



Inquiry into community assets

Dear Members of the Local Government and Housing Committee, please find below our written submission to the Inquiry into community assets.

Shared Assets welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to this consultation, and does so to compliment the submissions of our partners in the Resilient Green Spaces project at Social Farms & Gardens, and the Landworkers' Alliance, as well as other third sector organisations involved in this work. We echo their assertion that land as well as buildings should be considered as part of a review of community asset transfer processes in Wales, in order that communities can better take advantage of the range of social, economic and environmental benefits which greater access to land can confer, through activities such as food growing and community forestry.

[Shared Assets](#) CIC is a social enterprise think and do tank working to create a socially just future through practical projects that build new relationships between people and the land. We work with communities, landowners, researchers and activists to create a world where our relationship to the land is based on stewardship, evidence and justice. Our consultancy work supports the practical creation of new business and governance models for land that create shared social, environmental and economic benefits. We do research to learn with and about the land, and those who have a relationship with it, to help build an evidence base of how we can work with the land for the common good. We collaborate with, coordinate and support activists and organisations working for justice in the land system.

Since our partners at Social Farms & Gardens have already written in depth about the context in Wales in their submission to this inquiry, our submission will draw together our additional experiences in supporting communities to access land/buildings in Wales, as well as our knowledge of alternative approaches from other countries from our decade of work in this sector.

In recent years, we have worked with a number of groups and projects in Wales on land-related issues. As mentioned above, we are currently involved in the Resilient Green Spaces project, as well as the Cardiff North Woods project where we were commissioned by Natural Resources Wales to engage with a range of users of the woodlands, including mountain bikers, walkers, runners and horseriders, to support greater self management by users and reduce conflicts and damage to the environment. Before this, we were involved in [Project Skyline](#) (2018-19), where we were commissioned by [The Green Valleys](#) to provide expert advice and support for a feasibility study established to explore the possibility of communities in the South Wales Valleys managing the landscape that surrounds their town or village. We also work closely with Lais Y Goedwig including in the delivery of Making Local Woods Work (2015-18), which aimed to support and grow woodland social enterprises across the UK.

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Whether the current statutory and policy framework empowers communities in Wales to develop community assets;

We support the Social Farms and Gardens response to this question.

The extent the Community Asset Transfer scheme promotes and supports effective development of community assets;

We support the Social Farms and Gardens response to this question.

To explore barriers and challenges faced by communities in taking ownership of public or privately owned assets, including finance and support services;

One of the most significant initial barriers communities face in taking ownership of public or privately owned assets is simply understanding who owns a piece of land or a building they are interested in taking on. From our work with local authorities and national government bodies in Wales (and beyond), we know that up to date and detailed information about their land and built assets is often not available even internally, nevermind in a format that is accessible to the public. We appreciate that it takes a considerable amount of work for public organisations to gather and maintain this data, yet improving data transparency in this way could save time, money and effort for community groups and public body officers, as they would not waste time considering assets which are not owned by, for example, their local council, or if owned which may be designated for other uses, or unsuitable for the particular activity they want to embark upon.

To discover what lessons can be learnt from beyond the Welsh border.

Over the last few years, Shared Assets has worked with CPRE and the New Economics Foundation and Who Owns England? to [investigate the decline of council farms in England](#), and develop a [vision](#) for their reinvigoration in the 21st century. As part of this work, Shared Assets produced a [literature review](#) of innovative and emerging models of public land ownership and management in the UK and abroad, which CATs are just one form of. It may be worth reading this literature review and the document it draws on from the Europe-wide Access to Land Network '[Supporting access to land for farmers in Europe - Experiences and potential of local authorities](#)' to consider a broader range of options to support community access to assets in Wales.

As part of the Resilient Green Spaces project, we have undertaken a review of policy in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England on public land and its disposal, as well as for private landowners to make land available to communities, to highlight the different approaches taken

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by each of the home nations outside Wales, including around Community Asset Transfers. Whilst perhaps none of the approaches undertaken is perfect, legislation is further developed, particularly in Scotland, around empowering communities to take on local assets and develop them for the widest social and environmental benefit.