



Cwmpawd Gwledig Cymru

Wales Rural Compass

Growing the Potential

Over recent decades rural Wales has benefitted substantially from the implementation of Rural Development Plans, and especially the LEADER programme. We have witnessed how this work has helped to diversify rural economic activity, strengthen rural communities, provide vital facilities and services, engage marginalized groups, reconnect people with their local heritage, and promote sustainability. It has done this by harnessing innovation within localities. We have seen rural communities empowered and a generation of rural leaders equipped to drive locally appropriate development.

We are concerned that these achievements could be lost as innovative locally led rural development is squeezed out between sustainable land management and regional economic investment. We are concerned at the absence of a coordinated plan to address shared rural challenges across Wales in current policy proposals and at the loss of guaranteed funding for community-based rural development, with rural communities forced to compete against urban communities. We are concerned that a unique opportunity to bring together the truly holistic, integrated approach to policy that rural Wales needs is being missed.

In her statement to the Senedd on 23rd February 2021, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister Lesley Griffiths said: “The future of rural development will need to support social justice in the transition to a net-zero economy. The future RDP will need to support skills and employment that enable the greening of rural industries whilst promoting inclusion, fair work and use of the Welsh language.” We endorse this ambition, but we contend that it cannot be realised without putting people at the centre and harnessing the capacities of rural communities themselves.

Future elected representatives of all parties, should commit to a community-based innovative approach to rural development. We call for decision-making that is evidence-based, responsive to community voices, and alert to policy impacts on rural inequalities. There should be guaranteed funding for a community innovation programme, at least equivalent to that in the last RDP.

We are committed to working together for rural communities; to sharing our knowledge and experience; to building links with rural communities elsewhere in the UK and internationally; to helping rural communities to be heard; and to pursuing the goal of a sustainable, resilient, inclusive and more just rural Wales.

We are a group of individuals and organisations working in rural Wales, with many years' experience of community-led economic policy. We will be building on the arguments set out in this statement at a Symposium in May 2021.

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