

Fixing the Future Generations Act:

It's Time for Wales to Deliver on Its Promise to Communities

*This position paper reflects the views of the Board of
Bronllys Well Being Park CLT Ltd (7th July 2025).*

The Stark Gap Between Promise and Practice

Wales has earned a global reputation as a pioneer in sustainable development and intergenerational justice through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the “WFG Act”). Yet, beneath this celebrated vision lies a profound disconnect: ten years on, the promise of the WFG Act remains, for most communities, little more than a facade.

The *Future Generations Report 2025* (the “FG Report”) delivers a candid and comprehensive account of the most pressing challenges in Wales: a climate and nature emergency, deep-rooted inequality, institutional exhaustion, and a widening gap between government rhetoric and struggles faced by communities across Wales. These are not abstract issues but daily realities for community-led organisations working to turn policy into practice.

Bronllys Well Being Park Community Land Trust Ltd (BWBP), for example, has tirelessly championed the repurposing of underutilised NHS land to create a sustainable Well-Being Community Hub. Time and again, we have faced resistance and bureaucratic obstruction from government bodies. Furthermore, our efforts to advocate for Community Asset Transfer (CAT) reform in Wales have revealed critical failings in transparency, accountability, and genuine community empowerment.

While the FG Report highlights many systemic issues, it also exposes a fundamental flaw in the WFG Act itself: the Future Generations Commissioner lacks enforcement powers or statutory authority to compel real change. As a result, the office remains a figurehead, sounding alarms without the tools to extinguish fires or rebuild what’s broken.

This position paper discusses the critical overlaps between our community-driven proposals and the FG Report’s findings. It argues that the Welsh Government must move beyond empty rhetoric and equip the WFG Act with the legislative strength required to fulfil its transformative vision.

Community-Led Solutions, Consistently Ignored

The FG Report explicitly highlights the urgent need to simplify and strengthen the mechanisms for transferring public assets to community stewardship. It also calls for:

- A national food resilience plan
- Investment in preventative healthcare
- Fair work (secure and properly paid employment with good conditions)
- Decent, affordable housing
- Local regeneration through cultural and place-based strategies

Our position paper, *Unlocking Potential in Communities: The Urgent Need for Community Asset Transfer Reform in Wales*, echoes these priorities. Like Cwmpas and the Community Land Trust Network, we argue for a legislative framework that guarantees communities the right to request and receive underutilised public land.

The Future Generations Commissioner may advocate for reform and urge public bodies to uphold the principles of the WFG Act, but he holds no legal authority to enforce compliance. There are no statutory consequences for public bodies that delay, obstruct, or ignore community initiatives, even when they fully align with the legislative goals. The result is a law with vision but no teeth, leaving communities to deteriorate, frustration to mount, and progress to grind to a halt as bureaucratic authorities continue drag their feet.

This is not merely a bureaucratic shortcoming; it's a failure of political will and purpose. The Welsh Government's continued inaction on community asset transfer reform traps organisations like BWBP in prolonged uncertainty and forces them to navigate a maze of red tape while public land lies idle and communities are denied the opportunity to benefit from resources meant to serve them. Nearly a decade after Scotland has enacted progressive community empowerment and land reform legislation, Wales remains shamefully mired in inertia, ignoring the pressing needs of communities the WFG Act was designed to support.

When Rural Health Innovation Meets Bureaucratic Deadlock

Another BWBP position paper, *Reimagining Rural Healthcare: The Case for the Bronllys Well-Being Community Hub*, directly addresses key health and well-being priorities identified in the FG Report:

- Locally delivered, preventative care
- Affordable housing for healthcare workers
- Community-based solutions to mental health and chronic illness
- Reducing the NHS's burden through integrated public services

Although PTHB has long expressed public support for the principles of the WFG Act, for many years it failed to engage meaningfully with BWBP's proposals or to develop a clear strategy for the Bronllys site. In the absence of legal requirements to act, PTHB was able to

defer decisions, reject community initiatives without explanation, and allow valuable public land to remain underused. This lack of accountability -- a direct consequence of the WFG Act's limited enforcement powers -- has stalled progress and undermined community confidence. However, encouraging signs have emerged over the past year, as PTHB's engagement has become more consistent and constructive, suggesting that a more collaborative relationship may now be possible.

These recent improvements are welcome but must be viewed in the context of a prolonged pattern of missed opportunities and systemic shortcomings. These challenges are not unique to PTHB; the UK COVID Inquiry, an official government investigation, has criticised Welsh health institutions more broadly for a lack of preparedness, poor planning, and muddled lines of authority. PTHB's historical reluctance to engage meaningfully with BWBP reflects these entrenched issues, which will continue to hinder progress unless addressed through meaningful legislative and structural reform.

The WFG Act: Vision Without Enforcement

When enacted in 2015, the WFG Act was a groundbreaking, visionary piece of legislation -- a global first in embedding intergenerational well-being into law. But being first means little if it fails to produce tangible results. Since the legislation was not designed as an enforcement tool, it lacks:

- Mandatory compliance mechanisms
- Penalties for non-adherence
- Clear avenues for community-led organisations to seek redress
- Statutory obligations on public bodies beyond reporting and loosely defined duties

The Future Generations Commissioner's role is limited to advising, recommending, monitoring, and publishing -- with no authority to compel action. This lack of enforcement power has contributed to what many in the third sector describe as "compliance theatre," where public bodies pay lip service to well-being goals without truly integrating them into decision-making.

The Commissioner's own report acknowledges the following persistent issues:

- Resistance to change within government institutions
- Prioritising GDP and short-term financial returns over long-term social benefit
- Inconsistent and often superficial engagement with communities
- Weak integration of well-being principles into workforce and asset planning

What good is a law, however well-intentioned, if it can be ignored without consequence? Legislation hailed as the world's first to enshrine such high ideals is rendered ineffective if those ideals remain just that -- lofty aspirations, not actionable realities.

Making Legislative Reform a Reality

The FG Report concludes with a call for a post-legislative review of the WFG Act. The Commissioner stresses that for this review to be meaningful, it must result in a comprehensive overhaul of the legislative framework to ensure:

- Enforceable mandates requiring public bodies to meet clear well-being goals
- Strengthened Commissioner role with power to contest decisions and compel action
- Binding legal standards for community engagement, transparency, and accountability
- A formal community right to challenge public asset decisions when benefits exist
- Sanctions for obstructing community-led initiatives that align with national priorities

Wales has no shortage of strategy documents, frameworks, or inspiring rhetoric. What it lacks is the legal and institutional framework necessary to transform these aspirations into tangible, lasting outcomes.

Time's Up on Empty Promises

A decade after the WFG Act became law, Wales remains largely where it started. The FG Report provides a sobering diagnosis alongside a hopeful vision, revealing both the scale of ambition and the weight of entrenched stagnation.

Community-led organisations don't need more words of encouragement. They need decisive action -- a government willing to break free from bureaucratic inertia and stand firmly with communities. They need legislation that doesn't simply ask public bodies to consider well-being but demands it be their priority.

The Commissioner's voice carries weight -- but without real authority, it is little more than a whisper, powerless to deliver meaningful change.

Now is the time for the Welsh Government to turn promises into enforceable laws, convert visionary policy into tangible outcomes, and finally empower communities with the tools to build the future Wales claims to want.

The question is no longer what must be done -- it's whether Wales, as a nation, is willing to face the challenge and act with conviction.