

204 - Cae Crwn Community Garden and Capacity to Gather: Criccieth Town Council

Hello, this episode will be in Welsh. If your Welsh isn't up to following along then we are completely fine with you skipping to the next one.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

Hello and welcome to the exchange, a podcast produced by Archwilio Cymru.

I'm Siôn Owen and I work for the Good Practice Exchange.

This time we went to Criccieth and visited the Cae Crwn community garden, learning more about the garden and its community, as well as the way the Town Council has acted to bring together the people of the organisations in order to facilitate the development of this community resource.

I'm here in the pavilion at Cae Crwn in Criccieth to talk to people from the Town Council about this project which has created a very special community garden and nature space, especially when the sun is out here in Criccieth.

Would you please introduce yourself now?

Catrin Jones (Clerk to Criccieth Town Council)

I'm Catrin Jones, Clerk of Criccieth Town Council.

Angela Jones (Councillor, Criccieth Town Council)

I'm Angela Jones. I'm a councillor on the Town Council. I'm with an allotment here and I'm sitting on the committee at Cae Crwn here too.

David Cassels (Round Field Volunteer)

David Cassels, I'm a volunteer for this project. A founder member.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

Okay, then I'd like you to describe the project.

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

The Cae Crwn project is an ambitious community project. It brings together community allotments, a nature garden and a butterfly garden in a nice site in the heart of Criccieth. The council developed this project in partnership with Friends of Nature Garden, Treforthyr Primary School and Gwynedd Council and we received a significant grant to start the project from the Welsh Government and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Back in 2021 the project started and it's amazing and the truth of what has been able to be achieved during that time.

And what's really important about the project I think is that it came from the community's desire to have this development. Tre Council found it very important that we had a community plan and we developed the original plan several years ago in consultation with the community and it was definitely what people wanted to see, it was a green, accessible and attractive space.

It would also improve biodiversity and offer opportunities for people of all ages to enjoy.

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

It's important to say that when experiencing Covid and the community is going through a terrible experience, then everyone feels like it's important to have somewhere to bring people of all generations together.

And where you're able to go on your own is also obvious, if you need to self-isolate from someone else, you're still kind of able to come and work in the allotment as well.

So I think Covid was really key to moving the idea forward, wasn't it?
So, yes.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes, it was because Covid triggered the project in the first place?

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

We applied for the funding in 2020 and the three of us worked on the application and then it was successful and started the project in January two thousand twenty-one and as Angela says people appreciated what it was like to be able to be out there it was one of the positive things that came out of Covid and the truth is that people appreciate oh yes it's Nice to be able to have an area that was nice to go out and enjoy and walk socializing safely and truthfully.

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Yes, and in addition to growing vegetables and flowers obviously, we see a lot of people visiting a round field as well in Dave's house?

People walk through, a lot of people stop to have a chat with us if we're working on the gardens visitors even to the area, we're staying here in the big hotel or there are different places to stay. A lot of people, I think, are encouraged to come here just to see what's going on in the town.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes, so it turned into an attraction. Okay, so you've already touched on this with the fact that it came from the community, came during Covid, but that's how did you bring the whole thing together and come together?

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Well we had a group called Ffrindiau Gardd Natur who were in the constituent group working on the nature garden that was already with us in Criccieth, and there was also over-contact with the Criccieth in its Flowers group. So there's a long history of looking after our green spaces and in the town so it's a result of the partnership that the town council is officially promoting this but of course we have a bunch of people ready to support the scheme and we have about fifty people helping on the community allotments, something like that.

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Yes Dave, yes how many people are here?

David Cassells (Cae Crwn)

No at the moment there are 35 members in the allotments and first there were 20, and there are a lot of people now and I need more. So it's grown but there's room to grow again.

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Is there room for more people, do we need more people?

David Cassells (Cae Crwn)

Yes to allotment, yes.

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

And we've got a range of people who have allotted here, there's a lot of young families in the last year with small children allotment on the site and one of the ideas for the future as a result of that is to create a small children's area in one of the allotments, so that's a good idea.

David Cassells (Cae Crwn)

Yes, we have six there are 8 families with young children at the moment so it's really good for us, yes.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

Because Criccieth isn't the biggest town under the sun either, but there will be some part of Criccieth with bigger gardens and dancing, and it's a nice thing that the space is available to people and a space like you've just seen just under the railway.

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Yes we get a lot of attention with trains passing by a lot of people raising their hands when we're working in the gardens, yes.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

In terms of how you approached it then, what was the role of the Town Council in the project as a whole afterwards?

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

We are with the lease for the land from Gwynedd Council and then of course there are a few councillors working on the allotments but in terms of the management of the friends of nature garden, who run the project on behalf of the Town Council. We then have a formal agreement which sets out what we expect in terms of the procedure and that they are accountable to the Town Council and that there is clear co-operation between the two bodies.

Yes, that's good practice I think in terms of having a formal agreement and then the allotment is available free of charge to people who dedicate themselves to the site and then we have an insurance policy for everyone who takes part and the Town Council insurance policy.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

Then you as a Town Council can take on the role of facilitating and being a facilitator, pulling people together and then enabling the community group to go and do and do the work, right?

So, to go from there, what difference did you see then from being complete to this?

A difference in the people, a difference in Criccieth that comes from this project?

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Oh, I think the allotments have made a big difference to the community. Most of the people who live here know what to do here. They definitely come for a walk in the evening or during the day and come to see what's going on here. It's open to everyone.

And I think that makes a big difference to people's well-being. People got to know each other ella. They didn't know each other before. It's a very social place. Everyone shares an idea, how to grow a thing or what works what doesn't. So I think on the part of the well-being of the town it's really important but because we have amazing members like David and Jackie, it's a new idea that's coming in is amazing too

'We're trying to grow a lot of new things, we've got a hut for mushrooms for the first time which has been very successful, we've got bees too. Beekeeping is also local. There's honey on a lamb for the first time so in terms of improving the biodiversity of the area it makes such a difference too.

David Cassells (Cae Crwn)

Yes there's a lot of things happening since we started the project

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

And then in terms of creativity and culture, we have interpretation boards decorated by one of the councillors, Cyngor Tre', councillor Ffion Gwyn, an artist, and also, we hold events such as the planting of roses John Ystumllyn, the black gardener, who came to live in the area in the eighteenth century.

Then last year, in 2025, we unveiled the peace statue, Sri Chinnoy, and that has brought together nature, heritage and local culture and the Town Council has also agreed to be an ambassador for peace and climate and then they have brought the statue and in the beautiful area they have brought it all together.

In terms of recognition then, in 2024, we won the CLAS community management and community land award, and as a result, there's a site

resilience plan set up by social farms and gardens, and there's an infographic that shows how it's working to support the well-being of future generations act.

This led to the inclusion of Cae Crwn in an international film called The Power of Local which highlights thirty projects across five continents working towards local, healthy economies and resilient communities and the film is currently being translated into several languages, so it's amazing to see what has been progress with the hard work of people and the vision and the truth to me. transform the site.

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

I get a lot of people coming to visit and ask how the place is set up and to learn about the good practice locally and remotely too so yes.

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

And we've also been recognised with the One Voice Wales award for this site so we're happy enough. We don't do it in terms of getting the award, but it's nice to get the recognition.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

In it, the work is going to happen anyway, but the acknowledgment is nice right? And oh well, what's the future ahead?

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Oh, over to Dave, and it's Dave and Jackie with ideas every five minutes, so yes.

Jackie especially, she sees something happening, and then she brings it to the committee. And ask for support and then, yes, we tend to move forward with Jackie's ideas because she's great.

David Cassells (Cae Crwn)

Yes. We have a lot of ideas but I don't have the space right now to expand-io. So, yes, cause it's a lot of ideas.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

So you have the allotment pieces, but do you have a wild garden outside the fence and then does?

David Cassells (Cae Crwn)

Wth of course, yes, yes.

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

And we've also just had the exciting news that the Royal Horticultural Society and social farms and gardens, they're planning to invest three eight million points to develop community gardening organisations, and that's across the United Kingdom, unfortunately not coming directly to Cae Crwn, this was a climate action fund grant, the National Lottery Fund.

But Cae Crwn was part of the bid, as an example of good practice, and it is possible that because of this, there will be opportunities for co-learning with other projects, and visits from other projects to come to Cae Crwn, and perhaps promoters, including the Welsh Parliament.

So that's an exciting new development to be a part of.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

You're trying to be as sustainable as you can when doing this, aren't you?

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Yes, yes, that's the intention.

Yes, and this is important to come because something under us grows under us also shares with each other, and if we overgrow like you do in the summer, there are a lot of the same kind of things coming together, under us sharing them too.

We've got a table where people can take something and just leave it as an honesty box and leave a little bit of brass if they want there's a bit of brass coming in that box, right?

David Cassells (Cae Crwn)

Fifty pounds this year right now in the honesty box.

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Yes, and at Christmas time some of the members have taken herbs around the shops in Criccieth and given them away for free to people too.

So, yes, there's quite a bit of yes, we're trying to be as sustainable as possible, and we're all sharing the seed and sharing things under us growing if we're overgrowing things and seedlings and so on, so yes.

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

We should also say that as well as national grants such as the lottery, the Gwynedd Nature Partnership, the Gwynedd Council, are very good and it has meant that we have been able to develop better accessible routes all sorts of developments that we have done because of the Nature Garden partnership in recent years, and the officer comes to visit and we have a good relationship and we are very grateful for these additional grants.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

'Do you benefit from being able to work together, and different groups with each other effectively so don't you?

Angela Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Yes, lessons and sharing good practice, so we put a system to hold rainwater in and test how this works, that has come through Gwynedd Council the Nature Partnership, so everyone uses that water. And we also have a composting system of course, we also have a hot bin in people able to bring food waste down so yes it's teaching people also about yes how to use things so yes.

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Yes and we've had ITV Wales news here twice to look at the southern water system.

Another is with the school children coming to plant the trees and things so we get attention and recognition from these exercises.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes, do you have a strong connection with the school?

Catrin Jones (Criccieth Town Council)

Yes, yes.

And then there are other schools coming from the surrounding areas as well, maybe they'll come by train and come for a little day out to Cae Crwn. It's nice to see the kids and I think that if we're made up of children and young people, we give ownership, it's part of their life and when they come to the

teenagers afterwards, It belongs to them and that's important and learning about the collaboration. The older people like to see the children put energy into that relationship afterwards.

Siôn Owen (Audit Wales)

Yes, so, thank you very much.

We have a town council that uses its power to bring people and organizations together to create an amazing little space, and happens to be fulfilling the duties of being about something while they're at it.

And everyone is happy.

Thank you very much for sharing the story with us.

Rhian Jones (Audit Wales)

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