedented floods devastate our homes, tree diseases wipe out our woodlands and extreme summer droughts impact our farming.

We are also amidst a social crisis. Our children are spending less and less time in nature, and it is becoming more widely recognised how disconnection from nature negatively impacts young people’s learning, behaviour, health and wellbeing. Unless we change this, they are less likely to fight to protect our natural heritage as adults.

The Penpont Project seeks to address these interconnected issues through an intergenerational approach to restoring land back to health whilst providing numerous opportunities for young people, and community members, to connect with nature and take meaningful action.

## Collaborating for Success

Success comes through working together and co-creating a landscape rich in habitat and biodiversity and where our cultural heritage is valued and preserved. The project’s vision encompasses the needs and ambitions of a wide range of actors – from young people visiting the site regularly to the farmers and community living and working at Penpont day-to-day.

The agroecological movement offers a powerful roadmap to a land-sharing model where nature restoration and farming work together. Through restoring our hedgerows, increasing tree cover and habitat availability and adopting regenerative agricultural and conservation practices to regenerate land and waterscapes, provide habitats to struggling and providing communities with a range of co-benefits. Wales is also leading the way with innovative legislation, namely the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, we hope to embody this through our work.





## Our Project

We have formed a co-management council whom are deciding on how to regenerate over 450 acres of land using a blend of practices including conservation grazing, regenerative agricultural practices, agroforestry, habitat restoration and species support actions. We have conducted a wide range of ecological baseline surveys with a range of specialists and local ecologists in order to measure our success.

The Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority has been a key supporter to the project so far. We are members of the Tree Mapping Scheme, and have collaborated with the Park's Wardens and local community members to plant over 3,000 trees, restore hedgerows and sow wildflower seeds to targeted areas. We hope to work even closer with Park and other local groups as we continue to implement our action plan,

# Future Bannau, Future Hope.

This plan represents an ambitious vision for an inclusive and ecologically rich landscape that values our traditions and ways of life. We hope our project can contribute to this transformation and be a part of a growing community working together to meet the most urgent challenge of our times.





# Not just for the Authority.

THE NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY is the organisation that is given statutory responsibility to protect the area of the National Park and implement the Purposes and Duty, but we are not alone in this endeavor.

All public bodies which act within the National Park, must in accordance with the law, have due regard to National Park Purposes and Duty in carrying out their functions both within the National Park and where this activity may impact the National Park. This requirement is set out in Section 62(2) of the Environment Act 1995. It means that the requirement to protect the assets of the National Park, in the public interest, is a shared responsibility and one that we collectively deliver.

Those public bodies which share this obligation, we often refer to as Section 62(2) bodies (referencing the clause of the Act that places this duty upon them), some of which are listed below:-

- Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
- Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW)
- Town and Community Councils within and bordering the Park
- Powys County Council
- Monmouthshire County Council
- Carmarthenshire County Council
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- Torfaen County Borough Council
- Rhondda Cynnon Taff County Borough Council
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- Herefordshire County Council
- Powys Public Service Board
- Carmarthenshire Public Service Board
- Gwent Public Service Board
- South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee
- South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee
- Mid Wales Corporate Joint Committee
- Constituent Health Boards
- Constituent Police Services
- Constituent Fire and Rescue Services
- Any Office of the Crown
- Any statutory undertaker



## A postcard from the future.

Its the 26th of August 2047, and I've cycled here, to the Park. I enjoyed the active feeling this exercise gave me, as I tackled the hills. It was great, as I passed many other cyclists, enjoying the fresh air and exercise.

As I listen, I hear birds calling, the wind gently rustling the leaves of the trees, scuttling as small mammals run through the undergrowth. A curlew calls in the distance. Pollinators hum around quietly going about their business.

It smells fresh, the air smells clean, wild flowers from the nearby meadows and hedgerows are going to seed, but there is still a hint of their scent. Soon, once the flowers have set seed, the smell of freshly cut grass will fill the air.

I stand still, the wind gently moves my hair, the warmth of late summer sunlight warms my skin, it is not too hot, just warm enough.

I notice an acorn on the ground. A bit early perhaps, but it symbolizes regeneration and sustainability to me. It is nice to think that this acorn could grow into an ancient tree, many years into the future, providing habitat for so many species.

I feel calm, relaxed, free, yet I feel motivated by the atmosphere. The wildlife encourages me. It is inspirational to see this landscape, where people and nature, from all backgrounds collaborate and co-exist in harmony and respect.

I write to you, my past self, with these things I have learned...

Nature has the ability to recover, we just need to work together, explain the importance of collaboration. Don't be afraid to act, to think big. Nature will recover, the work will pay off. You can do this, see everything as an opportunity to improve the planet and this National Park. Good luck!

**Ellen**

Defynnog

Age (in 2022) 15



# A Post Card from 2047

A Vision By  
**Gavin Hogg**

Penpont Estate



I rode my electric bicycle. The National Park now has progressive vehicle-free zones, with some roads now used as cycle paths. The old railway line through the park has been restored and electric trams serve the local area, and connect the Park to the outside world.

As a resident I like to cycle, it gives me a sense of freedom; I can go at my own pace, stop whenever I want to. I love to feel the air on my skin, and the wind in my face, and the sun on my skin. The old Celtic Blessing has never been more apt!

I hear silence. I hear the voice of nature. I hear birds calling and singing. A golden eagle shrieks high in the sky above me. Once common throughout Wales in the 1800s, they were successfully reintroduced into the park 10 years ago. I hear the wind rustling through the leaves of the trees. There are so many more trees now, and with climate change many different species have been successfully introduced to replace the native stock that tragically suffered from the tree pandemics of the 2020's.

I stop on a river crossing. It runs clear and clean, and the sound of rippling water fills my ears, I hear a large swoosh in the water and notice an otter playing in the shallows with her cub. Water birds sing from the undergrowth and the banks, a Reed Warbler flits through the rushes in the nearby bog. Since the traffic has been controlled the aural soundscape has become so enlivened with the sounds of nature, it is wonderful to now experience this.

There is a scent of late summer floral blossom in the air, The hedges are full of meadowsweet, honeysuckle and mallow in blossom. Changes in agricultural methods have resulted in the hedgerows becoming much wilder and more abundant with flowers, berries and insect life. The heather on the moor above me is beginning to flower. Bees are out collecting late season nectar.

The late season hay is being cut in the wild flower meadows, and there is a wonderful rich smell of drying herbage that permeates the late evening air as the sun turns the landscape gold. The electric powered tractor silently turns the hay, sending insects and dust up into the surroundings, reflecting gold in the evening light. Lime trees and sweet chestnut in savannah style field plantings, are in flower and their canopies are humming with life and the air around them is sweet with the smell of pollen

I strip off and find a swimming hole in the River Usk, the water is beautifully clean, and cool for the time of year. The fresh water invigorates my skin and as I lie on a shingle bank half floating half suspended, I gaze up at the blue sky above me. I am totally at peace; nothing can beat this sensation. The Usk has recently been declared the cleanest river in Wales, and a colony of fresh water mussels have successfully reinhabited the upper reaches of the river. It is abundant with life and I am feeling lucky that I can share this with all the other creatures that now can safely call this their home.

As I leave the water something catches my eye, I reach down and pick up a small elongated cylindrical object, I'm pretty sure that it is some kind of scat or spraint. I check on my phone and it confirms my thought that this is Beaver droppings. Over the last 10 years Beavers have made the upper reaches of the Usk their home. Being nocturnal animals, they have been hard to spot, but this evidence now confirms their presence in this region. A group of land managers and farmers have been working together on a landscape scale rewinding project of the upper Usk valleys and it is a joy to start to see the results of this work.

I have lived in the park for over 50 years now, and have worked on the land for all of that time,

dedicating my work to conservation of the land, woodlands and organic agriculture. I am happy to see that at long last the efforts of the farming community are starting to reverse the trend of biodiversity loss. A renewed mindset has come into being and nature has at last been valued; we no longer talk of 'GDP' and refer to Natural capital growth. It has taken decades to move away from unsustainable practices, and the new educational hubs and colleges in the park are providing exciting opportunities into the latest growing generation of land workers and managers.

It brings joy to my heart that I am able to witness this change, and leave behind me an environment that has strong beating heart, one that provides prosperity to all that call this place home.

**'Yes, it was worth it.'**

Everyone's combined efforts have created a rich and diverse mosaic of habitats which now supports a rich array of flora and fauna, far richer than 2022.

Farming systems have radically changed, working together in cluster groups, sharing ideas, equipment and workloads. The Welsh Government have finally found the right balance, supporting agriculture to both produce nutrient dense food and a diverse range of environmental benefits.

In some areas, old field systems have been restored, with messy hedgerows that have become havens for wildlife. In other areas, enclosed land has been opened up into rich extensive wildlands, where livestock are monitored via local area networks and GPS tracking devices. Hedges have become wild havens, spilling over creating shade and habitat. Animals graze in savannah style systems and are monitored for their impact on the land at all times of the year. Wildflower meadows are now abundant throughout the park, and many more trees have been planted, occupying about 30% of the land now.

There are many more ponds and wetlands and this has radically changed the landscape, adding so many benefits to all.



Human communities within the park, are now much more self-sufficient, and local food now supplies 80% of the community's needs. New schools and community centers have been built, binding rural people together, and providing opportunities for the younger generations.

Making the changes has been immensely challenging for everyone. Aided by some dynamic leaders and strong community bonds, a new way of life was developed. It has created a much healthier and vibrant environment for Life, for decades to come.

**'Yes, it was worth it.'**







# A post card from 2047

**Sally Davies, Tirmawr Farm**

I am now 83 years old and still walking! I have lived and worked in the park all of my life. I am taking my daily walk to try and keep fit and active. I have my youngest grandchild with me. I show her the hole in the tree made by a green woodpecker, the fox runs and badger setts. My daughter told me to take her with me because she needs some fresh air but I know it's just to keep an eye on me to make sure I don't fall.

Its autumn and the trees are going into their dormancy. I can hear the River Usk roaring through the valley after yet another heavy spell of rain. In the distance I can hear a chainsaw. My husband, daughter and grandson are laying one of our hedges...passing the ancient skill on to the next generation.

After the storm there is calm. The sun is shining down on my face, there is a brilliance of colour from the autumnal leaves.

I pick up a chewed hazelnut shell. Red squirrels have returned to the area. I show my granddaughter where the squirrel had nibbled the shell, removing the nut.

I think of the past...

I shouldn't have worried so much. I was so scared that the park was merely a preservation society. Its role being to stop any development in the park, allowing only the suited and booted to buy property. I was afraid that the Park would become full of soulless dormitory villages, but I was wrong.

Our farm business is a beef, sheep and eco-tourism business, which continues to thrive today. We are grateful for the BBNP's new approach which has enabled us to build a modular energy-efficient eco-home within the farmstead. We were eligible as we could prove that we make our living principally from the land, which incidentally carries over to other land-based sectors too. This means that my husband and I can still live on the farm where we have lived most

of our lives and we are able to pass our knowledge on and support the future generations. I'm now able to watch the grand children while my kids tend to lambing, shearing and guiding school groups around the land. My grandchildren are also now able to live on the farmstead, which is of vital support to me too, keeping an eye on, fetching and carrying, enabling me to still be independent and useful.

When this area was designated a National Park my father-in-law went to Ystradfellte School, my mother-in-law went to Trallong school. In later years my husband went to Crai school and I went to Libanus School - all of these schools were long gone by 2022. Young people were migrating out of the area because of lack of jobs and housing. Now, in the year 2047, these trends have been reversed; not only is the wildlife flourishing but so are our communities, with different generations living alongside each other, learning from each other and supporting each other.

Against the odds, the park managed to get the balance right. They didn't merely preserve a landscape - a photo in time - they have enabled it to become a living, breathing and dynamic place, with vibrant communities of all ages, and all species.