



## **Why we did a questionnaire about the forest**

Coetir Mynydd has been working with the Forestry Commission to consult with local communities in our area for a number of years. Parc y Blwch is our local forest which belongs to the Welsh Government and is managed by the Forestry Commission. Like most Forestry Commission forests it is a dense block of Sitka spruce which was planted in the 1960's and is now at the age when the trees are felled and re-planted. These activities are done according to a Design Plan which is revised every five years. When these plans are revised the Forestry Commission invite comments and ideas from the local community – usually this means the Community Council but it can also be a public consultation. The Design Plan for Parc y Bwlch expired in May 2009 and preparation of the next Design Plan has been delayed to allow for an in-depth public consultation as part of the Forestry Commission Pathfinder study. In 2009 the Mynydd Llandygai Youth Club did a questionnaire survey of people living in their village but this does not represent the views of everyone living around the forest. So after getting funding from GwirVol and the Forestry Commission, Coetir Mynydd came and offered us in Tregarth Youth Club the opportunity to do a forest consultation in our village. The results of our study will be forwarded to the Forestry Commission and used in the next Design Plan for Parc y Bwlch.

There are several reasons why we agreed to volunteer do the questionnaire:

- only a few of us in the Youth Club are very familiar with the forest and this provided an opportunity to find out more about it;
- the project sounded like something interesting to do and
- it provided a useful volunteer opportunity.

## **What we did**

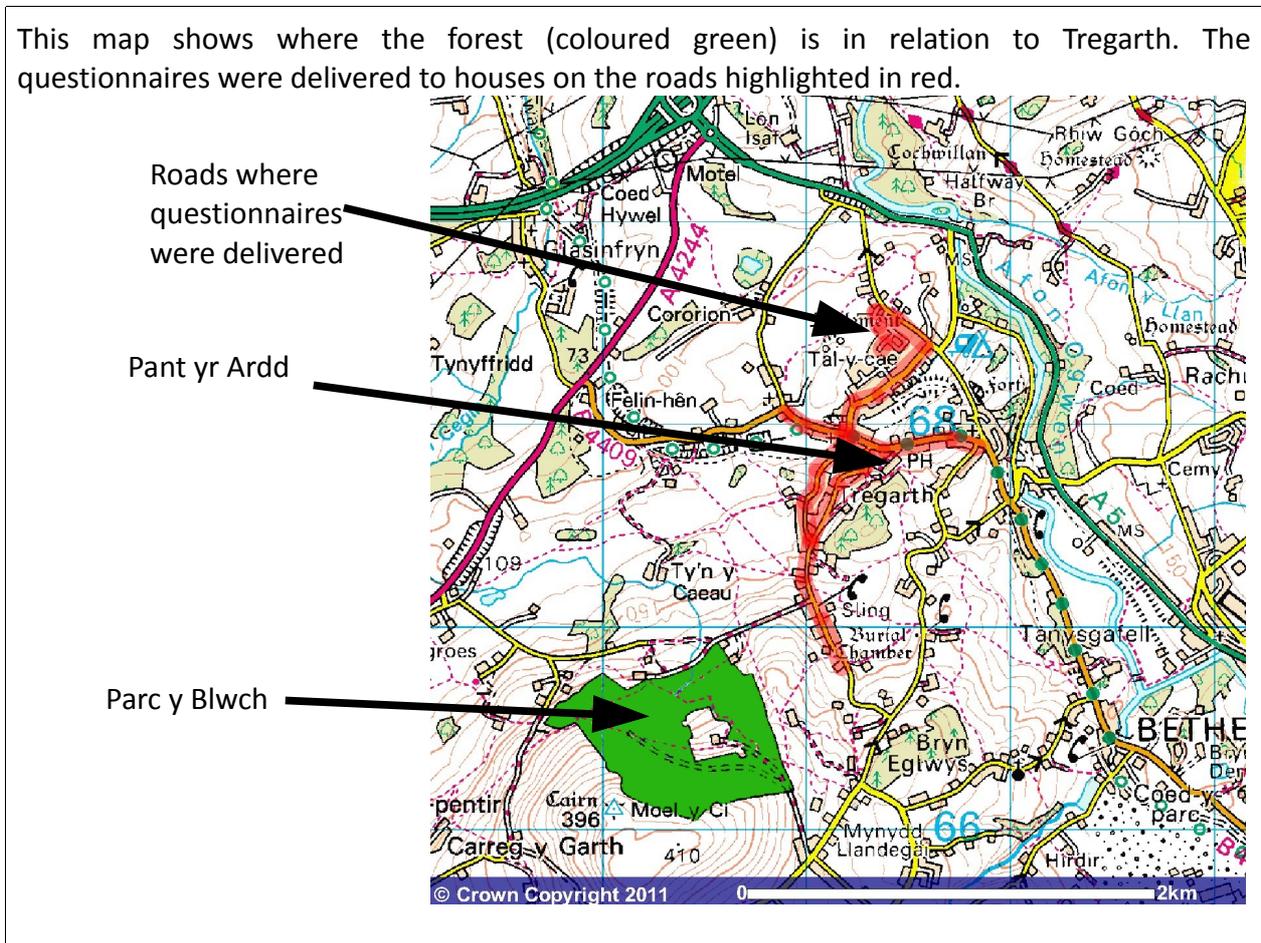
The project took the form of 12 sessions with Robin, Claire and Kirsten of the Wales Youth Forum for Sustainable Development at the Thursday Youth Club from January to May 2011. The initial sessions were concerned with learning more about the forest, the Forestry Commission and questionnaire techniques. We then designed our own questionnaire and printed out a few hundred copies in English and Welsh. These were delivered it around the village, knocking on doors to explain what it was all about.

There were four ways people returned the filled in questionnaires: left it sticking out of letterbox for collection shortly after delivery; dropping in a box at the Pant yr Ardd pub, calling for a pick up, returning it to a friend or filling in the questionnaire on-line on Survey Monkey.

The information on the filled in questionnaires was typed on a computer and turned into the bar charts and figures in this report. We then thought about what our results mean and sorted out the key messages to pass onto the Forestry Commission. We turned these ideas into a presentation which was shown at a village meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2011 to which we invited the Forestry Commission. This report has been prepared as a record of the project and what we found out for everyone in the village. It is also for the Forestry Commission so they know what the people of Tregarth think of the forest.

We hope that this will be the starting point for greater interest and involvement in the forest by the community of Tregarth. It is one of three community reports prepared for Parc y Bwlch and joins those for Mynydd Llandygai and Rhiwlas.

This map shows where the forest (coloured green) is in relation to Tregarth. The questionnaires were delivered to houses on the roads highlighted in red.



## Who filled in the questionnaires?

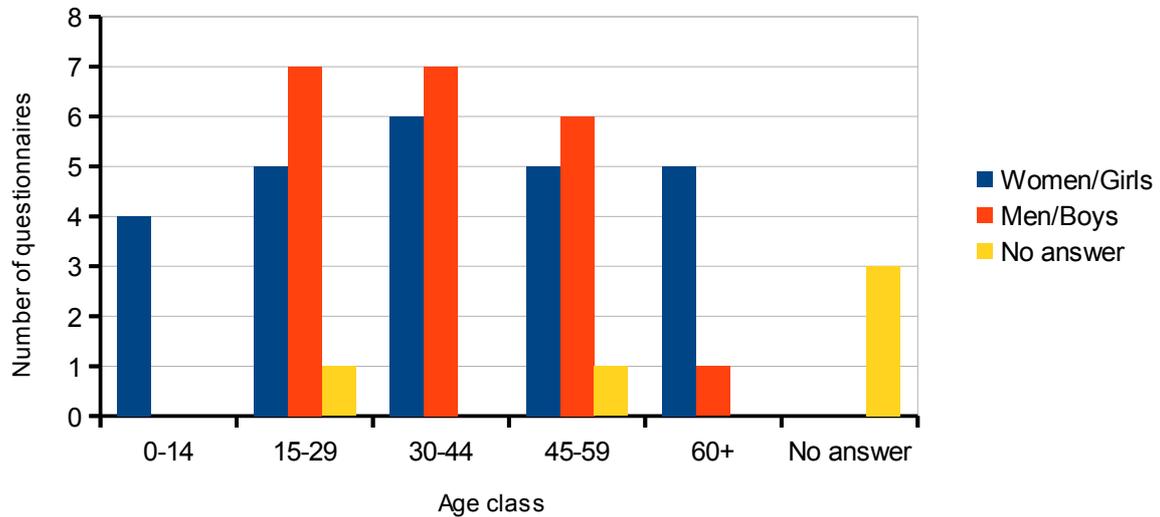
We got 51 filled in questionnaires back (10 of these from Survey Monkey). Chart 1 shows how many of the English and Welsh questionnaires we got back which shows we got a good representation of both languages.

Chart 1: Language used to fill in the questionnaire



Question 10 asked people filling in the questionnaire whether they were male or female and their age. We asked this so we could tell whether our results included a cross section of everyone in the village or just a particular age or more men or women. Chart 2 shows the number of people who filled in the questionnaire.

Chart 2: Age and gender of people who filled in the questionnaire



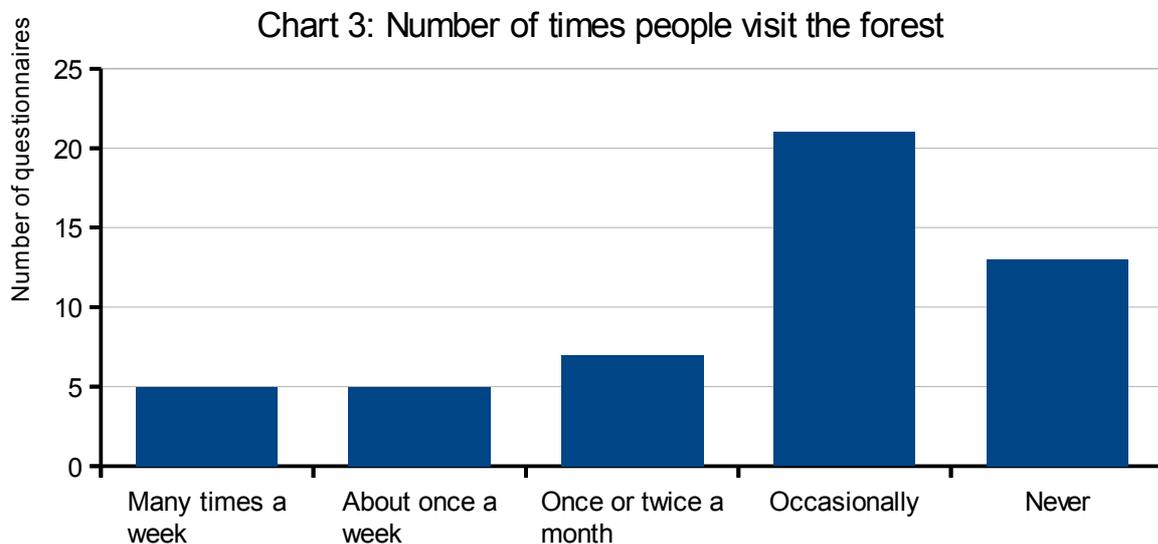
Altogether 51 questionnaires were returned but some people did not tick to give their age or gender. Of the people we know about, 19 were male and 25 were female which means we may be short of males as most populations are 50:50 men and women. Looking at the different ages we can see that we are missing boys from 0-14 years old and have few men over 60. Although there are 3 questionnaires with no answers for this question which may fill some of these gaps.

Despite these problems, we have what looks like a good cross-section of the population of Tregarth. This is very encouraging as it means our results should be reliable.

*Thank you to everyone who supported us and filled in a questionnaire!*

## Q1: How often do you visit the forest?

All 51 people who completed the questionnaire answered this question (Chart 3) and 74% said that they visited the forest at least occasionally.



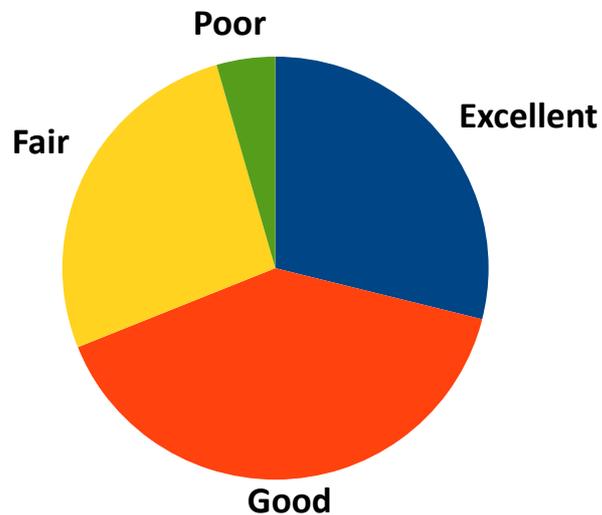
We expected people who are more interested in the forest to fill in the questionnaire so this doesn't mean that 74% of the whole village visit the forest. But 38 is still a good number of people to visit a forest which is a reasonable walk up a steep hill from the village, especially if they take their families along or visit with friends who didn't fill in a questionnaire. Most people only occasionally visit the forest and relatively few go there regularly.

We wondered why 13 people would bother completing the questionnaire when they don't visit the forest. We thought of two reasons why they might do this: they wanted to support a Youth Club activity or they would like to visit the forest but are not able to do so. Some answers also suggest that there are people in Tregarth who are not aware that there is a public forest within walking distance – for example one person wrote on their questionnaire “I didn't even know where it was! And I've lived here for 10 years!”

## Q2: How would you rate this as a place to visit?

Of the 51 people, 6 did not answer this question while 13 people said they never visited the forest. Of the 8 people who never visit who answered this question, 3 thought it was 'Excellent', 3 'Good' and 2 a 'Fair' place to visit. This suggests that these people may like to visit the forest but for some reason are unable to visit or disinterested in the forest personally but recognise its value to others.

Chart 4: Ratings for forest visits

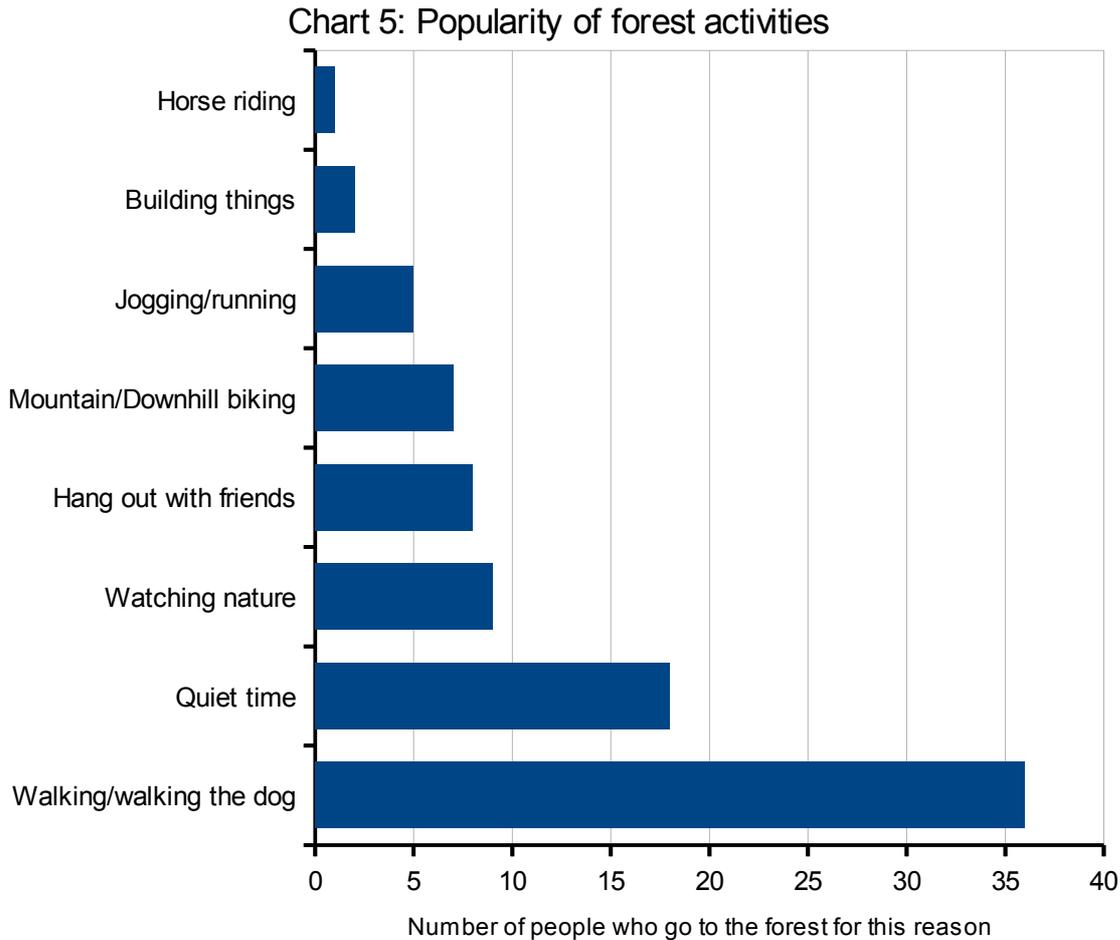


Of the people who rated the forest 71% thought it is at least a good place to visit but only a third of these people rated it 'Excellent'. Given that Question 1 shows that most people only visit the forest occasionally this result suggests that people like the idea of the place, even if they can't get there very often.

## Q3: What do you do in the forest?

This question provided a list of 8 activities or reasons why people might wish to visit the forest along with a box for other suggestions. People could choose more than one box as they may visit the forest to cycle as well as run (but not usually at the same time!). Chart 5 shows the counts of each activity and it is very clear that nearly everyone who visits the forest will go for a walk there (81% of the 38 people who visit the forest). In this questionnaire going for a walk was grouped with walking the dog but in the Mynydd Llandygai survey these were separated and there it was clear that there is a difference between going for a walk and 'taking the dog for walk'.

Most of the more popular activities are done as part of walk with many people ticking boxes to show that they most often go for walk to have a quiet time to think. Active 'sports' such as mountain biking, running and horse riding done by relatively small numbers of people.



Only a couple of extra activities were listed by people – these being:  
 Collect “llys” when in season  
 Birdwatching / Gwyllo adar

### Q4: What do you like best about the forest?

#### What don't you like?

This question was open so people could write what they wanted which produced some interesting comments but these can be difficult to summarise. We therefore counted up the number of times people mentioned a particular word such as 'quiet' with the idea that the more times a word was used the more useful it is as a description of how people see the forest. The word-pictures below show the words sized according to the number of times they were mentioned in answers to this question. The boxes are also sized to represent the overall number of 'best' and 'don't likes' people listed.

We like...



We don't like...

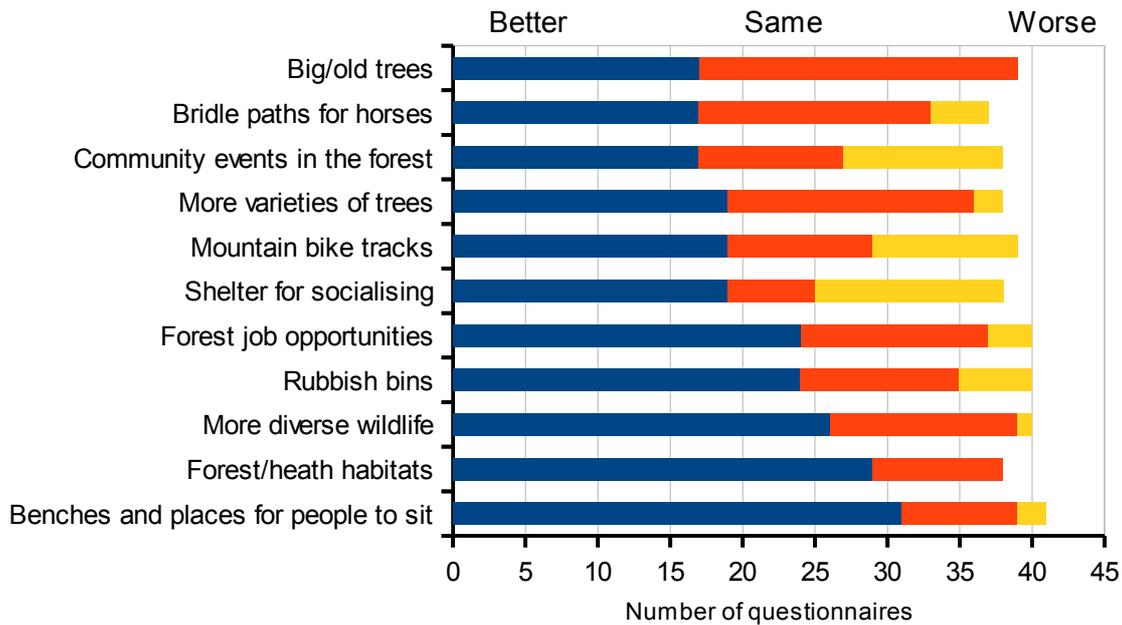


It is clear from the likes that many people prefer peace rather than activity which creates a conflict with the more sporty activities such as mountain biking pursued by relatively few people. It has been suggested that the don't likes are biased because of a lack of input from young people. However, Chart 2 shows that there were good numbers of young people including young men from 15-29 years old. Look carefully and you will see that 'motorbike' actually appears in the we like box as something good in the forest – a comment presumably made by someone who rides one. The comments are probably simply a reflection of the disturbance caused by bikes to people wanting a quiet walk in the forest.

### Q5: Think about possible changes in the forest. How would they affect your opinion of the forest and how much you use it?

This question tried to provide an opportunity for people to indicate their reaction to a range of ideas which have been suggested for the forest. The question was in two parts, the first asked whether the forest would be better, the same or worse as a consequence of a list of possible changes as shown in Chart 6. The blue bars on Chart 6 show the number of people who view this change as improving the forest, the red bar those who reckon it wouldn't make much difference and the yellow those who think it would make the forest worse. So things with the longest blue bars give a big payback while those without any yellow are the ones that wouldn't cause an argument and everyone could probably agree on. Looked at this way, Chart 6 shows us that there are just 2 ideas which are popular with everyone and both of these are to improve the quality of the forest for wildlife and allowing the trees to grow older and bigger which are two ways of saying much the same thing: people think managing the forest for nature would improve it. This fits with people approving of changes which would enhance the nature, peace, quiet of the forest which Question 4 showed are valued by many people.

Chart 6: If there were... The forest would be...

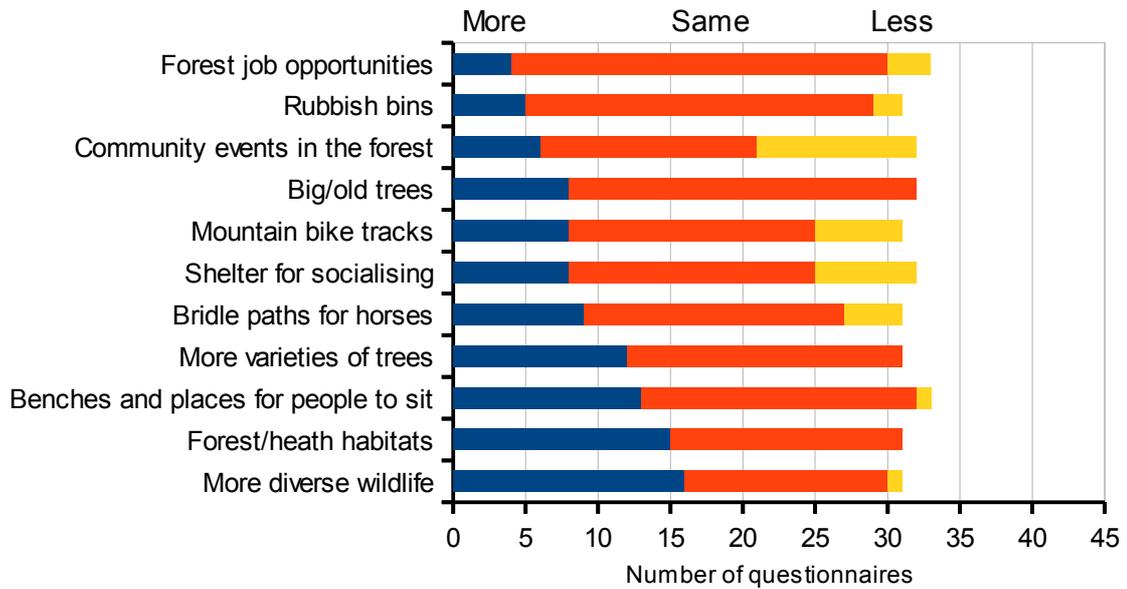


However, there are also facilities such as a bench and rubbish bins which most people think would make the forest better – because it would tackle litter which is universally unpopular. However, some people think this would make the forest worse because it might make the forest look more like a park than a wilderness and anyway, who is going to empty the bins and prevent the benches from being vandalised?

The change which are least popular are those with the longest yellow bars and are community events, mountain bike tracks and shelter for socialising all of which would bring more people into the forest. The last two of these are mainly meant as a facilities for young people and there are suggestions that older people are worried that this would lead to more litter, vandalism and noise.

With regard to forest job opportunities one respondent suggested 'to give work to local contractors to take care of woodland' – interestingly this was thought to make the forest better. "Better" could be a sense of satisfaction that it is contributing to local employment or working the forest in a different way than it is at present – perhaps even utilising volunteers (Question 8). The second part of Question 5 was intended to find out whether a possible change might increase or decrease the number of visits to the forest. Compared to the first part of the question not many people filled in this in very well – it was either left blank or wouldn't change the number of visits. This might be because the way the question was laid out was confusing as it appears to ask the same thing twice or because people were already visiting the forest as often as they want. Chart 7 can be read in the same way as Chart 6, longer blue bars mean there would be more visits while yellow bars mean there would be less. Overall, the results are much as we expected; that people would visit more if the most popular and least argumentative suggestions were done. These are the same as the ones in Chart 6 which were shown to make the forest better and most are related to making the forest more natural.

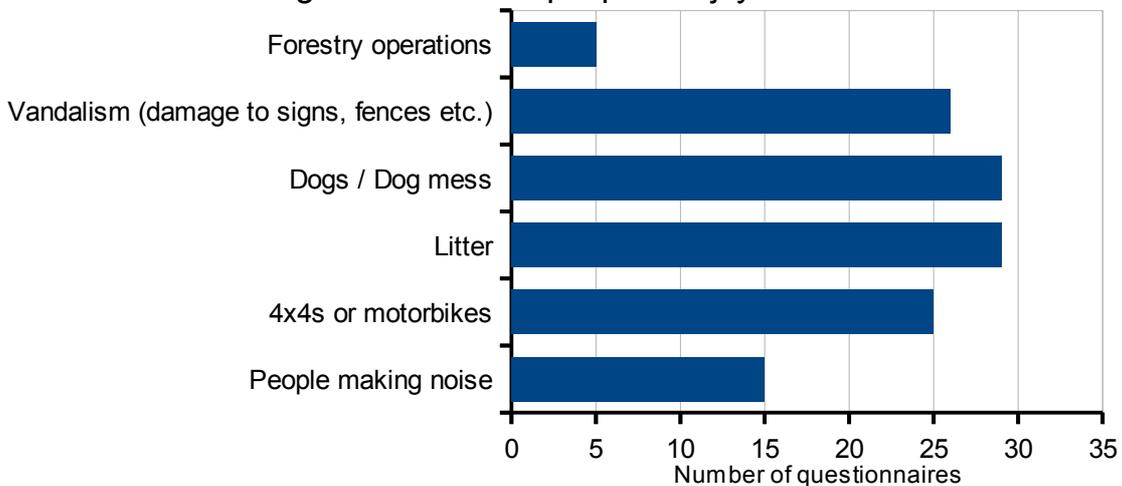
Chart 7: If there were... I'd use the forest...



### Q6: Do any of the following make you enjoy the forest less?

This question asked people to tick off things they don't like in the forest from a short list of alternatives. This turned out to repeat many of the things which people listed under Question 4 but this time, as shown in Chart 8 in a way which allows us to do counts to find out which are the things people like the least. If we get the same answers from questions asked in different ways is a social science technique called 'triangulation' which means we can be more confident that the combined results are true. Here we found that the things that people really don't like are litter, vandalism and dog mess all of which show a disregard for the environment and the enjoyment of other users. Noise is also unpopular though few people objected to forestry operations as they recognise that they are part of what needs to happen in a forest even if it is noisy and disruptive when it takes place. The things which upset people most are litter and motorbikes.

Chart 8: Things which reduce people's enjoyment of the forest



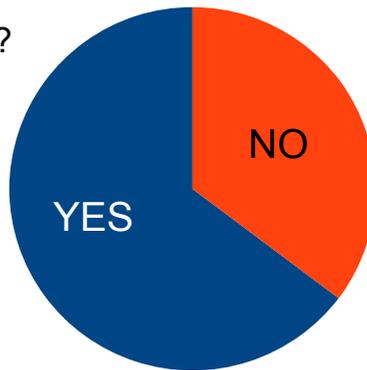
Other things people wrote about Q6:

- No dog bins (so have to look where you walk)
- Angen neud mwy i'r gymuned
- Achos tydach chi ddim yn gofyn i'r gymuned yn iawn
- Cwm heb fod ar dennyn
- Happy to walk in a working forest
- Ddim y cwm eu huain?

## Q7: Does the forest seem safe and welcoming? Why?

As hinted at in Question 4, people in Tregarth consider the forest as somewhere unfamiliar and a little bit scary and offputting. This question directly asked people to consider their overall response to the forest as a place to visit. The results of this question are very interesting as it suggests that Tregarth people are unfamiliar with the forest and around 40% of people see it as less safe or welcoming. Looking at the comments we thought this may be because people may feel unsafe might be because it is unknown so they could get lost, or perhaps unfamiliar dark conifer blocks might hide unknown dangers or simply that it may be frequented by strangers. Whatever the reason it seems people may need to be reassured that the forest is safe before people will come up the hill and explore the forest.

Chart 9: Is the forest safe and welcoming?

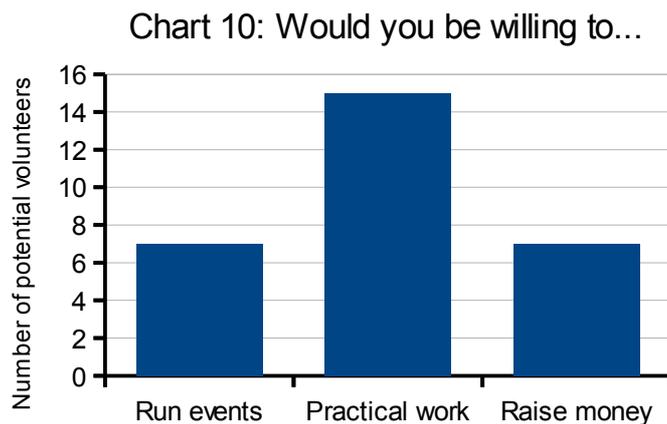


### Why? Comments from people who said the forest was..

Safe & welcoming	NOT safe & welcoming
Achos nid oes digon o bobl yn ei ddefnyddio	Dim golisdau yno
Distaw – golygfeydd da	Eithaf croesawgar
It's a beautiful habitat	Too boring
Llonydd ac amser distaw	
Neb yna yn aml	
Open space	
Peaceful and natural	
Quiet and peaceful	
Safe, yes, but how can a forest be welcoming?	

## Q8: Would you be willing to volunteer?

This question was included so we could get some idea of whether there are people in the village who might volunteer to help do things in the forest. We were surprised to find that 30% of our sample (of 51) ticked the box to say they would be willing to help with practical work in the forest. We guess from earlier questions that what most people have in mind is probably work related to habitat management or perhaps footpath improvements. There are also people willing to help run events and raise money. Other suggestions made were: to help organise youth volunteer activities and litter picking. It is very encouraging that people are willing to help do something positive in the forest.



## Q9: If you could change one thing about the woodland, what would it be?

This was another free question where people could suggest the most important thing they would like to see happen in the woods. 17 people made suggestions which we have grouped into three categories. The largest group is concerned with improving access to the woodland – by providing signposts and the establishment of new footpaths and development of mountain bike tracks including an uplift. However, as shown in Question 5, many of these suggestions are not supported by everyone and would need careful planning and discussion to be sure that doing something to favour one set of users did not spoil the enjoyment of others.

The second group of suggestions are to do with silviculture which is the growing of the trees that form the forest. People would like to see the forest changed (gradually) so it has more light and glades (open spaces), a greater variety of species and more native trees and wildlife. An appreciation of nature is a strong theme in the whole consultation and there are a number of people willing to volunteer to make this happen and it may also provide opportunities for local employment. As shown in Question 5, most of these suggestions would be welcomed by people in Tregarth but may be more of a problem for the Forestry Commission as it would require more changes in the way they manage the woodland.

The third group is concerned with placing facilities such as litter bins and benches in the woodland (or in one case the village). As we've seen earlier (Question 5) these are more controversial suggestions and would need to be carefully considered. Bins in particular will only work if there is a commitment to maintaining and emptying them.

## **Access**

Beicio moduron mewn un lle pendant  
Cael mwy o arwyddion yn dangos beth sydd yny goedwig  
Establish walking trails  
More accessible to young people  
Mwy o draciau beicio  
Sign Posts!  
Signpost and grade mountain bike trails  
Uplift for mountain bikers

## **Silviculture**

A better variety of trees would be a big bonus  
Developing a mountain bike / horse riding circuit  
Management – to look after it in a responsible way  
More broad leaf trees

## **Facilities**

Biniau baw ci  
I would like places to sit  
Meinciau  
Na swn  
Rhoi goliadau yno

# **What we thought of the results**

We are very pleased that people filled in our questionnaire seriously and we got some good information out of our study. We were a bit surprised by the results as we didn't think many people from Tregarth used the woods though we did come across people who don't even know the forest is there.

There is a lot of information in the questionnaires and a lot to think about but we have identified a few key issues and some suggestions of things that could be done in the forest which would benefit the people of Tregarth.

## **Summary of key results**

- The forest is visited at least 'occasionally' by 74% of the 51 people who filled in the questionnaires. Compared to Mynydd Llandygai and Rhiwlas these numbers are low which is not surprising as Tregarth is further from the forest.
- Although the majority (64%) of people view the forest as a safe and welcoming place to visit there are a good number of people who find it scary and unwelcoming. Again this is probably because they are unfamiliar with the forest.
- 80% of the questionnaires rated the forest as good or excellent as a place to visit which suggests there is some room for improvement.
- Most people who visit the forest go there for a walk (95%) though 18% go to ride mountain

bikes, 13% run and one person rides a horse. The proportion of visitors who do things other than walk are higher for Tregarth than the closer villages.

- Most people value the forest as a quiet, peaceful and natural place.
- The things people don't like in the forest are litter, dog mess, vandalism and noise.
- Improving wildlife habitats is something that no-one thinks would make the forest worse and most think would improve it.
- Letting the trees grow to larger sizes is also something which most people agree would improve the forest and no-one thinks would make it worse.
- The mountain bikers would like to see more facilities for them but there is a significant number of people who think this would make the forest worse and they would be less inclined to visit if there were more bikes there. Further development of biking and other facilities to which some people object would require careful planning and perhaps zoning of the forest.
- Dogs in the forest is complicated, several people said they like taking their dogs to the forest so they can run off the lead, a few would like people moving faster (running or on bikes) to slow down for dogs while bikers don't want dogs off the lead because they can be a hazard and most people dislike dog mess. Walking a dog is a practical and appropriate use of the forest but even this may require some negotiation and agreement between dog owners and other visitors to the forest.
- Some activities such as motorbikes and quads are unpopular because of the noise and although it would be good to find somewhere for this it probably can't be in the forest.
- There are a number of people who said they would be prepared to volunteer to help with forest activities with most being interested in doing practical conservation projects in the woods.

## **Suggestions**

We also have a few ideas which would help encourage more people from Tregarth to make the trip up the hill to visit the forest:

- Raise awareness of the existence of the forest
- Make the forest a noteworthy place by putting up signposts
- Enhancing the wildlife potential of the forest would make it more appealing to place to visit (for example, the Red kite feeding in Bwlch Nant yr Arian)

## **What next?**

There are things which could be done to take advantage of the interest raised by the questionnaire. What these might be should come out of the public meeting to present the results but it will definitely require further meetings, applications and agreements with the Forestry Commission, the other villages close to the forest and other forest users.