

IS THERE A NEED FOR A POWYS WOOD WEB?



Summary

Fuelwood suppliers, woodland owners, stove suppliers and fuelwood buyers were surveyed to find out if there is a need for Powys Wood Web to find reliable sources of fuelwood in Powys. During this research, it was found that there is a demand for a Powys Wood Web/directory from fuelwood customers, fuelwood suppliers, stove suppliers and some woodland owners.

However it has been difficult to identify an organisation who would host and manage a Powys wood website so that it would be properly promoted and maintained. Another alternative option would be to use an existing website such as Woodfuel Wales and use additional funding to publicise this website especially for Powys fuelwood suppliers as well as encourage small scale fuelwood suppliers to join an existing website by reducing the annual membership only to use the website.

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Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
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1. INTRODUCTION

The overall objective of the research funded by Glasu was to:-

- Assess the demand for a community based Powys Woodweb from consumers and suppliers
- Assess existing supply of fuelwood in Powys
- Work out the costings for a Powys Woodweb
- Identify additional sources of funding

The rationale for the research was to improve the supply and demand for wood based products in Powys especially fuelwood with the increasing purchase of woodstoves and the rising demand for locally sourced, relatively dry firewood. If individuals could get good quality fuelwood and other wood products locally, it would reduce transport costs and increase the sustainability in the county. This research compliments the leaflets “Wood Fuels in Wales” and “How to Buy Wood Fuels” which Glasu has already produced.

Questionnaires were put out at three shows to assess the demand for fuelwood. The research also visited five woodland owners, ten fuelwood producers and three stove suppliers. In addition, emails were sent to three Better Woods for Wales management planners. Two website designers were visited and a possible website was discussed. In addition, other interested parties were contacted including the project officer for Coed Cymraeg in North East Wales.

Before the project was properly launched, a site meeting was arranged between Laura Shewring of Glasu and Frankie Owen, who represents Fuelwood Wales. Frankie discussed the earmarked Fuelwood Wales funding for over £300,000 for a project officer and assistant to set up standards for fuelwood and an updated Woodfuel Wales website.

2a. DEMAND FOR FUELWOOD - FUELWOOD USERS

Questionnaires were asked at three shows – the Smallholders’ show in Builth Wells in May, the Green Homes exhibition in Builth Wells in June and the Rhaeadr Green Fair in July. Forty questionnaires were filled in and all the individuals questioned had woodstoves in their houses. Almost everyone who were asked at the shows used wood for heating. Most people used logs though a few used briquettes especially for starting fires and one couple used wood pellets for heating their house. Of the people questioned, only three had major problems with sourcing a reliable quantity of dry fuelwood at the present time. Most people had their wood from the local farmer, woodyard or local fuelwood supplier.

However people asked were concerned about the dryness of the wood. Some of the fuelwood delivered was not dry but individuals were happy to continue to season the wood themselves but only if there was a sufficient storage area around their house.

The wood delivered was generally in a pickup, trailer load or dumpy bag and the price was for a load but not per tonne or calorific value. One person questioned wrote “Always concerned about quantity/cost ratio = An unregulated market”. Most fuelwood was delivered from within a ten mile radius though one person from near

Rhayader was so concerned about getting dry fuelwood, she purchased it from near Hereford which is 45 miles to the east.

Some people thought fuelwood was an inexpensive option for heating but it was more labour intensive. Most people preferred the quality of heat from fuelwood and were concerned about helping the environment. However there was a general lack of awareness about the sustainability of their woodfuel. There also was a need for ongoing education about how to buy woodfuel eg the time of year, where the wood comes from, what type of wood is in the load, how dry is the wood.

2b. DEMAND FOR FUELWOOD – FUELWOOD SUPPLIERS

Ten fuelwood suppliers were interviewed in North and Mid Powys. All the people interviewed sold logs split to size and three sold kindling. One had a successful business selling logstacks. Three of the ten people also sold wood in nets to garages and local coal merchants. The standard of the supplier was generally considered to be good.

For three people, it was a full time business – the others were also tree felling contractors, farmers and experienced woodsmen on estates. All the fuelwood suppliers would benefit from phone calls about a possible processing and marketing grant especially for upgrading machinery and general marketing advice. One person owns his own wood, two are estate woodsmen and the thinnings are part of the woodland management programme, two are felling contractors who have purchased thinnings as a standing sale and the rest have bought in loads of mixed hardwood thinnings mainly from large private forestry companies to split and store. Fuelwood contractors are receiving little wood at present from smaller farm woods and all are concerned about a reliable, future supply of wood.

The majority sold mainly hardwood logs and most explained to their customers about the proportions of the wood if there was softwood and this was usually reflected in the price. There is evidence that a few may not have explained if poorer quality broadleaves for burning eg alder, poplar were in the load. Customers locally are considered well informed about identifying logs especially beech and ash and fuelwood suppliers ran the risk of losing if he misinforms them about the composition of the fuelwood. All logs were split to 18' lengths or less depending on the size of the woodburner. Suppliers asked the customer before providing the product.

The annual volume and method of delivery is shown below. Most suppliers deliver fuelwood free of charge. Three suppliers knew the moisture content of the wood and this was used as a good selling point. One supplier had a moisture meter and two used sample logs to measure the moisture content.

Fuelwood suppliers

| Fuelwood Supplier | Method of delivery | Sale of timber annually | Moisture content | Hardwoods/ softwoods | Approximate weight/volume sold | Approximate cost |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Trailer | 100m ³ | 25% moisture content | Mixture | 0.33m ³ | £135/m ³ |
| 2 | Trailer | 50m ³ | 17% for softwoods & 19% for hardwoods | Beech & oak | 0.2m ³ | £170/m ³ |
| 3 | Pick up load | 80-100 tons | One year drying | Mixture | Pickup load <1 ton | £55-70 for trailer load depending on % softwood |
| 4 | Tipping trailer | 60-80 tons | Split immediately & seasoned for one summer | 90% beech, oak, ash | Slightly less than 1 ton | £60-70/trailer |
| 5 | Dumpy bag | 150 tons | Split & seasoned in agricultural shed | Mainly ash, oak | 0.33 ton | £90/ton (sold to one agent) |
| 6 | Trailer | 700 tons | Stored in round, split & sold | Beech, ash | Roughly 1 ton | £70 + VAT |
| 7 | Trailer | 60 tons | Split & seasoned | Mixture | Slightly less than 1 ton | £55 per trailer load |
| 8 | Dumpy bag | 700 tons | Stored in round & split before sale | Beech & ash | 0.33 ton | £44/dumpy bag inc. delivery |
| 9 | Dumpy bag | 200 tons | Split & seasoned in agricultural shed | Beech & oak | 0.33 ton | £35/dumpy bag inc. delivery |
| 10 | Trailer | 100 tons+ | Below 25% | Both | Around ½ ton | £45 |

Fuelwood suppliers put in a lot of time and effort to produce good quality logs. Several suppliers are purchasing new logsplitters to reduce the handling and increase efficiency. Several are very reluctant to keep their logs for more than a year as capital is being tied up and very few other businesses keep their products for two years.

Although it was not specified, there may have been a problem with over demand of fuelwood from customers. As a result of having an insufficient quantity of dry fuelwood, contractors may have been selling on wet wood especially in the New Year.

Advertising is mostly by word by mouth. People will always recommend a good product to their friends and neighbours. One fuelwood supplier was providing fuelwood for most of two villages very close to him in North Powys. Some put up an advert in the local newsagent or supermarket and a very good place is the local stove supplier. One fuelwood supplier put an advert in his box scheme which is a complimentary form of advertising. One fuelwood supplier who was in the Woodfuel Wales said he had had no enquiries from the WFW website. Two fuelwood suppliers had websites for businesses. The main form of business communication for all the fuelwood suppliers was mobile phone.

2c. DEMAND FOR FUELWOOD – STOVE SUPPLIERS

Two stove suppliers were visited in Mid Wales and one was just over the border in Shropshire. All three suppliers had good sales of wood stoves in the last two years and were pleased with the turn over. All three emphasised to customers that the wood needed to be dry to burn ideally at less than 20% moisture but this is very difficult to achieve. In a typical winter, small stoves can burn 3-4 tons annually, larger stoves can burn 5-6 tons annually and central heating boilers can burn 10-15 tons annually.

The approach about sourcing fuelwood varied for all three stove suppliers. One provided a list of fuelwood suppliers but had not updated the list for the past two years. One provided his own fuelwood however he said that selling wood had caused him far more problems than selling stoves. The third had adverts in the shop. They had major concerns about the dryness of the fuelwood being sold which resulted in customers complaining about their wood stoves especially when their stove chimneys were damaged. They were very anxious to have a Powys Wood Web up and running as soon as possible and to have the fuelwood market better regulated. They also wanted to support local businesses rather than getting in fuelwood from Anglesey or Hereford.

2d. DEMAND FOR OTHER TIMBER PRODUCTS

The idea for a Powys Wood Web is to set up a local sourced, community website which is sustainable. Although the main emphasis for this research was fuelwood (logs and kindling, there is also a need to source briquettes and wood pellets. Other products mentioned were logstacks and mobile sawmilling. Contractors who have

log splitters often have mobile sawmills as well. It could be a useful way to advert for small quantities of non standard timber material.

3a. SUPPLY OF FUELWOOD (WOODLAND OWNERS)

Five woodland owners were visited during the Glasu survey in North Powys. Four woodland owners were in existing Better Woods for Wales management plans and were actively managing their woods. The fifth was not interested at present in managing his wood and used the wood as a cattle shelter. The area of the woods varied from 8 hectares to 150 hectares and the total area of woodland was approximately 380 hectares. All the owners were interested in producing fuelwood for financial returns and the majority were also interested in improving the quality of their remaining timber. The present annually volume from the five woods was around 100m³. One woodland owner said that he had been offered £25/ton at roadside for hardwood thinnings but other people have been offered up to £30/ton. The price of fuelwood at roadside is increasing but at the same time, it is also expensive to get a contractor into the wood to start the thinning.

The incentives for woodland owners to manage their woods is through the present Better Woods for Wales grant scheme where there is a grant for management of uneconomic broadleaf woods. The deterrents from managing their woods is that it can be difficult to find a reliable felling contractor with small machinery to access the farm woods, there is difficulty extracting timber along fields, the price/ton at roadside, the time available for the owner and three out of five woodland owners interviewed were over 55.

All the owners thought that setting up a Powys Wood Web was a good idea so that there would be better contact with fuelwood contractors and it would help with improving communication between buyers and selling of fuelwood. However none of the woodland owners use the website on a regular basis and therefore would not use a Powys Wood Web. One owner asked for a paper copy of the Wood Web if it does come online.

4a. POWYS WOOD WEB – IS THIS A GOOD IDEA?

Management planners have contact with woodland owners by filling in Better Woods for Wales grant schemes and organising sales of timber. Three management planners were emailed and asked if there was a need for a Powys Wood Web.

Andrew Bronwin has an established forestry management business in Mid Wales and at present is chair of the Welsh Forest Business Partnership which now manages Woodfuel Wales. He was very concerned that Powys Woodweb would conflict with the Woodfuel Wales website which has received over £300,000 from the Welsh Assembly Government to improve the quality and supply of fuelwood into the domestic market. He considered that too many websites would result in confusion and duplication.

Coed Cymru was generally supportive of the concept though would have preferred the grant to be used to set up a directory for suppliers. The Coed Cymru officer said that they would be a shortage of hardwood thinnings this winter because of a lack of thinning operations. He thought that one company should set up and co-ordinate the website.

A third management planner manages a number of woods in North and Mid Wales and he generally considered that websites are now working well and that the site needs to be easily picked up by search engines. It would be useful for owners and management planners to have a site for small volumes of non stand material as well as fuelwood. However it is very important that the website uses well established, quality fuelwood suppliers as he has concerns about the increase in unreliable and poor supplies of wet wood as demand for fuelwood increases.

Rod Waterfield runs Bodfari Charcoal in Llandelga, North East Wales and is a passionate supporter of sustainable fuelwood. He was a founder member of the Welsh Timber Forum. He was the project officer for Coed Cymraeg which was set up for nine months in 2007 but struggled to get further funding. His funders were Cadwyn Clwyd, a Rural Development Agency, LEADER+, Flintshire and Denbighshire County Council. He emphasised that it was now very important to use one organisation so that there is a national database of woodfuel suppliers.

Patrick Green is the Assistant Operation Management for Grants and Licences at the Forestry Commission. He was very concerned about the maintenance of a Powys Wood web and which organisation would run it. He said that websites run by organisations are not generally as effective as websites run by commercial businesses.

5. EXAMPLES OF WOOD BASED WEBSITES

5a. WOODNET IN EAST SUSSEX

Woodnet is the website for Woodlots which is a free directory with listings of wood and timber products in South East England. Woodnet and woodlots aim to help people involved with growing or working with wood to find buyers in the region. It also advertised woodland events and courses. The magazine is distributed to 1,900 homes, businesses and organisations in the South East with a direct interest in sustainable forestry. There is a rate for sellers to advertise. Sponsors for the website include Forestry Commission, Arts Council, Ernest Cook Foundation, High Weald AONB sustainable development fund, Leader+, SEEDA and East and West Sussex County Council.

The web site is visually pleased and actively managed – however it can be difficult to navigate and there is no search for the location of the product. The web site address is <http://www.wood.netmx.co.uk>

5b. Coetir Clwyd

This website was set up around four years but has not been updated since 2008. It is managed by Cadwyn Clwyd which is a Rural Development Agency. Cadwyn Clwyd had originally used a paper based directory but it always needed to be updated. The original aim was to support businesses in Denbighshire and Flintshire but contacts in Monmouthshire have been added as a result of the Woodland Revival project.

The website was supported by LEADER+. It originally cost around £5,000 but increased to around £12,000-15,000 because it had to be translated into Italian and German as it was part of a European partnership. There were also costs for hosting the website. Certain businesses eg furniture makers were known to benefit from the website and there was a good living gallery which the project officer was enjoyed. However there was an insufficient bid for marketing and PR for the website. The website is relatively easy to use but there is no search for the location of the product. There are 74 wood related keywords for searching. The web site address is <http://www.coetirclwyd.co.uk>.

5c. Woodfuel Wales

Woodfuel Wales was launched as a result of the increasing demand for fuelwood at the instigation of the woodfuel businesses in Wales and the borders. Woodfuel Wales is now managed by the umbrella organisation – the Wales Forest Business Partnership. Woodfuel Wales is a membership organisation and its members advertise on the website. However smaller fuelwood suppliers ie individuals who supply fuelwood as part of their business are generally not members and therefore do not advertise on the website. This results in the website being of limited benefit for locating local sources of fuelwood. However the website is informative about fuelwoods. It is funded by Dulas, National Energy Foundation, the Wales biomass centre, the Welsh Timber Forum and the Wales Biomass Energy centre. The web site address is <http://www.woodfuelwales.org.uk/>

6. POWYS WOOD WEB

6a. Type of website

One option for a Powys wood website would be to have a simple online directory with wood services and wood products advertised with details of the individuals advertising. This would need a search facility and possibly divisions in different areas of Powys or Montgomeryshire, Radnorshire and Brecknock. The directory would need to be updated regularly eg every six months. There would also be a place for customer feedback.

The problem is to find an organisation which would host the website. Similar websites are run by council funded organisations. Adventa runs the timber directory in Monmouthshire which is a paper directory of wood services and Cadwyn Clwyd runs Coetir Clwyd website. There is also Heartwoods which set up a wood based directory for Shropshire, Herefordshire and the West Midlands. Woodland based organisations such as Coed Cymru and the Small Woods Association have no record of running a wood based directory for one county. Glasu would be a good location for a website but do not have the resources to maintain the website.

Another alternative is to use an existing website. The website for Woodfuel Wales is up and running but the membership is limited and therefore the search facility is also limited. Using an existing website for fuelwood suppliers in Powys to advertise their product would be very beneficial as there would be no setting and maintenance costs of the website.

6b. Rough costings for setting up a website

The cost of setting up a basic website with a search facility would be £2,000 and the cost of hosting, maintaining and upgrading website over the website over year would be a further £2,000. This cost would become redundant if an existing website was used.

The cost of carrying basic research ie getting information from fuelwood suppliers throughout Powys and including visiting newsagents, supermarkets, stove suppliers as contacting fuelwood suppliers and sending out postcards to get the information would be another £320/day for 10 days as well as the costs of basic postcards and stamps.

6c. Co-sponsors for a Powys Wood Web

It has been difficult to find interested partners as all forestry related WAG grants are going directly to the Welsh Forest Business Partnership who are looking for national not local initiatives. This makes the option of using the existing Woodfuel Wales website more attractive as the organisation is now managed by the Welsh Forest Business Partnership which receives Welsh Assembly Government funding.

The supporters of other websites such as Coetir Clwyd include county councils, Rural Development Plan grants and charitable foundations.

7. CONCLUSIONS

During this research, it was found that there is a demand for a Powys Wood Web/directory from woodfuel customers, fuelwood suppliers, stove suppliers and some woodland owners. In addition there is a growing demand for sustainable supplies of fuelwood and other fuelwood products eg pellets, briquettes. As well, buyers of woodfuel and other timber products often look for products by using the internet.

However it has been difficult to identify an organisation who would host and manage a Powys wood website so that it would be properly promoted and maintained – the website needs to be of sufficient quality to have a good search facility. It has also been difficult to pinpoint match funding in the present financial climate.

An alternative way forward would be to use the existing Woodfuel Wales website and encourage fuelwood suppliers in Powys to use this website. The website would need to be publicised more widely by or example, advertising the website at shows and events with good quality postcards.

However fuelwood suppliers also need to be encouraged to join the Woodfuel Wales website. It would be very beneficial if Woodfuel Wales membership could be reduced for individuals who only advertise on the website. Fuelwood suppliers who were interviewed during this research are supplying fuelwood usually as a second or third business to supplement their income and at this time, are unlikely to justify paying a full annual membership to Woodfuel Wales.

Finally, there does need to be additional database research in order to find fuelwood suppliers including sellers of pellets and briquettes in Powys so that all these suppliers can be given the opportunity to join a website. They should also be informed about the findings of this initial Glasu research.

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