

1. Community consultation process



The barn set up for the meeting at Pont y Gafel, 10th June 2006

Meetings had been held informally with neighbours of the land in April, and a more public launch in Narbeth in May, but it was decided to hold a public meeting in a barn on the land and invite the local community on 10th June 2006.

The aim was to gather local opinions and make them feel like they can have some input and that their concerns will be listened to. Lammas also wanted to know what the needs of the area were – so we intended to split the discussion into *issues*, *good points* and *needs*, and attempt to use participatory appraisal to allow everyone's voice to be heard. It was hoped that by breaking off into small groups and asking people to note their concerns on paper (to be posted collectively on sheets on the wall) that we could diminish some of the hostility we feared and produce useful summaries of people's key concerns. It was advertised by posters throughout the area, on the website and by word of mouth, and we had arranged for a Welsh translator to be present.

Things did not really go to plan. Around 60 people attended, many familiar faces from the Narbeth meeting in May. Many said it was a fair representation of the village, and many people were there from surrounding villages such as Hebron, Hermon and Blaenwauen. Lammas did a presentation, and then a short question session was held. This session was difficult to control and although I did my best to facilitate it there was a lot of anger at the proposal. We tried to make sure all were heard, but when I tried to begin the group work (everyone was already sitting around in small groups around tables), a woman strongly objected. We held a vote to ascertain whether people wanted to continue the general question session or whether we could talk in more detail in groups. There was strong resistance to group work and the majority wanted to carry on asking questions as one big group. We continued the questions for a further half an hour, I then ended the formal aspect of the meeting by encouraging people to talk to Lammas individually and share further comments with us. People hung around for at least another hour asking questions, looking at maps, and usefully putting extra comments in a box we had set up. So we were not able to get to some of the detail of concerns, to hear the views of many people present, nor prioritise concerns or the needs of the area. There was simply too much resistance. However, a space was provided for many questions to be raised, for Lammas to listen to those concerns (which are summarised in this report), and to make contact with the local community (especially via a contact sheet, of which 24 were completed).

Although it was perhaps useful to have such a public space of 'venting' for the local community, there were also many problems with the way the day, and the consultation process, was run. There clearly needed to be more preliminary work to build relationships with the local community before such an event was held, the room needed better organising (many participants had poor visibility of the powerpoint slides), and my inexperience as a facilitator led to poor decisions (such as allowing a vote to begin as to who supported and

who opposed the proposal). Consequently, there needs to be further consideration of the next steps in building community relations, which is discussed at the end of this report.

2. How this report is written

The views in this report are an interpretation of comments during the day and of emails and phone calls in the week following the meeting. The detail of comments and questions are included and ordered, but the key issues have also been summarised.

There are two main things that require consideration:

- (a) a closer consideration of the *process* of community inclusion in the project, and
- (b) the details to which there are objections.

3. Summary of main issues

The majority accept why an eco-village is necessary, but not the detail

The broader reasons as to why LID is needed are understood. There were many comments as to how the project is clearly ecologically sound. Additionally, many believe they are trying their best to lead sustainable lives, and thus found Lammas' emphasis on why change was environmentally necessary patronising. It is the detail of how this proposal would be enacted that has upset most. There is a large group of locals who support the project *in principle*, but who are concerned about the details. The phrase 'the devil is in the detail' was said numerous times. The main concerns are nicely summarised by a Hebron resident;

If Lammas's proposal were for a purely residential project of up to ten households on the proposed site, I would raise no objection. It is the scale, scope and nature of what is actually proposed and the inevitable traffic implications to which I object. This is a fine, worthy and much-needed project, but I feel in its current form it should be located closer to roads adequate to handle the increased traffic flow.

The opposition

There is a small, but vocal, group of locals who are completely opposed to the project, and as such are unlikely to ever be 'won over'. They view the project as backwards, trying to return to the Iron Age or the 60's. They can only see the negatives, and are likely to become well organised and garner media attention. They do not really differentiate Lammas from any other form of development imposed upon an area, and were probably already mobilised by the fight against the Bluestone development in the National Park. This group are potentially very problematic and are building an opposition group (with meetings in the village hall) - but all areas are likely to have equivalent constituents.

Impacts – visual, social, economic

Few doubt that the project would be environmentally low impact, but are concerned about the visual impact (particularly because in the middle it is on a ridge), social impact (size, noise, outsiders), and economic impact (not bringing enough to the area [also see needs below]). All of these issues relate to the *scale* of the proposal - it is seen as simply too big for the area.

The need to compliment rather than compete

There was concern that economic survival in the area was already fragile and would be destabilised by further competition from another shop, visitors centre, other sellers or families to support. Many see the project as an additional potential *burden* on an already struggling area. Thus many of the positive suggestions concern complimenting rather than competing with existing services. For example, rather than selling farm goods through a shop running a vegetable box scheme, providing a hall for the community, extending educational facilities, preventing sales of goods which competed with existing artists and basket makers etc.

How are community needs going to be incorporated?

Lammas asked that the issue of community needs be incorporated into the consultation. Some needs were identified: more children, better medical care (nearest is 17 miles away without public transport links), a community hall, better public transport, and support for the local shop and post office.

However, it is unclear what Lammas are really offering in terms of responding to needs. This project is seen as a response to global needs (oil crisis, need for sustainability etc) but not local. Lammas have a vision and it is unclear to the community what they will compromise on in putting it into practice. This approach has the effect of making any 'community consultation' appear like a whitewash. Given that Lammas is not a wealthy development company it is unlikely in practice to be able to offer many real incentives to the local community. Therefore, asking about needs without any real ability to provide, has resonance with other development situations. For example, Jacqui Katona of the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation in Australia¹, when talking about indigenous fights against mining companies says;

The mining company used to issue these ultimatums – you'd better give us a list of all the things that you want, and I said 'you're not in a position to be able to deliver anything, so what are you asking for a list for? The list isn't the focus – the focus is you haven't built a relationship with your closest neighbours, the people on whose land you're mining – you've tokenised their participation, so don't talk to me about what people want when you've got no mechanism for delivering it, you're not even in that head space'

While the project could provide some of the needs identified (children, shop customers, community hall), it would simultaneously compound some existing problems in the area (transport, medical care, etc).

How relations with the community are built

While Lammas have been open about their proposal and have invited community comment on their plans, because the vision of the project was already quite advanced before the location of Glandwr was found, then the project is seen as being 'imposed from above'. Consequently, links with the community are more difficult. Links need to be made with the numerous local community initiatives to improve the area, and links should be made directly by the Lammas core team and those who intend to move to the area. This will be a slow process.

4. Detailed concerns

In order of number of comments, most controversial first:

Traffic and vehicles

Concern over number of residents and visitors vehicles, especially given narrow local lanes and small bridges already heavily used by farm machinery – concern over vibration (both noise and impact on existing structure of homes), noise, pollution, and congestion. There is particular concern over use of narrow roads by lorries during construction phase. Concern that if used west access route would increase already high traffic to the Fisheries, bottling plant, and 12 parking spaces of barn conversion. Many wanted access from the top (I know this is not possible) because of the narrow lane at south end, or from a 'main road'.

Visitors Centre

There is more support for residential dwellings than there is for the visitors centre – significant concern about the lack of ability to limit the number of visitors vehicles or how

¹ Taken from another research project I am working on looking at the relationship between Australian environmental organisations and indigenous communities.

these would be managed. A comment by email: “I think it will be much harder for Lammas to convince objectors of the visitor centre is part of the proposal”.

Finances

Worries about the financial viability of the whole project, concerned by:

- * the opaqueness of where the money to buy the land is coming from, and how the initial infrastructure would be funded (i.e road through land)
- * requests for a more detailed business plan
- * how will planning application be funded?
- * how people would generate enough cash to pay bills (such as rates, council tax)
- * that 5 acres is too small from which to make a living
- * would have a negative impact on local business (see below)
- * at what stage will Lammas buy the land, i.e. after planning permission?
- * fear that once planning achieved would push up land prices, and unclear how Lammas would deal with that.

Visual impact

Concern over changing landscape views, especially for those who live to the north of Glandwr where the land is directly in their view.

Integration with existing community

More detail wanted on how the new community would really integrate (what affordable housing really meant, what the proposal was offering the community etc). Concern that Lammas is not really prepared to compromise and are actually trying to create a separate village with its own identity which is isolated from others. Poor image of potential newcomers - comment from box - ‘Don’t want ... hippies smoking dope on the dole drawing a Giro cheque’.

Fear of area being ‘overwhelmed’ by newcomers - much talk about how the project would ‘double’ Glandwr. However, others highlighted that Glandwr has had many newcomers. Comment by email - “over the past two or three years there has already been quite a few new residents moving into the area and new bungalows built, and I’m not aware of existing residents complaining of being swamped by those incomers”.

Long term viability

Linked to concern over the finances, but broader in its implications was the concern that the project might not last. If, for example, planning permission was to be withdrawn by the Council because people no longer met the SPG 50 criteria then they would be left with a worthless piece of land. In other words, the *risks* of the project had not been adequately communicated.

Some see the project as an additional potential *burden* on an already struggling area. Concerns over whether a critical mass was required to make the project work and what would happen if there were not enough people interested or too many left.

Economic impact

Concern that additional residents activities, the shop/ visitors centre, and hostel would all have a negative impact on the local economy – complaints that had not been a survey as to what was already in the area (again refers to the ‘needs’ debate above), or knowledge of potential markets for proposed goods. Wanted to see a livelihood business plan to show potential costs, sales and products. So rather than compete need to compliment i.e. rather than opening a shop run a vegetable box delivery scheme. Additionally, clear that some initiatives needed support – such as Glandwr post office – that “is very likely to close if local people continue not to use it”.

Level of ‘control’ enforced by Lammas group on new residents

Concern that Lammas is not setting itself up as being able to prevent new residents on the land breaking some of the basic principles.

The ‘we had to do it the hard way’ factor

Concern that project would not be as restricted by planning, regulations and bureaucracy as they had been – i.e. Lammas getting special treatment. Many have had to work hard to build their business and homes against strict council rulings and thus feel a little cheated if others do not.

Housing for locals

Questions as to how many locals were interested and how Lammas had researched that (i.e. what need is there in the area?) and whether it would really be affordable (doubt as to whether people would be able to raise mortgages for such a project).

Forms of structures

Some concern that outside toilets would be used, and that structures would not be sturdy. Most of these objections were based on stereotypes - comment from box - ‘Don’t want mud huts, benders, shacks etc’.

Water

Concern over water usage (especially by those also living on same land) – as ‘sometimes pressure gets very low already’.

5. Detailed positive suggestions

1. Rather than a hostel suggested asking the community to run B&B for visitors - many people in the area have spare rooms but it was difficult to find lodgers in the area.
2. Glandwr needs a hall/ community centre - could the proposed call on the land become the community hall?
3. Rather than have delivery vehicles drive up road (for housing material or wholefood deliveries), could the community have a horse and cart to collect bits from the land edge?
4. Park and walk/ cycle system from further out of the village – so avoid narrow roads.
5. Could there be workshops for children, or even paid seasonal work to get them involved in the land?
6. Could local artists sell their work in the visitors centre?
7. Set up a process whereby local input is invited throughout project life into decisions that affect local community.
8. Delivery box scheme rather than a shop that would compete with the Glandwr shop.
9. Library in community hall?
10. The local post office needs support – so an increase in users would be welcomed.
11. Start small scale and then grow – that way local community can gradually understand its benefits and how it works.
12. Change wording of proposal, so rather than call it ‘Low Impact’ (when community feels it as high visual and social impact), call it something more acceptable such as an eco-village or Garden village.

6. Additional questions raised by participants

- * How does the Lammas project link in with barn planning application?
- * Where would the water come from?
- * Why not run the project as a social enterprise?
- * When producing maps could Lammas do one in context of surrounding area – so can see size in relation to the village.

7. Recommended actions

If Lammas were to seriously take on board the community comments and concerns then several changes to the proposal would need to be made²:

- * The visitors centre (and shop) and hostel would be removed from the proposal
- * The number of plots and proposed dwellings would be reduced
- * A stricter vehicles policy would be introduced
- * A detailed financial plan would be produced
- * Research into potential markets for good produced from the land would be undertaken and publicised
- * Further research and detail into the housing needs of locals would be undertaken, with a clearer plan as to how locals could purchase plots/ houses.

9. Next steps for community relations

There are several next steps to be taken for community relations and for research within the Lammas proposal.

Key areas for further research include:

- * The likely economic impact of the proposal upon the surrounding area, especially what skills, craft and produce Lammas would bring, and what market there would be for them.
 - * The impact and workings of other eco-villages
 - * A need to better understand what initiatives and community projects are ongoing and link into them. Links need to be made with community organisations, Government Initiatives (such as PLANED – they may have already done ‘needs’ research on the area) and other researchers with expertise in related areas (such as those exploring rural Welsh development, economies of rural communities etc).
 - * To follow up locals requests to talk further about the project. Many people on the info sheets have ticked ‘yes’ to being contacted and to them talking in more detail as to their views on the proposal. The area of the ‘local’ would need to include Hebron, Hermon, Llanglydwen, Llanfyrnach and Blaenwaun (as representative of those who attended on Saturday)
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² I am not suggesting that these *should* be made, just that these are the outcomes from the process of consultation.