

Draft discussion paper

VISION for a RURAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR HEALTH & WELLBEING

based at Bronllys Hospital, Powys Teaching Health Board

Further to the recent 'Hearts and Minds' event to develop a vision for mental health services in Powys discussions, some preliminary thoughts about potential service developments at Bronllys as one strand of this vision are outlined below.

We have a unique resource in Powys, being a rural teaching LHB in one of the most beautiful counties in the UK. We face particular challenges but at the same time have some excellent opportunities. With the Bronllys Hospital site we have a potential resource to develop a range of innovative services and therapeutic practices that utilise the attributes of the hospital campus and environment, and our location in mid Wales on the edge of the Brecon Beacons, to benefit staff, patients and the local community. By thinking creatively we may be able to create income streams, training and education opportunities, research projects and address many needs both in terms of sustainability, links and partnerships between statutory and non-statutory sectors and services, as well as local community engagement and resilience.

This could also fit with aspects of

- Welsh Government's Rural Health Innovation Programme which includes community cohesion and engagement as one of its three themes.
- The Prince's Foundation Vision for Bronllys Hospital Site
- Hearts & Minds Together for Mental Health in Powys

Benefits to physical and mental health – the evidence base

There is a growing body of research and evidence demonstrating the physical and mental health benefits of many aspects of the relationship between the environment and health and wellbeing and of 'green care' eg Institute for Rural Health study 'Natural Heritage - A Pathway to Health' (Davies & Deaville 2008). A summary of relevant research can be provided if required.

Some background, context and relevant links to examples of existing national initiatives include:

- **MIND**
Following research conducted by the University of Essex demonstrating significant improvements in mental health problems including depression, the MIND Report on Ecotherapy in 2007 calls for "a new *green* agenda for mental health, following growing evidence in support of ecotherapy as an accessible, cost-effective and natural addition to existing treatment options."
http://www.mind.org.uk/campaigns_and_issues/report_and_resources/835_ecotherapy
- *Ecominds* is funding several ecotherapy projects around England, though unfortunately this funding is not currently available to develop similar projects in Wales.
<http://www.mind.org.uk/ecominds>
- **Natural Health Service**
The Natural Health Service, a project of Natural England, highlights the role of the natural environment in maintaining healthy lives – there are well-documented improvements to health and wellbeing that contact with plants, nature and a greener environment can deliver.
<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/linkingpeople/health/default.aspx>

- The **Sustainable Development Commission** <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=712> suggests that “The NHS can help tackle health inequalities and promote physical and mental wellbeing by working with local partners to encourage a greater understanding of the value of spending time in the natural environment... and ensure that the natural environment is a prominent feature of the community and easily accessible to all. This can help to relieve the NHS and the wider economy of the financial burden of ill-health.”
- **Care Farming and ‘Green Care’ opportunities**
As one of the Rural Health Innovation Projects, the Institute for Rural Health produced their report in 2011 ‘Delivering Care in the Countryside – Taking Care Farming Forward in Wales’ http://www.rural-health.ac.uk/pdfs/care_farming.pdf.
 - Care farming provides the opportunity for farms, market gardens and woodlands to be used as places to provide meaningful activity for a range of client groups, including those experiencing mental health issues; excluded and disaffected youth; those with alcohol/drug issues; people with special needs and autism; prolific offenders and those on probation; the long-term unemployed. The therapeutic benefits of becoming involved in farming and horticultural practices can provide an alternative to traditional interventions and treatment.
 - Many successful initiatives exist in England, with Ludlow and Leominster CMHTs also involved in supporting clients to participate in activities at care farms via personal budgets.
 - Local projects Ashfield Community Enterprise and Primrose Earth Awareness Trust offer similar activities
- **The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (CSH)** <http://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/about> inspires people to realise “the vital importance of the overlap between their wellbeing and environmental sustainability, particularly in the field of healthcare. With studies showing that climate change is the biggest threat to health this century, and reports demonstrating that the NHS is one of the biggest carbon polluters in the UK, the CSH aims to promote healthy, ‘green’ practices as opposed to being the country’s largest carbon polluter. It is working with key partners to engage healthcare professionals, patients and the wider community in understanding the connections between health and environment and the importance of adopting sustainable practices at work and at home. The ‘convenient truth’ is that what is good for the environment is also good for people’s health”.
 - **Developing under-utilised land on NHS hospital sites**
For example the ‘Outer Space’ project of CHC has Big Lottery Access To Nature funding and is working with NHS partners to open up under-utilised land on hospital sites, with the aim of “providing improved access to natural green spaces for the benefit of hospital users, staff and their local communities, developed with local partners and volunteers to become hubs for the enjoyment of nature, relaxation, arts, ecotherapy, green crafts, woodland skills and personal development.” <http://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/news/2011/07/outer-space-our-lottery-funded-access-nature-project-has-started>

Potential projects on Bronllys site

These could benefit various groups including

- Staff
- Patients – eg Felindre, veterans, CMHT clients
- Local community

Wellbeing at Work

As well as the Bronllys site walking map produced for WBAW Sophia Bird has been in contact with BTCV about creating a nice outdoor seated area and walk through the hospital grounds eg for lunchtime walks, that would be suitable for staff and patients.

Therapeutic gardening / horticultural projects - reclaiming Bronllys land for vegetable growing

Somewhere I have seen an old photograph of land in front of Hilfa Unit being ploughed by horses and growing vegetables, in the days of the TB hospital. We have the potential to revive this on a small scale, perhaps with a pilot project which could include staff, patients and the local community.

'Outer Space' project

Powys tLHB could develop a similar 'Outer Space' project at Bronllys to become a showcase / pilot project for Powys/Wales:

- in partnership with NHS Forest, coordinated by CSH, who aim to "improve health of staff, patients and communities and encourage greater social cohesion between NHS sites and the local community."
- They liaise with GP practices interested in 'green referral' for exercise or conservation activities in partnership with BTCV.
- They have said that they would be keen to help us develop a suitable project at Bronllys and conduct the community engagement sessions, as well as help with finding funding. If we are interested in pursuing this possibility, they would suggest an initial meeting or conference call to discuss further.

Felindre

- Developing a therapeutic garden at the inpatient unit – there have been initial conversations with Michelle F, Penny P, Tanyia P, and there is interest and support to pursue this possibility.
- Developing horticultural projects – raised beds, growing veg for patients to cook – OT activities, and for kitchen to use.
- Walking in nature with clients – therapeutic resource for self-soothing, grounding, 'walk & talk'.

Specific populations eg veterans, local community, young people

- Some local veterans have been instrumental in initiating ideas for a Bronllys residential support unit now included in the Princes Foundation Vision for Bronllys Hospital Site Bronllys residential rehab unit – (see outline proposal attached for info).
- Ex-service clients have many skills to offer, which are often not recognised or utilised once they are back in civilian life.
- Some of my clients, also involved in the Bronllys residential unit idea, have suggested that in addition to psychological therapies, practical activities such as horticultural projects would be beneficial and have offered to provide their expertise on gardening, horticulture, landscaping and person-power to clear land, build raised beds, sheds, greenhouses or polytunnels, project planning.
- Combat Stress have created a special therapeutic sensory garden for PTSD sufferers, for example.
- Linking vegetable growing on NHS land with hospital staff, patients, local community, possibly with education, probation, or employment services to offer volunteering and work experience.
- Mental health benefits of such activity-based projects may include raising self-esteem, confidence-building, overcoming isolation and alienation, integrating into civilian life and local community, building social networks and friendships, feeling valued, learning new skills etc .
- Potential links with young people seeking employment, skills, work experience opportunities or training (eg recent conversation with horticulture tutor/CBT therapist at Neath Port Talbot College now merging with Coleg Powys).
- Other clients with appropriate skills and enthusiasm to be involved and of use who are not able to find paid employment for a range of reasons.
- Reclaim old walled garden, or other suitable plot?
- Could also benefit and include staff and WBAW.

Therapy outdoors

- Reclaim garden outside Hilfa Unit or other suitable location to create a therapeutic 'safe space' for psychological therapy sessions as appropriate and weather permitting
 - eg some ex-service clients are not comfortable in a small indoor consulting room,
 - nature as a helpful resource for grounding and sensory awareness exercises, also useful as part of building coping skills in stabilisation and preparation phase for trauma therapy
- The professional organisation Counselling & Psychotherapy Outdoors (CAPO) supports therapists in taking their practice outdoors and promotes research. www.outdoorththerapy.org.uk
- Book 'The Healing Fields' by clinical psychologist Jenny Grut describes her therapeutic work outdoors with traumatised asylum seekers through gardening and growing vegetables.

Research & training possibilities

- Review substantial current evidence-base and opportunities to develop research projects
 - Eg IRH review of evidence <http://www.irh.ac.uk/pdfs/publications/NaturalHeritage.pdf>
- Trainee research projects
- Research projects, eg outcome data and qualitative evaluation or simple satisfaction questionnaires
- Client case studies
- Opportunities for students on placement
- Apprenticeships
- Seminars, special interest groups

Wider partnerships

- Develop a Powys forum or special interest group in ecotherapy/green care using the natural environment in Powys and with NHS staff, 3rd sector, local community
- Link with existing projects already mentioned, and local initiatives and 3rd sector organisations eg Ashfield Community Enterprises, The Loft, Mind, Healthy Friendships
- Walking groups, gardening groups, access to therapeutic gardens, green prescription from GPs eg green gym
- Opportunities for voluntary work / Volunteering on Prescription
- Possible link with Three Cocks garden centre

Possible sources of funding and/or project assistance or partnership

- Powys Armed Forces Community Covenant funding for projects involving veterans
- GLASU http://www.glasu.org.uk/en/page_12.php as part of the Community Resilience funding stream
- Centre for Sustainable Healthcare /NHS Forest
- BCTV
- Cwm Harry <http://cwmharry.org.uk>

Next steps

- There is interest from several staff including CMHTs, and a preliminary meeting of relevant parties and potential partners could be arranged to explore possibilities.
- Sophia Bird and I are hoping to further develop one of the above ideas as a proposal for a small-scale horticultural or gardening pilot project possibly linking veterans, Wellbeing at Work, local community and possible Military Covenant Funding.

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