

*"...the artist is making a response and exploring and sharing a way but not giving an answer .. that's a different cultural response to the way environmentalists think"*



## **Woolly Perspectives**

### **Reflections from participants and stakeholders on the Woollen Line Project<sup>1</sup>**

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Three years after the start of the Woollen Line project and the laying of the first line on Pen Trumau, we invited 7 groups of participants and stakeholders to discuss their thoughts and reflections on the project – how they've been involved, how they understand and feel about it, how they see its value, who they consider owns it and what they think should happen next.

The 7 groups were facilitated by Alison Kidd and Kirsty Claxton. They consisted of: Crickhowell school students, Black Mountain Graziers, Community members, Artists, Horse handlers, Ecologists and Wardens and National Park and Funding managers. About 55 people were involved and we thank them for the time they gave to talking to us.

The discussions were all recorded and subsequently transcribed and 1000 comments analysed using an ethno-linguistic technique. A selection of words and phrases from the groups were also extracted and used to create an exhibit at the Woollen Line Art Exhibition curated by Kirsty Claxton in Crickhowell.

This report is a psychologist's interpretation of the linguistic data garnered from the 7 groups. Different interpretations are obviously possible.

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The dominant word is 'experience'<sup>5</sup>

"it was a new experience", "the whole experience", "a remarkable experience when I got up there", "I think it's the experience of how wild the environment is", "an experience of creativity and artistic excellence", "the experience to connect with the environment"

We categorised people's responses to the experience into whether they reflected emotions, cognition or physical sensations. Emotional responses (of all kinds) dominated.

#### **Emotions (51% responses):-**

*"It was wonderful making felt at the beginning. I'd never done that before."*

*"first sight of erosion was a big shock- emotional"*

*"So it was a shock. The first time I actually saw it was the scale of it."*

*".. the actual state of that hill when you get up there. It's just horrific"*

*"I love it. It's one of my favourite days... making felt ... because you're working on a cooperative ... we don't do this very often. We're making something with a purpose and that purpose isn't personal aesthetic satisfaction, it's a collective purpose which you're doing with other people and it's fun".*

*"I was excited about the dynamics of the contrast between light and dark and the line and the scale and all these things which I found really exciting"*

*"it was really fun to do"*

*"it's like a horror film up there .. something like that .. it's very spooky quite unnerving actually."*

#### **Cognition (28% responses):-**

*".. this project kind of explodes all that for me because I think someone has actually turned that on it's head and they are seeing something complete new to be developed"*

*"seeing something we see everyday and giving new angle or interpretation"*

*"The art element was new for me .. it makes me look at things a bit differently".*

*"everyone working on the ground like me just looks at it and goes 'crikey, this is a very long winded way of doing things'"*

*"The project has raised new questions for me about the nature and role of art today""*

*"I learned how heavy wool is"*

*"I'm still a bit sceptical"*

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<sup>5</sup> 'Passing through an event by which one is affected' (Chambers Dictionary).

*".. it brings back a lost memory of working in the fields or working with your hands with common purpose which we don't do anymore."*

**Physical Sensation (21% responses):-**

*"What has impressed me as an individual is physically when you're laying it, the impression that it leaves you"*

*"windy .. you get blown off"*

*"blisters on my ankles"*

*"my hands went blue"*

*"drizzling the day we went so the wool was getting wetter and heavier"*

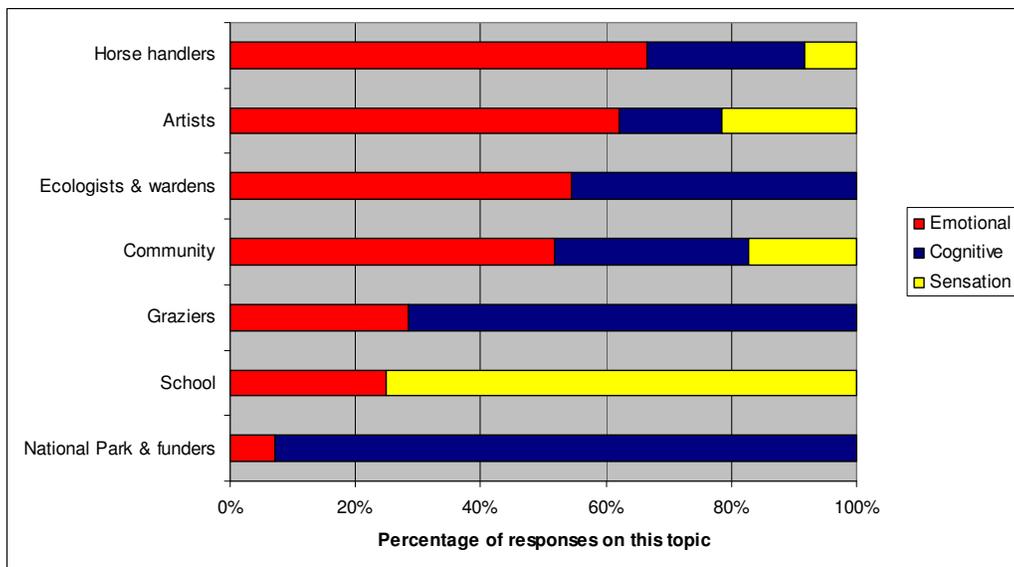
*".. the first time I saw it live rather than as a photograph, I thought 'My God, it's a coastline - it's the driftline where the tide comes. Like a new coast, a new born coast.'"*

*"Quite hard work trying to fix these bundles of wool into the ground with stakes. I found that quite an effort - quite a strain on the back and squatting."*

*"I felt very involved in the process I have to say when I was asked to plant the seedlings in the ground and push them in with a stick. Not something I normally do"*

*"It looked like an alien landscape to me when I was up there. It was very wet and boggy."*

Further analysis revealed a marked difference between the responses to the project from the 7 discussion groups. The chart below shows the percentage of responses from each group which fitted each category.



The horse handlers led the way on emotional responses – but this was mostly them talking about the horses! - *"when we've said to the horses 'now you've done it last year, we've got to put the sacks on', it was a case of 'no way!'".* But

the handlers also described their own stress levels at managing fully loaded horses being led by amateurs - *"it's quite stressful actually .. we're dealing with people who don't necessarily know how to handle a horse or deal with horses."* At the same time, the handlers were understandably proud of their own and the horses' achievements in this unusual task - *"it's something they've never done before and they've done really well with it to be fair. The horses have done really well."*

Not surprisingly, the individuals who had experienced the Woollen Line in the flesh talked most about the emotional impact. They talked of fun and excitement, and a sense of achievement but also of visceral shock and horror at the extent of the erosion damage.

Those who had no direct experience of the mountain top installations (*"I haven't been up the hill", "I've observed it from a distance"*) talked about their responses purely in cognitive terms (e.g. *"it's a very valuable tool in the context of engaging people"*). But they did recognise the importance of direct experience to others - *"it's about giving people an experience that makes them go on and do something else"*. Such responses were most frequent amongst the National Park managers and funders.

The Graziers also used predominantly cognitive language - probably because their focus is on finding practical solutions for a problem with which they are familiar (no shock value) and which directly affects their livelihood - *"I was a bit sceptical about what she was trying to do but I didn't see too much problem with it because she was trying to do something"*.

## **4 The Woollen Line philosophy**

In talking about the project, much of the discussion focussed on the different philosophy of the Woollen Line project compared to other conservation/ecology projects.

Individuals in different groups varied as to how comfortable or uncomfortable they felt with this philosophy.

The main tenets of the philosophy which emerged from the discussions are:-

### **An evolving, open-ended process**

People see the project as a process which is open-ended and evolving rather than focussed on a pre-defined product or output.

*"it's always been an evolution"*

*"it's very much something that is going from year to year and has that element of not necessarily having to have a clear end vision"*

*"it's exploring and sharing a way but it's not giving an answer"*

*"every time something's happened, it's taken it somewhere else"*

The Artists are the most comfortable with this philosophy as they explained that it is how they normally work.

*"it's about process .. I think artists are very comfortable with process. I think that's the bit that others don't understand from other professions. It's a means to*

*an end very often in the science world and technology and this sort of thing .. whereas the artist, well they regard the process as being as important as the finished end result."*

To a lesser extent, some Ecologists and Community members, together with the Graziers, recognise that there is no established answer to these complex ecological problems. They too are comfortable with an evolving, adapt as you go approach.

*"You try an idea and adapt, adjust and hopefully things will evolve from there."*

*"There is no set way to approach this problem anyway as anyone round this table can tell you. It's not a black and white thing."*

*"you've got to try several things, haven't you? You won't know until you try things""*

Although the Graziers and Ecologists have a more specific end result in mind.

*"the next step is to try to get some type of grass to grow on it"*

*"get something to grow there"*

### **A response to an experience**

For many of the participants, the central point of the project is people's response to engaging with it.

*"I think the whole point of being there is that you're responding"*

*"we around the table having been involved in it and others have this emotional response and then the place becomes very important to you and you do everything you can to protect it in the future, to conserve it and I think this is what engaging through the art processes can do for the environment."*

*"It's the way something makes you feel that motivates you to want to do something about it and that is an artistic response to the environment."*

*"how does working with this landscape make me feel or how do I experience it?"*

Again this approach resonates most strongly with an artistic philosophy and outlook as these comments from the Artists' group show:-

*"it's the way the artist thinks"*

*"it's almost like performance art"*

*"it's about enabling everybody to have an experience of creativity and artistic excellence and arts in the environment"*

*"there isn't a quick fix and that part of the solution is changing minds and attitudes .. and that it's not didactic."*

The National Park management and funders clearly recognise the value of this approach –

*"the fact that it's sculpture but actually hands on in the landscape connects it in a way which I think people get a lot more out of."*

*"it's about actually giving people an experience that makes them go on and do something else and that's exactly what this is doing."*

And they recognise such buy-in is necessary for long-term conservation of the uplands.

*"... actually the seeds you sow in people's minds and the increase in understanding is actually essential."*

*"if you did it as a straight conservation project, you'd be missing a trick because you wouldn't add that extra dimension of kind of inspirational stuff that people like to be involved with and actually there's a sense of ownership which is really important"*

*"with this project, you've got the community there and, even if there's no money, they'll probably carry on doing certain things even if it's just awareness raising, education and awareness raising about the importance of the uplands"*

However, the key difference is that the National Park managers and funders mostly talk about the effect of the project experience on other people not on themselves. For example, their language predominantly uses pronouns "them" and "they" where others talk about "we" and "I".

*"what is good about this is that it gives people a sense of ownership to what's happening up on that mountain which is what we need to do because if they've no sense of ownership, they won't report the off-road bikers, they won't report the fires quick enough, they won't feel as though they need to protect something"*

*" it's really difficult to engage the unengaged ... this is a really good way of getting other people on board and explaining to them the importance sort of covertly without sort of ramming it down people's throats saying 'the uplands are really really important and this is why you need to look after it!'. I suppose you have been doing that but doing it in a covert way so that people educate themselves I suppose through the medium of art."*

*"It's positively subversive and I mean that in a good way in terms of people learning about conservation and the importance of carbon conservation, land management, water conservation without actually realising that that's what they're learning about."*

### **Making connections**

Common across all groups is the recognition that making connections is core to the project philosophy.

Firstly, it's the process of connecting people from widely different backgrounds and cultures to work together on the project.

*"this project seems to really embrace the children, the young people. It connects them with the community"*

*"it is the woollen line, it is the graziers, it is the artists, it's the communities"*

*"it's bringing these different groups that are talking to each other."*

*"it's integrated, it brings together all of the different elements to solve a solution that everyone's got an interest in and gets everybody to contribute"*

*".. has broken down those barriers .. just sort of invite everybody in and nobody sees anyone else as a threat"*

Secondly, it's the process of connecting people with the land.

*"it connects the people who engage with it much more strongly to the landscape and the environment."*

*"giving people a link through art and conservation combined, giving them that link, that reconnecting them back with doing something creative, making the felt, with something that links them back into restoring a piece of landscape"*

*"it's been connecting people with that part of the landscape whether they're locals or from further afield"*

Thirdly, it's the process of reconnecting the arts and the sciences.

*"there is an opportunity with regard to the way that Pip is doing things to reconcile those two things - the art and the science"*

*"we have to remember only 200 years ago, there weren't separate sciences, they were natural philosophers. Newton was a natural philosopher, he wasn't a mathematician or a physicist. And those people were great musicians and great artists and great novelists. And the whole thing was all combined together and we've gone off into different disciplines as the disciplines have had to compete for airspace and compete for attention and, unfortunately, compete for research council grants and what this project does is it pulls it all back together."*

*"I have found it refreshing because the science side that dominates a lot of conservation thinking is very cold and sterile and it tends to be quite exclusive.."*

### **Wool as the connecting material**

The philosophy of using wool from local sheep to repair the mountain is key to the whole project – both physically and metaphorically. And people recognise that.

*"the woollen line is a very signature element to it".*

*"..it is like stitching, it's not just the stitching together of the landscape"*

*"so many different strands being woven into it. There's like all these knitting and stitching metaphors."*

Wool is the single common material that connects the participants' varied contributions - supplying, collecting, stuffing nets, making felt, loading horses, carrying and pegging down.

*"these horses with great bundles of wool on either side."*

*"I gathered some of the wool in for her"*

*"just producing the actual felt material"*

*"all I've done is fill nets and take wool up on the horseback"*

*"we were stuffing as much wool as we could in because we wanted to take as much as possible up"*

*"trying to fix these bundles of wool into the ground with stakes"*

Wool is the "ink" used to draw on the hill

*"Pip had a vision of trying to turn the whole thing white"*

*"lines on a landscape which is visual and bold."*

*"to physically see that sinewing sort of line ..it is quite impressive in that context."*

*"I think of it as a drawing"*

Returning the Wool completes the carbon cycle

*"I'd also say it's returning the carbon back to the hill because the wool is going back up there. It's taking the wool that's been grown on there and being put straight back on the soil so it completes the circle as a project."*

*"use local wool from the sheep that had grazed it and so it's kind of like a circle"*

*"there's a bit of poetry in that about using the wool which is a natural material which belongs on these mountains that goes back to the land to heal this scar."*

*"completing that understanding of the wool was grown on the hillside, it's going back to help restore the hillside"*

And finally demonstrating the unique properties of wool and stimulating new uses

*"I thought the belly wool or the small wool as we call it, dag wool, was worthless as such and I thought if they could use that .."*

*"Wool is a natural material which behaves largely like peat. It retains water but it releases it slowly, it's fantastic."*

*"Wool is getting a new life .. It's a fantastic product."*

*"One last thing, let's not forget the other element of all this as well which is giving a new use to short wool."*

*"Somebody else might be inspired to say, 'hang on a minute, we'll use it as compost, we'll grow it locally and we'll have something we can make'."*

### **Low carbon footprint**

The participants all recognise and mostly respect that a key principle of the Woollen Line is to avoid, as far as possible, employing carbon intensive techniques to repair a carbon problem. The principal challenge is how to transport the wool up the hill and this is where the horses, large numbers of people and Gurkhas have come in.

*"to continue the project in a non mechanical way, how do you get something as bulky and heavy to the top of the hill? There's limited heather in proximity at the same level so you are always going to be bringing it uphill and that's a big challenge"*

*"We talked about aerial spraying well I don't know that process but whether you can do that without actually having to use a helicopter whether you can actually spray seed physically or in another way or whether people could just walk and spray the material so you can reduce the footprint that way"*

*"I really liked .. co-operatively working with our hands and things. That's something that's hugely missing from our society nowadays. It used to be the core of everything and people haven't got that now."*

As part of the project process, this low carbon constraint is stimulating new learning and thinking:-

*"potentially .. ponies to train to take a cart of brash if you want to keep away from anything petrol driven."*

*"Rigging up a skid style, rather than a wheeled cart to try to drag material"*

*"I wonder if you could set up something similar to what you use with old mining systems where you'd set up something with a water balance system."*

But some of the Graziers, Ecologists and Wardens feel that the low carbon approaches should be compromised to achieve results faster and with less human effort. This was referred to as "high input".

*"The quickest and the easiest way to get a mass of wool rapidly up there would be on quads."*

*"It depends how fast you want the wool up there. I can see the environmental aspect of using the horses, less damage to the environment. They are not petrol driven and all the rest of it but, if you asked me to organise the trip up there, I'd be rounding the local farmers up on their quads"*

*"You could mechanise it, you could fly helicopters up, you could try and find .. a couple of hundred thousand rather than tens of thousands to try to deliver these projects"*

*"I mean we could take a big industrial approach to this which is happening in other parts of the Park in terms of flying materials up, installing things, putting dams in, putting restoration materials over the top."*

### **Slow pace**

Everyone recognised that the Woollen Line project is moving at a slow pace compared to other upland restoration projects.

*"I would describe this project as 'slow'. I think it's slow and, in some ways, it depends what you want your outcomes to be and, for involvement, it's fantastic but in terms of covering that ground and getting something growing on it, you look at the photos and there's not much evidence of a lot growing on it yet"*

For those involved in other projects or focussed on achieving a fast result, the slow pace is a frustration and a worry.

*"as practitioners of this high intensity work, we recognise that it's painfully slow and there are things which can be done in small scale increments to make small scale changes and get sections complete"*

*"In terms of whether it's restoring peat and locking in carbon, well it's a much slower approach to things"*

*"crikey, this is a very long winded way of doing things".*

However, the artists together with some of the Community members and Ecologists see the slow pace as an important tenet of the project philosophy – because it's a process rather than an end goal and the connections and mind shifting it's creating take their own time.

*"The fact that it's being done gradually is very good because you can see what's happening so you can build on that and it takes time for each bit to bed in so you can then build on that."*

*"It's allowing people to learn and then engage together and you can only do that through a slow pace. I know that's a really really important part of the project."*

*"It depends what you want as the outcome - if it's about reconnecting people with the landscape, then this one is way in front probably but, in terms of getting stuff growing on it, it's a long way behind."*

*"I think that's kind of been a journey. I have seen attitudes shifting since I first was talking about it"*

*"even if it took 20 years, I think it would be good"*

#### **4.1 Comparative approaches**

The Ecologists, Wardens, National Park management and Graziers all drew comparisons between the Woollen Line project and other restoration projects. The main differences they outlined were as follows:-

##### **High intensity for a short time period**

*"we are very used to a very 'get in, get something done, get out again'.*

*"on those high input projects, you know you're always looking at 2-3 year grants ... it is all intensive"*

*"they've approached it from the high intensity end"*

##### **Focussed on fast results and clear measurable outcomes**

*"But you look at one of the projects in the Black Mountains that was high input and there's a lot growing on it and the water's under control but there has been some local input but not at the same scale."*

*"The sort of thing that the peak district have done where they've sprayed seed and fertiliser and sticking agents onto peat and had a very rapid response."*

*"you've got a big amount of cash, you've got to spend it and you've got to have some degree of certainty of outcome and measures of success"*

### **Low local involvement**

*"if you just fly in experts from outside of the Park or wherever; they come in, they do the project, they spend the money and they go again"*

*"then I think they've realised that they've left everybody behind"*

*"we wouldn't necessarily have created the same level of broad interest around the restoration"*

*"it doesn't necessarily engage with the public"*

### **Ends justify the means (in carbon terms)**

*"we used helicopters on Hatterill hill and all the carbon impact of that"*

*"tractors coming up there or mechanised contractors"*

*"Tractor drivers, helicopter so there's lots and lots of money and lots and lots of machinery involved but only really a handful of people in terms of directly doing the work."*

*"you could mechanise it, you could fly helicopters up"*

### **Very Expensive**

Possibly because the money is spent in a short time period, these projects are perceived to be very expensive.

*"It's extremely expensive"*

*"a couple of hundred thousands, rather than tens of thousands to deliver these projects"*

*"it was a lot of money"*

The Graziers tend to see these projects as unnecessarily expensive and a waste of money.

*"the National Park do various works on the hill which are perceived to be a waste of money, well they are a waste of money.. they spend a huge amount of money."*

*"The National Park usually take big jobs ... expensive"*

*"I'd be very sceptical about the National Park because they'd be wasting a lot of money".*

The Graziers seem more comfortable with smaller scale, more experimental and (in their eyes) a more practical approach.

*"Some of their ideas haven't been thought out and practical."*

*"I think in the first instance we're all fairly practical people otherwise we wouldn't be there. You are concerned that there maybe an elaborate waste of money."*

*"You don't know what's going to work until you try it. The more things you try, the more chance of success."*

*"We try everything - pick what works the best. If you restricted yourself to only trying what somebody thought you should be doing, then you'd never get anywhere like."*

Most of those involved in other 'high intensity' projects didn't see the Woollen Line project as less valuable – simply different and an approach they are interested to learn from.

*"I think the difference with this project it's started with a very low intensity and is maintaining a low intensity in order to hold onto that community interest - to bring people with you because you could deliver this in a very different way."*

*"It depends what you want as the outcome - if it's about reconnecting people with the landscape, then this one is way in front probably but, in terms of getting stuff growing on it, it's a long way behind."*

*"Now, if you did it as a straight conservation project, you'd be missing a trick because you wouldn't add that extra dimension of kind of inspirational stuff that people like to be involved with"*

*"And all the National Park ecologists, if they remember one thing when they left here, that was the thing that they were most impressed by was the woollenline and Pip's presentation - it really meant something to them".*

## **5 Woollen Line as Art**

### **As a Philosophy**

We have seen, in a previous section of this report, how an art perspective is central to the philosophy of the Woollen Line project - both the fact that the project is essentially a process not a product and that it is primarily about the response it creates in those who engage with that process.

*"the Woollen Line shows that art can do more – brings in a dimension of positive action which challenges not just the audience but the accepted method of conservation".*

*"viewers are confronted with worrying questions about erosion and human intervention and their own part in the process"*

### **As an Artwork**

But the Artists along with some of the Community members, School students and Ecologists perceive the line drawn on the hill as an important and radical artwork in its own right.

*"I think of it as a drawing"*

*"it directly marks the earth"*

*"It's Land Art .. like Richard Long for example who construct patterns in the landscape, lines, arrange slates, stones that kind of thing and Andy Goldsworthy who also puts things into the landscapes."*

*"The artwork IS the Woollen Line – it is the main visual outcome"*

*"It's not just a plinth and a structure that's been put there, it's a much more intimate part of the hillside."*

*"it's making a visual statement"*

*"it was black and you're turning it white"*

There is also a recognition that, unlike Land Art, the Woollen Line as an artwork will evolve and change over time – *"that's designed in - that it will decay. It will become something that's different. It's going to decay and become part of the landscape. It sort of accepts that process."*

Some of the non-artists reported that there is an awkward expectation that an artwork is something that one should be able to see.

*".. my mother - she drives up Pengefnordd quite often, she says 'where is it?'. She looks on the hillside and can't see it. So, in that way, it's quite remote, isn't it."*

*"it is difficult to connect to the artistic when all you have is a very limited mental picture, a visual picture of the site and the statement that arises from the aerial photo .. if you can't see it .. then it's a difficult visual art"*

But the Artists would argue that the struggle to climb the hill and access the art in its wild environment *is* part of experiencing it.

*"the actual line cannot be viewed without an exhausting climb and encountering the elements"*

*"it points the way forward for art which demands more from the artist and the audience"*

### **As a medium of response**

As well as the artwork on the hill, the Students and some of the Artists talked about the art they had generated themselves as their way of responding to the project.

*"you feel a bit like Richard Long in those bleak, black and white photos standing on the top of a rocky mountain with a big line of stones. You feel like him, you know, up there and you feel like rearranging a few stones as you go as well. I've always enjoyed that kind of art.."*

*"The learning was probably the art. Once you've experienced it, how much art you can produce doing it."*

*"We started making music about it. I played the piano, she sings."*

And the Community members talked about the impact that some of these art responses had had on them.

*"I like the fact that it's art in all its forms.. as I said there's a poem that's been written about it, there's aerial photographic shots of it. ... So, I don't know if there is any involvement from music but that would seem to be the only bit that was missing to me ... so maybe we should sing as we go up?!"*

*"Chris Meredith's poetry is just fantastic."*

### **As metaphor**

As already discussed, the woollen line serves as a powerful visual metaphor for stitching together people and the landscape.

*"But also it is like stitching, it's not just the stitching together of the landscape,"*

*"so many different strands being woven into it. There's like all these knitting and stitching metaphors."*

### **But not everyone sees the role for art**

Across the discussion groups, there were people who don't view the art as central to the project. They see it as a separate and probably dispensable component of the project.

*"..he was coming at it from a complete different world.. it's almost as if he was missing the art bit altogether."*

*"Well the only thing I thought about the art project was where some of the funding comes from initially"*

*"if it's an art project, so be it. If they are making an effort that might cause a bit of help, well it's a start, isn't it."*

*"art is ..probably seen as a luxury"*

Some scientists see art as something they do in their personal rather than professional role.

*"Some of us might be artists in our spare time but none of us are artists in our professional capacity."*

A few even see the art (or report others who see the art) as a somewhat trivial component of a potentially serious ecological project.

*"there was some very negative reactions because they felt it was whimsical perhaps or just not sufficiently seriously tackling it"*

*"there are some people who still think it's slightly frivolous".*

*"The job that I would see which would be re-vegetating it and not just making it into a pattern."*

*"It's more practical - it's a waste of time doing the art stuff."*

## **6 Who owns the Woollen Line project?**

We asked each group who they thought owned the project. Nearly all the groups struggled with this issue and saw it as very complex.

*"ownership? – it's not the right word is it?"*

*"ownership – I agree ... it's a difficult word"*

*"ownership is a hard one"*

*"I've no idea"*

Part of the difficulty is identifying what one is talking about 'owning', i.e. the Woollen Line project itself? or the hill? or the issue of peatland erosion? And part of the difficulty comes from different views of 'ownership' – i.e. legal ownership? or rights? or responsibilities? or management authority? or benefits arising from use or access?

So, the potential identities of owners (or those seen as primarily responsible) varied widely according to who was being asked. Most parties acknowledge that the Glanusk estate is the legal owner of the land itself.

*"it is factually owned by Glanusk estate. There is an owner"*

*"it is owned by a private estate"*

*"It's privately owned land which has commoners' rights on it"*

But some questioned whether there was any involvement by the landowner beyond providing permission for the project.

*"what is the landowner's contribution? ... they are having their land restored for free"*

*"I think it's Glanusk estate – they're not going to be particularly interested in paying anybody to go up there and do it"*

The Ecologists and Wardens mostly see the project as owned by a combination of Pip and the Graziers:-

*"we kind of view this as Pip and the Graziers' project"*

*"Pip's project with the involvement of the Graziers"*

*"it's been one person's vision and the Graziers"*

*"Pip has brought (the Graziers) in from the start – they own the project"*

They see the National Park as having a role as the managing authority – enabling, advising and granting permissions.

*"I think it fits slap bang within the Authority's role"*

*"it's a triple SSI so there is a consenting process"*

However, the National Park management and funders were clear that the project itself was not theirs.

*"the great thing about this project is that it's not the National Park"*

In fact, they expressed a strong desire to stay in the background simply enabling and supporting and helping source funding.

*"..we've been able to stay in the background and, if someone wants a bit of advice, we're happy to give some advice and happy to come up there on our own"*

*time and give a bit of elbow grease to the work as well and that means that it's achieved something that we can't achieve because we don't have this sort of expertise."*

*"The Authority's role in the project is to give the officers the freedom to support Pip .. and other people working with Pip"*

*"but the Authority has got the power to help it happen and that's where I think our role, particularly through SDF fund and the conservation fund could easily be supporting this action to continue - enabling, giving staff time, so it's that helping role which we can do within our programme of works."*

They also see themselves as having a regulatory role with regards to the project.

*"to a certain degree, it is a regulatory role in some aspects of what goes on there, so while we want to be as fully supportive and everything else, we do have a legal duty so it is a regulation role in some instances"*

But National Park management felt that any more active leadership role in the project could have a detrimental effect.

*"those kind of issues, if they come from an official conservation organisation, may not be received particularly well"*

*"we would have to be invited to take on a project like that because of the sensitivities of the people involved. We couldn't step in because ... what goodwill have we built up as an organisation? It would have to be on an invitation basis."*

*"you get the normal thing of 'you're taking over'"*

So, who do they consider does own the project? The answer is a combination of all the parties who've been involved and they are very happy with that.

*"you say 'who owns it?', the answer should be everyone - everybody involved, be they scientific researcher, the landowner, the commoners, whoever - it should be a shared responsibility"*

*"it's the graziers, it's the artists, it's the communities"*

*"it's the community, isn't it?"*

*"there's a role for everyone who lives and works in the National Park"*

However, they also recognise that Pip is a driving force and they worry whether the project has the alternative leaders or structures to continue the momentum if she wasn't around.

*"..having the community there is part of that sustainability but unless you've got somebody to hold it all together it can quite easily fall apart"*

*"..demonstrating that although Pip's the driving force, that actually what you are putting in place is the mechanism that will carry on"*

The Graziers see themselves as having a definite interest in the project and are actively contributing ideas and wool but they do not appear to see themselves as the project owners.

*"I suppose we graze on the hill and so it is an interest to us"*

*"I thought if they could use the wool straight off the farm and off the Black Mountains.. I thought that idea was good"*

*"well (filling nets) that's been the only contribution that we've given so far."*

*"that's all we've been asked to do, isn't it?"*

They see the project as belonging to Pip (*"it seems to be Pip's scheme I think", "Pip is in charge"*) but the erosion problem on the hill as being a National Park responsibility and they assume the latter's involvement in some fashion.

*"like the National Park have done nothing in all that time, have they?"*

*"the National Park – are they something to do with it?"*

The Graziers express frustration at being bound by the rules and regulations of authority bodies and seem to view themselves as having little freedom to solve problems in their own way.

*"got to abide by their rules"*

*"the powers that be"*

*"like with commonland, none of us... yes, we know it's there but, if you was caught sowing seed or fertiliser up there, well um 'yes'."*

And they also talk about the difficulty of getting their ideas and perspective across.

*"but the more you say to someone else, the more it gets diluted and you've lost the idea, your hands get tied behind your back and you can't do anything anyway."*

*"..you might have to go to an ecologist. He'd have to go to somebody else and somebody else and somebody else and by the time you get to the end .. our ideas is lost. The sense has all gone out of it."*

The Community members also see the National Park has having a major responsibility.

*"it's the National Park, isn't it?"*

*"the National Park is within the boundaries of where this is so you'd assume a significant measure of responsibility on their part for what goes on there, for what is happening there"*

*"caretakers – they should be putting some effort into the care of the land".*

*"surprise the Parks hadn't done much and it took an artist to set the ball rolling"*

But the Community members also expressed a view that the project doesn't belong to anyone – it's open for anyone to join in.

*"I don't think the project should be owned. It's just there and people can be part of it if they want to be part of it ... I don't think it should belong to anyone".*

The Artists were clear that they see the owner of the project as Pip – maybe because they think in terms of a creator of 'the artwork'.

*"It's Pip's concept. It's Pip's artwork"*

*"It's Pip's artwork and it's nice to contribute and participate"*

*"Pip actually made her own lines on it"*

*"It's an artist's vision of how we can tackle a really important environmental problem."*

Finally, a couple of the Ecologists said they thought that the hill itself was the owner.

*"I see the hill itself as owning it. ..I think of it as just a hill that's wounded and people are just doing it in their own way giving it a bit of first aid. It's the same as any wounded animal, who owns the wound? The Doctors or the vet don't own it. It's all owned by that hill. I don't think anyone really owns the project."*

*"I agree .. the hill owns itself and owns the scar"*

## **7 Evaluating the Woollen Line Project**

The majority of people who participated in the discussion groups were enthusiastic about the Woollen Line project and saw it as achieving significant value in terms of the numbers and range of people involved and the effect it has on its participants.

*"I have seen attitudes shifting"*

*"there is value in the amount of people who are at least aware or thinking of the issue and now aware of the scale"*

*"for me one of the biggest achievements of the project is the number of people that it's managed to draw into understanding and trying to do work to restore the scar up on Waun Fach."*

*"there's a real enthusiasm whenever you go up on the hill with a group of people on one of Pip's days out and that's equally as beneficial as the environmental work"*

*"I've been particularly impressed with the social inclusion element of the project."*

Some of the Ecologists also outlined the tangible ecological results of the project to date.

*"In terms of physical restoration, the fact that the material is still there. I had visions of sheets of wool everywhere. It's still there, that to me is a measure of success."*

*"The site has seen degradation over a long period of time, it's on a downward slope so stopping that, i.e. nothing's changed from 3 years ago is also a measure of success because it hasn't got worse. .. and without the work that's been done, who knows how bad it could be particularly with the very wet year we've had."*

*"There's little bits (of growth) within the sausages but it's how you promote that re-vegetation once you've got stable surface and the wool is endeavouring to provide that stable surface"*

*"I'd also say it's returning the carbon back to the hill because the wool is going back up there."*

However, people expressed two major concerns about the project's success (i) achieving plant growth and (ii) measuring success in order to justify further funding.

### **Achieving plant growth**

The concern about achieving growth on the scar was expressed mainly by the Graziers, the Ecologists and Wardens but also by some Community members.

*"Well, I think most farmers are thinking 'was the experiment worthwhile?' .. see if anything will grow. That's the main thing."*

*"for involvement, it's fantastic but in terms of covering that ground and getting something growing on it, you look at the photos and there's not much evidence of a lot growing on it yet."*

*"but is it working? Does it stop erosion? Can it lead to re-growth? I don't know the answer to that. I don't know if anyone knows the answer."*

### **Measuring project success**

As we have reported here, most people recognise that the Woollen Line project is primarily about a process of connecting people (across boundaries of perspective and culture) and with a landscape which needs healing through the medium of art and wool. The key is the way people (as well as the land) respond and are changed by that engagement.

*"You don't know what seeds you're sowing with the people who come but using art, using conservation, completing that understanding of the wool was grown on the hillside, it's going back to help restore the hillside. Actually the seeds you sow in people's minds and the increase in understanding is actually essential."*

And most of the funders and management see the project as having novel and unique value in that regard.

*"It's not only novel, I think in the physical processes it's undertaking in creating the woollen lines but it's very novel in the artistic approach it's taking and the level of community engagement as well. All of that makes it a really innovative and worthwhile project"*

So, the National Park Managers and Funders value the project precisely because it's different and is "thinking outside the box"

*"we can afford to think outside the box here."*

*"This is just looking outside the box."*

*"it's been outside the world of targets and things like that"*

But ironically they are troubled precisely because they haven't got the usual boxes (sic) to tick to justify the project to themselves or those to whom they are accountable.

*"it's got very few measures of success identified as a project"*

*"to know something's working, you have to set an objective for it so it's what objectives have been set for the project and then you have to set a set of measures against that. So that's the way I'd approach whether or not it's working."*

*"what is the basis on which you are making the judgement of value for money?"*

*"I would like to emphasise again, I think that as it continues, there do need to be in place ways of assessing what it's achieving, what is being accomplished."*

They are understandably anxious about how they justify the money and their own decision making to the Government or Trustees on whose behalf they allocate funds.

*"there's already that good will that feeling that it is worthwhile but sooner or later, we may get audited by the Welsh Audit Office to say 'why did you continue to support this?' and we will need that evidence as well."*

*"on what basis am I going to present to the Trustees to put in even more than they've put in this year? - what's the basis of the success?"*

*"people are going to say 'but hold on, we've funded this for X years, is there a plan with outcome of success?"*

Interestingly our analysis showed that the individuals who talked most about their own direct experience of the project and how it had affected them personally talked least about the need for measurable outputs and vice versa.<sup>6</sup>

Some also contrasted the 'soft' evidence from stories and anecdotes about individuals' responses to the project with the need for "hard" scientific or financial evidence of progress.

*"We are all telling stories to one another about our experiences of it and that's perfectly fine, that's one line of evidence but I think we do need other lines of evidence. We need scientific lines of evidence and we need some financial measures as well."*

*"And I think we need more than nice stories to be able to convey that effectively or with any degree of rigour."*

Even the reporting process of the discussion groups constitutes only 'soft' evidence.

*"Clearly, to a certain extent that's happening today, you've got stakeholders reporting back how they feel but that's all anecdotal stuff."*

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<sup>6</sup> There was a negative correlation of 0.74 between these two types of comment (personal impact and need for measurable outcomes).

So, the management recognise that there is a problem with regard to official funding and ongoing support of the project. There is a fundamental clash between an artistic philosophy of an open-ended process creating individual responses and outcomes which are unpredictable by nature ("*you don't know what you're unlocking*", "*each time something's happened, it's taken it somewhere else*") and an organisational/funding/auditing viewpoint where success is assessed 'objectively' in terms of predefined measures and outcomes ("*to know something's working, you have to set an objective for it*", "*in terms of success, it all depends what you set your criteria or outputs and outcomes to be in the first place*").

Some people suggested that elements of the project can be readily quantified for the purpose of such auditing and that this would help.

*"I think there still are measurable parameters, factors whatever one wants to call them in the jargon on the site. There are areas of wool, there are linear lengths of sausages, there are the odd hectare of ground covered. So you can quantify things in order to give measured responses back to parties and you can quantify what you aim to cover in the subsequent sessions. You could equally quantify the number of parties you've engaged with..."*

*"Well, there are a number of different measures you could take because you could look at the amount of volunteering, community engagement that you were securing if you like but I think also in scientific terms, this is perhaps one way of restoring the uplands and will achieve X amount over such an area, what other approaches are possible and how much do they cost to achieve similar results?"*

*"useful to capture all the volunteer effort that's gone into it and compare that over 5-10 years to the way we did it traditionally on Hatterill."*

Indeed, it was suggested that the more different measurements there are the better – "*the more measures they come with, the more likely people will say 'oh it's working, we'll keep it going'.*"

Others pointed out that 'soft' outcomes (like people's attitudes) can also be measured and reported.

*"I think the other thing that you could look at is how you measure the soft outcomes, the benefits, the people... it'll be the impact 5 years down the line. And perhaps you need to be gauging a baseline attitudinal study now of what people think about it and then see whether or not that's changed in 3 to 5 years time."*

But even this approach requires one to decide in advance on the nature of the change one is seeking to measure over time (i.e. it can't be open-ended)<sup>7</sup>.

But perhaps more importantly, such soft measurement techniques create an 'us' (who is measuring) and a 'them' (whose changing attitude, understanding or behaviour is being assessed). So far, the Woollen Line project does not have such an 'us' and 'them' distinction and therein lies its strength – anyone can choose to participate and thus be affected by it. To disturb that would be to disturb something fundamental.

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<sup>7</sup> A 'measure' is defined as 'the ascertainment of extent by comparison with a standard'. (Chambers Dictionary)

## 8 Next steps

Leaving the somewhat vexed funding issues aside, almost all those involved in the discussion groups were keen to see the project continue.

*"I'd like to see the project continue as other people would"*

*"Absolutely"*

*"there's no end to it really"*

These are the next steps that are either planned, proposed or were suggested by individuals taking part in the discussion.

### **Diversification of materials & techniques**

In the next few months, there are plans for the Graziers, together with their sheep, to help till an experimental piece of the land and sow locally propagated seed which will be protected by wool and possibly heather and brash.

*"taking the seed which has been harvested up to the hill in the forthcoming months throughout this year, planting cotton grass that is currently been propagated."*

*"The bringing of brash to the hill is an essential, that is recognised, the difficulty is how. There are contemplations of harvesting brash, physically how that's done is the dilemma."*

### **New creative input**

Transporting more bulky materials up the hill requires new thinking in order to achieve it within the low carbon spirit of the project. Whilst this is problematic, it also stimulates new ideas and creative thinking which involves new skills and may well engage the interests of different people.

*"I think you need to take the pony idea further and actually look for some pony transport mechanism"*

*"Rigging up a skid style, rather than a wheeled cart to try to drag material."*

*"I wonder if you could set up something similar to what you use with old mining systems where you'd set up something with a water balance system."*

*"It's moving the right way with the purpose built saddle bags. We're starting to refine the breastplates .. the process is getting there."*

*"we need to just get them (Graziers) to bring up their sheep and pick it off them"*

One community member is interested in exploring whether wind and paragliders could be deployed for lifting bales.

### **New creative output**

The Artists, together with some of the School students and some Community members, are keen to explore new creative output inspired by the project.

*"I would like to continue the painting that comes out of the conversations"*

*"this whole business about how you show work and how it can have really profound meaning"*

*"art can do more – it brings in a dimension of positive action which challenges not just the audience but the accepted methods of conservation"*

*"I really like the (museum) exhibition and it was nice to see how other artists and writers, their take on it so more of that again to kind of disseminate what's happening in the project through different means"*

*"really want young people to create the art because of the emotional aspect and then protect and conserve and take from that back to their own square mile or their own patch"*

The more recent Woollen Line Art Exhibition in Crickhowell is attracting a new audience and stimulating new creative responses in its own right. Overheard conversations suggest more visual art but also possibly music and drama.

### **Wider promotion and involvement**

The Community members feel that more could be done to promote the project locally and to visitors and through the media.

*"I think some kind of media coverage or something that lets more really local people know more about it."*

*"It's a very striking beautiful image (referring to the aerial shot) and that being sold as a postcard with a message on the back which harnesses visitors to the area."*

*"And there are lots of events on in this kind of area, sort of craft fairs, people could be there making the nets, making the felt at those kind of events and other people would see it."*

*"see the project featured in journals – Resurgence, Artists' Newsletter, New Scientist".*

They would also like to see a permanent base for the project and exhibition.

*"..idea of having a shop, a base, taking somewhere over."*

*".. if we can get a summer long exhibition somewhere"*

### **Informing wider policy and practice**

The National Park Ecologists hope to see the project continue to inform UK policy and thinking.

*"it's trying to give a platform to this different approach and trying to get policymakers to try to think .. outside the box"*

*"IUCN<sup>8</sup> is now following up and they are going to be coming to the Park at some point in the future to talk about peatland restoration in the Park and Pip will be integral to both discussions"*

### **Shifting and strengthening ownership**

There is a recognition that the project cannot rely on the driving force of one person.

*"although Pip's the driving force, actually what you are putting in place is the mechanism that will carry on"*

(It needs to find) *"a way to be self perpetuating .. how do you carry it on?"*

Some expressed the need for a shift in ownership/driving force more strongly

*"I think about Pip as well and what effect the project is having on her because it seems so all consuming and like a big amount of responsibility for an artist to do this project - how that affects her and does she ever want to do something else?"*

*"Pip to stand aside and give herself space for new creative ventures. Parks and Graziers to get finger out and do something other than protect own interests"*

### **Establishing an annual fun event**

Part of Pip's original vision, to which her thoughts are returning, is to create an annual Woollen Line event with a focus on fun.

*"the vision I had right at the beginning was that we would end up with an annual event like a pilgrimage with horses and it would be fun .. that's what the vision was and it's growing. There is an expectation that there will be an event and I like that"*

## **9 Concluding thoughts**

Here is a concluding response to listening and analysing the feedback from the 7 discussion groups.

Almost everyone involved in the Woollen Line project is keen to see it continue and recognises its unique value in the connecting the disparate worlds of art and ecology, wool and peatland restoration, community, farming and the National Park Authority.

The project's value lies in its open-ended, art-led philosophy which focuses on creating experiences which stimulate widely varying emotional, cognitive and physical responses in the individuals who engage. The experiences connect together stakeholders from contrasting (and sometimes conflicting) outlooks and cultures and change how the participants think and behave in relation both to each other and to the land they work on, live in, play in or manage.

But without directly experiencing it, people find it difficult to understand the project or its value.

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<sup>8</sup> International Union for Conservation of Nature

By focussing on one well-defined, ecological result for the project (restored growth on the hill), there is a risk that people may miss the point.

Here is an analogy - recent academic research into Stonehenge's origins suggests<sup>9</sup> that the key to its original meaning and purpose may not have been the structure itself but rather the unifying process of constructing it because this involved thousands of diverse people (and rocks!) from the length and breadth of Britain. Who knows what conflicting cultures and approaches engaged in this co-operative activity or what new technologies or behaviours emerged as a result but recent archaeological findings suggest they certainly celebrated together as they did it.

We all need to understand better the effect of our actions on our physical environment and be energised to look after it ourselves because no amount of public money can rescue it once the damage is extensive. Rather than setting out to change attitudes, the Woollen Line project engages us in new and challenging activities and experiences which change the way we think and act and this is in tune with how behavioural psychology works.

No-one at this point in time can predict what the long term effects of the project might be or where it will take us all on its journey. Certainly, participants of all persuasions hope and aim that peat restoration and re-vegetation of Pen Trumau will result.

But the key point is that the lasting impacts of the project may well lie elsewhere completely. We simply do not know at this point. It might stimulate new economies for waste wool or create new relationships between the National Park Authority, Graziers and the Community. It might give rise to innovative low carbon technology and techniques for moving material up hills or radical new forms of art which impact how we view ourselves as an integral part of our environment. It might even transform organisational approaches for justifying and evaluating of "out of the box" projects.

Meanwhile, two major challenges for the project emerged from the research reported here: (i) ownership and (ii) funding policy. Either could disrupt the successful evolution of the project over the coming year.

**Ownership** - Despite the active and enthusiastic participation of so many groups and individuals in the project over the past 3 years, the language used in the feedback groups did not reveal any party stepping forward to lead on aspects of the project and drive them forward on their own initiative. Everyone seems keen to help, enable and support but not to lead. From her perspective, Pip is eagerly working towards the day when she can become simply 'one of the team' and concentrate on her role as an artist contributor. She recognises that the project hasn't got to that point yet but it is not yet clear how that shift might happen.

**Funding policy** - the project requires ongoing funding to cover (at minimum) materials, administration and installation days as well as related arts and social inclusion activities. As discussed in this report, the project's slow pace and open ended, creative nature doesn't naturally fit the current structures of funding allocation and auditing and even challenges these in some awkward ways. This does not mean that it is a poor use of public funds nor that project members feel less responsibility for spending tax payer's money but it does create stress on all

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.shef.ac.uk/news/nr/stonehenge-monument-unification-britain-1.188608>

sides and wastes valuable time and energy which could be better deployed actually doing the project. It may therefore be that the thinking and policy of funding authorities and their agents needs itself be one of the multiple things transformed by personal engagement with this radical project.

## 10 Postscript

The aim of this work was to *inform* (i.e. give new *form* to) our thinking – author and reader alike and its effect will be unique to the individual concerned. Once read, feel free either to throw this report away or pass it to someone else. Either these marks (on the paper or screen) have *informed* you, in which case their value is discharged or they have not, in which case they have no further informing function and shredded paper makes excellent compost (another *informing* function!). If filed away physically or digitally, a report cannot inform its container.



*"we around the table having been involved in it and others have this emotional response and then the place becomes very important to you and you do everything you can to protect it in the future, to conserve it and I think this is what engaging through the art processes can do for the environment."*