

# PENLLERGARE VALLEY WOODS

## SUMMARY

- Name of Organisation: The Penllergare Trust
- Established: May 2000
- Staff: 6.8 full time equivalents
- Volunteers: 107, 9 trustees
- Legal Structure: Limited company and registered charity
- Tenure: Leased from private owners
- Turnover: £150k from trading and £75k in grants/charitable activities for the year 2018/19
- Website: <https://penllergare.org/>

## PRODUCT/SERVICE

Penllergare Valley Woods is a major tourism, recreational, heritage and wildlife site that welcomes over 120,000 visitors from all over the UK every year. It covers 260 acres of land that provide a green lung to the north of Swansea, surrounded as it is by motorway, housing developments and other concrete structures. The Trust's ethos is embedded in three main pillars of work: biodiversity, history and community.

The site is home to one of the most biodiverse sites in the Swansea region, incorporating 4 of the rarest habitat types in the area: ancient woodland, wet woodland, open freshwater, and heath land.

The woods are steeped in history and the site is owned by the descendants of John Dillwyn Llewellyn, a local MP and mayor of Swansea in the Victorian era, who was part of a prominent local family that owned land and estates across Swansea and what is now Neath Port Talbot. Dillwyn Llewellyn was a keen botanist and landscape designer and restoration and maintenance of buildings, a turbine and his landscaping design on the site is a major part of the Penllergare Trust's work.

The site is bordered by the Penderry ward (one of Swansea's most deprived) and the Trust supports wide-ranging community activities encouraging participation, social cohesion, and behavioural change. It supports over 100 volunteers, including those most likely to be socially excluded, including people with learning difficulties, the homeless, ethnic minorities and some of the most vulnerable in society from ages 16 to 90.

There is a volunteer-run coffee shop on site and a working water turbine and phase 2 of their restoration project is currently underway. This work includes (not exhaustively) the construction of the new Discovery Centre, designed to celebrate the achievements of the Dillwyn dynasty, restoration of the Orchid House, vinery,

various gardens and buildings and the re-establishment of original plant collections. The restoration work will incorporate a programme of activities aimed at laying strong foundations for the long-term sustainability of the management and maintenance of Valley Woods as a valued local green space, enriching the lives of local people, and as a nationally important heritage site.

### HISTORY

The Penllergare Trust was established by local community members with the support of Welsh Historic Gardens in May 2000 to further the protection, restoration and regeneration of the estate for the benefit of the public, including the protection of the diversity of wildlife on the site and to provide employment, volunteering and learning opportunities. Concerned community members set up the Trust following a period of inactivity on the site after a failure to deliver a promised local country park and the expansion of a nearby housing development threatened the historic fabric of the CADW-registered (Grade II) park and gardens.

Through hard work, persistence and community spirit by local volunteers, and with the financial support of sponsors and the Friends of Penllergare membership scheme, the local community has been working hard over the last decade or so to maintain and to restore the Penllergare landscape to the romantic style shown in the photographs of John Dillwyn Llewelyn who created it. It currently has National Lottery Heritage Funding to undertake phase 2 of the restoration (see previous section).

### ACHIEVEMENTS

The Trust has significantly reduced antisocial behaviour in the area since its inception, when there were 70 burnt out cars in the valley. Management say they have improved park safety and now often see single visitors who feel safe to walk and run in the park.

They are proud of what has been achieved by their 100-strong team of volunteers over the years and to have this recognised. In 2016, the Trust was one of just two places in Wales to be awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award given to local volunteer groups across the UK to recognise outstanding work done in their own communities and known as the 'MBE for volunteer groups.' Over the past years, volunteers, staff and contractors have worked to restore the Upper Lake, Carriage Drive, Lower Lake, and historic paths and steps. More recently, work has been done to restore and replant the Terrace Rockwork Garden and cascades, and this is still ongoing. Recent community projects include those focussed on:

- Employment skills and confidence in 'green skills', horticulture, catering, and visitor management and administration activities
- Increasing social inclusion and building social capital
- Citizenship and community cohesion

The site generates around £150k trading income per annum through its coffee shop, turbine, fundraising and car park charges. The turbine generates 303,104kw of renewable energy, Co2 offsetting equivalent to 17.5 medium sized domestic properties.

They are also winners of the WCVA Environmental Award and the Trip Advisor Hall of Fame Award (the woods are 7<sup>th</sup> in the top 114 things to do in the Swansea Region, beaten only by Gower beaches) and have been Green Flag holders for the past 5 years.

The Trust supports walking and running groups, health recovery patients and vulnerable people who gain mental and physical health benefits and combats social exclusion. The Trust receive many anecdotal reports of how engaging with the Trust has saved people's health and wellbeing and sometimes their life.

### CHALLENGES

The site of the woods is still owned by the Dillwyn Llewelyn family and although they support the Trust's work, the site is managed by a local land agent whose role is to ensure maximum income generation from all of the family-owned sites. The Trust therefore needs to find £35k per annum for rent for the site before staffing, overheads, and site maintenance costs. It has also had to deal with costly anti-social behaviour (most recently deliberate fire setting), and fundraising is challenging; management feel that historical sites and green spaces are not as popular with the public to fund as other local causes, including (eg) Llys Nini, a local animal shelter close by.

The current Heritage Lottery Fund grant is partly funding overheads, but it is recognised this is not sustainable in the longer term. The woods have seen a relatively rapid growth in visitor numbers and while this supports social enterprise-type income generation through the car park and coffee shop, capacity in both is limited. It is not possible or desirable to charge for entrance to the woods as the site has many entrances and is situated in an area of high deprivation. The onsite turbine earns around £10k per annum through energy generation and feed-in tariffs and while this could be increased, it would involve reducing the time the waterfall is flowing, which is a main visitor attraction.

The site is also under threat from the growth in housing development on its borders. 2,000 houses are about to be built on its eastern side and the Trust was not invited to take part in planning discussions, although it expects residents in all 2,000 homes to use the woods, increasing maintenance and wildlife protection costs. Having a 'place at the table' is crucial when such discussions take place in order to make the case for receiving funds that developers are required to set aside during developments (Section 106 funds) to mitigate for adverse impacts on neighbouring properties. It would help the site to get local nature reserve status, but this is only currently available to local authority owned land and is unlikely to change.

The Trust's relationship with the local authority has been fairly distant in the past, although some informal and ad hoc support was being provided prior to austerity (such as lending tractors and leftover path materials). The Trust is just starting to make better links with the tourism department to raise awareness of the number of visitors the woods attract, expected to rise further when phase 2 of the restoration is complete. Links have also been established with the local health board and other organisations wanting to use the woods as a 'venue' for health and wellbeing activities and this happens regularly, although often there is no budget available to contribute to maintenance/other costs.

At May 2020, the current coronavirus crisis was having a huge impact on income and this will last well into the future with social distancing requirements in the coffee shop and being dependent on large number of older volunteers. The Trust has applied for a local authority business bailout fund and has furloughed staff under HMRC's scheme, but the longer-term future is uncertain.

### WHAT COULD BE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

According to management, additional resources that would help the Trust achieve longer term viability include:

- Means to cope with increasing demand
- Equipment (borrowed or bought)
- Education staff, site guides
- More site security (e.g. warden roles)
- Increased capacity to provide materials and support in other languages and to run ongoing events

Some of these are direct financial costs, but others could be provided 'in kind'. The Trust would also benefit from a 'peppercorn rent' arrangement or having the option to buy the land from the family, possibly including a covenant clause so that the land reverts back to the family if it needed to be sold.

### SUCCESS CRITERIA

- People!
- Recognising and responding to the needs of the collective/community – good communication, fostering diversity and respect for all
- Communicating what we do! Passion is infectious!

## TESTIMONIALS

*Penllergare Woods has become an amazing place for locals and visitors to this area to visit proving a magical place for children and adults alike to get close to nature and get exercise without it feeling like a chore.*

*The Trust have and are continuing to develop these amazing woods so that every time you visit there is something new to discover. Together with the small army of volunteers, of which I am one, they are continuing to make Penllergare Woods a place that people want to visit time and time again.*

*Becoming a volunteer in the coffee shop has been lovely. I am a people person and since I retired have missed the interaction with colleagues that I used to have and missed and now have with the staff and other volunteers. I have become good friends with some of the other volunteers I work closely with and feel very supported and valued by both David, the Coffee Shop Manager and Lee our Site Manager.*

*Since starting there, I have also formed and now run a local art group who have now become a close group of friends. All funds from this group are also donated to the Woods as well so as well as providing a new interest for the group we are also feel we are helping in our small way to the Woods.*

Judy Moreton – Volunteer

Dear Sir,

Re- PENLLERGARE VALLEY WOODS

I write to commend to you the value of the land under the management of the Penllergare Trust and the work of that Trust.

Penllergare Valley Woods is a vitally important green swathe of land lying between the existing and proposed residential developments to the west and the commercial and future residential land to the east. The Woods lie to the north of Fforest Fach and are bounded by the M48 / M4. It comprises the former demesne lands of the old Penllergare House.

For nearly twenty years the Penllergare Trust has been managing this area which acts as a privately leased, public park, providing residents from the whole of Swansea and beyond the facility to enjoy the tranquillity of this parkland and woods free of charge. The work is only made possible by the immense enthusiasm of over one hundred volunteers who carry out the physical labour of woodland management as well as activities of fund-raising and educational work relating to the historical importance of the land and its bio-diversity. Over one hundred thousand visits are made to the Woods annually, a number which has continues to grow and is testament to the value of the Woods to the well-being of the people of Swansea.

The land provides habitat for a wide variety of native plants and trees as well as specimen trees of historical value and interest. Additionally, the avifauna is diverse and includes some red-listed endangered species.

It is my view that the importance of the project cannot be overstated and that the work of the Penllergare Trust is essential to the welfare of the City and should be supported and guaranteed throughout these difficult times.

Yours faithfully

Jeremy R Douglas-Jones

Secretary

Gower Ornithological Society