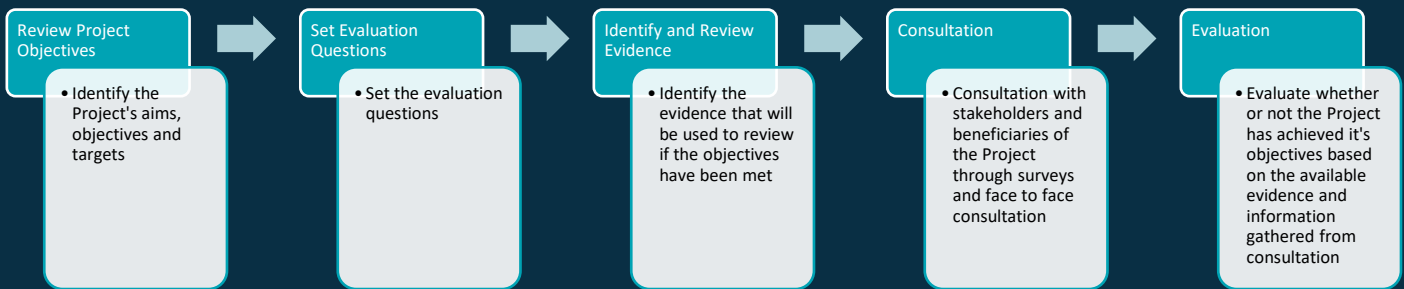




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tirwedd y Comin project (the 'Project') aimed to restore and protect the Gelligaer and Merthyr Common (the 'Common') for future generations. It was supported by the Cwm a Mynydd and Rural Action Cwm Taff Local Action Groups and received funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which was funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government. The Common spans two local authorities, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) and Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) and covers approximately 2,900 hectares. The Project was delivered between 2018 and 2020 and incorporated community education, skills and training to ensure that the balance of the Common can be restored and sustained. It focussed on land management, habitat restoration (tackling invasive species) and the responsible promotion of the landscape from a tourism and heritage perspective.

TACP (UK) Ltd and their subconsultant Cumulus Consultants Ltd were commissioned by Gelligaer and Merthyr Commoners Association to evaluate the success of the Project. The evaluation was based on guidance developed by the Welsh Government and the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development:



1,355
Trees planted

Evidence used to complete the evaluation included a review of project documentation and consultation with key stakeholders. The consultation was originally planned to include drop-in sessions and an online survey. However, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, drop-in sessions were cancelled and therefore, the consultation-based evidence focussed on the online survey. A bilingual survey was sent to 23 stakeholder groups/organisations including: commoners; activity and

volunteer groups; local authorities; local police forces; and, the project delivery team.

The evaluation focussed on the Project Objectives (see table below) with the addition of: Project Delivery; Habitat Management; and, Project Legacy.

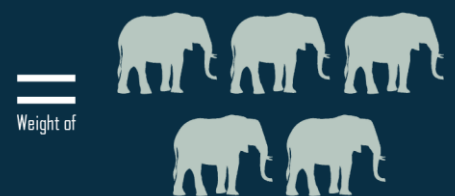
From the 23 stakeholder groups/organisations contacted, 30 individual responses from 13 organisations were received. Half of these responses were from

local activity groups, volunteers and members of the public.

A clear success for the Project has been the high number of local volunteers that have assisted in managing the Common. They carried out multiple litter picks and community clean-ups (removing over 30 tonnes of waste), assisted in planting 1,355 trees and clearing over five hectares of vegetation to help open up areas of the Common to graze livestock.



30.94
tonnes
of litter and fly tipped waste removed



The table below outlines the Project's objectives and targets, whether they were met and provides a brief explanation:

Project Objective	Target	Achieved Yes/No/ Undeterminable	Comments
1. Engage with local communities	a) Establish a volunteer group	Yes	A volunteer group was established early in the Project with volunteering information and news posted regularly online.
	b) Achieve at least 40 participants	Yes	194 participants have been recorded participating in a variety of volunteering opportunities, excluding school and wider stakeholder engagement.
	c) 20 community clean-ups	Yes	34 community clean-ups were carried out throughout the Project.
2. Tackle the issue of fly-tipping	50% reduction	Undeterminable	Whilst multiple online survey responses and evidence from the Project delivery team indicate a reduction in fly-tipping, there was no baseline against which to assess whether the target has been met.
3. Tackle the issue of fly-grazing	50% reduction	No	The issue of fly-grazing has been difficult to quantify with no baseline data. However, no physical measures have been implemented due to delays with the Section 38 Commons Act 2006 application.
4. Tackle the issue of illegal off-roading	50% reduction	Undeterminable	Whilst online survey results and evidence from police patrols confirm reductions in illegal off-roading, there was no baseline to assess whether the target has been met.
5. Establish pilot schemes	At least one	Yes	A pilot scheme on land near Gelligaer Quarry to assess the effectiveness of earth bunds in preventing fly-tipping confirmed that preventing access to problem areas reduces landscape crime in that area.
6. Project management	Establish a steering group	Yes	A steering group was set up at the start of the Project.
7. Landscape Gateways	Creation of four landscape gateways	No	There was limited progress with the four landscape gateways due to delays in with the Section 38 Commons Act 2006 application.

Five targets have been met and four targets were not met in their entirety. A target of a 50% reduction was set for three of the objectives, however, there was no baseline data available and no clear method for monitoring against these targets. Therefore it was not

possible to confirm whether these targets have been met.

The Commons Act 2006 was an obstacle for the Project Delivery Team. The Act prevents restrictive works being completed on common land (e.g. erecting fencing) without consent from the relevant authority. The Project Delivery Team sought consent by completing a Section 38 application. This was a lengthy process and at the time of writing, a decision has not been made on whether consent will be granted. As typical ‘quick-fix’ measures to address landscape crime (i.e. access restrictions) cannot be implemented without consent, alternative approaches have been undertaken including: educating local communities; raising awareness; and, increasing police presence on the Common. On their own, these approaches take time to yield significant results and ideally they would be completed in conjunction with access restrictions.



Source: Gwent Police

A major success of the Project has been the high level of community and stakeholder engagement that has been achieved and maintained. The Project Ranger has worked hard to engage with a broad range of stakeholders and key groups. These connections are not only beneficial for the Project but will also aid future projects in the area. An example of effective engagement has been the numerous patrols carried out on the Common with Gwent Police and South Wales Police, resulting in six Section 59 warnings being issued to illegal off-roaders under the Police Reform Act 2002 and helping to reduce landscape crime. Also, following advice from South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, the Project Ranger has created over 1,400 meters of fire breaks.

The evaluation identified four key lessons that can be applied to future projects:

- 1. Stricter scope management** – stricter scope management would prevent tasks consuming disproportionately large amounts of time (e.g. Section 38 Commons Act 2006 application).
- 2. Clear target setting** – targets would have benefited from following the SMART approach.
- 3. Financial management** – this was an issue particularly early on and led to delays, a clear financial strategy would improve accountability and efficiency.
- 4. A clear monitoring method** – future projects would benefit from a clearer and more structured system of monitoring.

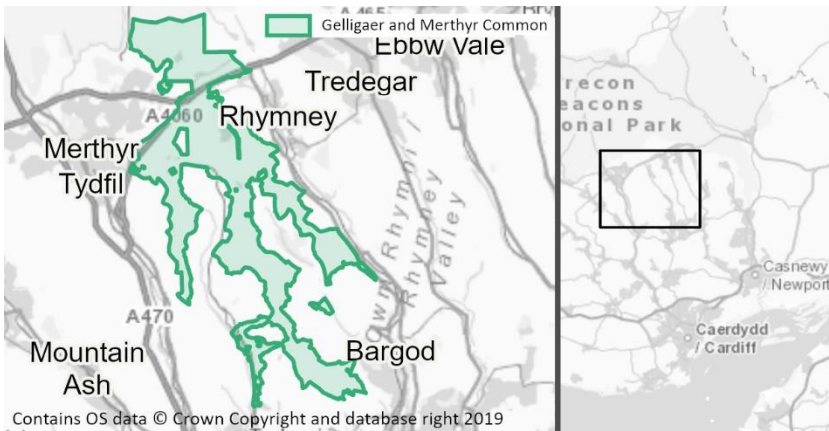


1,449m
of firebreaks created

=

Height of





The Project has laid a strong foundation for future projects to be effectively developed and implemented. Key areas for future projects on the Common included:

1. Tackle fly-tipping

identified as a persistent issue, tackling fly-tipping on the Common was identified by 97% of survey respondents to be carried forward.

3. Engage with the wider public

engagement has been a key success of the Project and future work should continue to develop this.

5. Strengthen the Common's Identity

incorporating aspects of the landscape gateways and building on the logo and website set up for the Common will continue to enhance the identity of the Common.

2. Tackle illegal off-roading

there was a positive response to the work completed to address the issue, both in reductions of off-roading and from the public.

4. Explore the option of CCTV

a useful tool in tackling landscape crime, particularly for the prosecution of fly-tippers and illegal off-roading.

6. Improve information and education

the website (www.gmcommon.org) provides stakeholders and the general public with a clear source of information about the Common and should be utilised fully in the future.

Overall the Tirwedd y Comin Project has been a success. Despite numerous hurdles, the Project has achieved a great deal over its two-year delivery programme thanks to the efforts of the Project Staff and other key stakeholders.

