Measuring the Economic Impact of Welsh Housing Associations

#morethanhousing
Contents

Introduction 3
Supply 3
Spend 5
Employment 9
Regeneration 11
Case Studies 14
This is the seventh year of the Welsh Economy Research Unit (WERU) report, prepared by Cardiff University on behalf of Community Housing Cymru (CHC).

The report aims to demonstrate the wider economic impact of Welsh housing associations during 2013/14 and looks at Gross Value Added (the measure of how much actual wealth is created in an area), direct and indirect full time equivalent (FTE) jobs supported by the sector and the number of new homes delivered, both with and without Social Housing Grant. Case study material demonstrating the wider socio-economic role played by CHC members is also included in this year’s report.

CHC is the membership body for housing associations in Wales. It has over seventy members with around thirty of these actively undertaking new housing developments.

Against a backdrop of austerity, cuts to public expenditure and the challenges brought about by welfare reform, our sector has continued to invest heavily in services for tenants and communities and our economic impact continues to grow.

Below are the key headlines from the report.

### Affordable Homes

At the beginning of the report series (2008), 95,000 homes were provided by CHC members. Since then, eleven local authorities have transferred their homes to new not-for-profit organisations who have subsequently become members of CHC. This, combined with a steady house building programme since 2008, means that the sector provides over 158,000 homes to people from all walks of life.
Additional new homes

In 2013/14, CHC members delivered 1,850 affordable homes. Of these, **1,383 (or 75%)** were delivered using Social Housing Grant and **467 (25%)** without any grant.

The need to sustain this rate remains. In March 2014, our affordable housing target was increased from **7,500** to **10,000** for this term of government and we entered into a pact with the Welsh Government to deliver against this target in return for continued investment, a fair rents policy and a sector Code of Governance.

Additional Homes provided by CHC members for this term of government (2011 – 2016):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Homes Delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total: 5,685**

Contribution towards Welsh Government’s target of **10,000**: **57%**
SPEND
Estimated Gross Spending of Welsh Housing Associations in 2013/14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEND</th>
<th>£m</th>
<th>Percentage of all Welsh HA spend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance, repair and upgrading</td>
<td>292.7</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct labour costs</td>
<td>267.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>213.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other *</td>
<td>134.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and business services</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport/post/telecoms</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land acquisition</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rents and rates</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy/water</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training services</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumables (stationery)</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels/ Distribution</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1027.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* “Other” includes items such as “depreciation of stock” and “other estate costs/management charges”.

In addition to the £1,027m directly spent by housing associations, transactions between different sectors of the economy have allowed the effect of the spend to be traced through the entire Welsh economy. These indirect impacts are estimated to be £921m. The combined direct and indirect economic impacts total almost £2bn.

Although this is a decrease of 1% from 2012/13, Gross Value Added (the measure of how much actual wealth is created in an area) is the highest it has been since we started this series. Direct Gross Value Added for 2013/14 was £267m.

81% of this spend was retained in Wales.
Estimated Economic Impact of Welsh Housing Associations on the Welsh Economy 2013/14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct Impact: HA Sector Output/ Employment</th>
<th>Indirect Impact: (Supplier effect + Induced Income effect)</th>
<th>Total Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Output £m</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>1,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Value Added (GVA) £m</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>658</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**£5.66bn**

Welsh housing associations have directly spent an estimated **£5.66bn** since the beginning of the series, showing substantial support to the Welsh economy. A large proportion of this spend has been channeled through the construction industry in Wales, providing a vital stimulus to the economy.

The continuous increase in output between 2008 and 2014 may be attributed to a number of factors including stock transfer, Welsh Government funding (Social Housing Grant and Strategic Capital Investment Fund) and the development of more innovative ways of accessing finance including the setting up of the Welsh Housing Finance Grant.
Estimated Gross Spending (£m) of Welsh Housing Associations in Wales 2008-2014

£2.5bn

Over the seven years of reporting, an estimated total of £2.5bn has been spent in the Welsh economy on housing properties alone (either construction or maintenance and repairs).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance &amp; Repair</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EMPLOYMENT
A Major Employer

We are a major employer in the Welsh economy. Since the original study was undertaken, there has been a marked increase in the impact of the sector on employment in Wales. In 2013/14, CHC members directly employed 8,400 full time equivalents. For every one full time person employed by the sector, one and a half other jobs are supported within the Welsh economy in other sectors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment:</td>
<td>8,400</td>
<td>12,950</td>
<td>21,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time Equivalents (FTEs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Year on year comparisons show that there has been a steady increase in the number of jobs provided directly by the sector.
More than Housing

We have always maintained that housing associations provide so much more than bricks and mortar. They contribute millions of pounds each year to community regeneration and are increasingly viewed as regeneration agents in Wales.

£514m

In 2013/14, an estimated £514m was spent on community regeneration. £293m (57%) of this was on repairs and maintenance as members continue to work towards the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS).

This figure is down slightly (4%) from 2012/13. This can be attributed to a number of members completing their major works programme, which has seen real benefits for tenants right across Wales.
Estimated Regeneration Spend (excluding staff costs) 2013/14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brownfield construction</td>
<td>177.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield construction assoc. with regeneration</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair &amp; maintenance</td>
<td>292.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training budgets</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Regeneration projects and related expenditure</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>514.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimated Regeneration Spend (£m) (excluding staff costs) 2008-2014

Spend on regeneration related activity by CHC members over the seven year series stands just short of an estimated £3bn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brownfield construction</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>1131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield construction assoc with regeneration</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair &amp; maintenance</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>1610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training budgets</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Regeneration projects and other expenditure</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>2965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CASE STUDIES
Examples of Socio-Economic Impact in Practice

Introduction

For this year’s impact study, WERU also gathered examples of work being done on the ground which contributes to the wider socio-economic impact of the housing association sector in Wales.

The examples were gathered under several themes which show the innovative and promising role housing associations are playing in areas such as health, education and training, community improvement and energy efficiency.

A number of these case studies are showcased below. CHC will be using these, along with others gathered for the report, on various activities throughout the year in order to highlight the wider economic impact on the Welsh economy and the positive impact the sector is making to thousands of tenants right across Wales.
In 2010, The Lighthouse Project started working with the Royal Gwent Hospital’s Discharge Team to set up a service to help patients who have housing related issues which are causing delays to a safe discharge from hospital. The issues may range from the threat of homelessness, welfare benefits not being in place or simply that their present housing is unsuitable or not habitable.

One of the Lighthouse Project’s support workers is now permanently based within the Hospital Discharge Team. They work closely with the service user, medical staff, family, and other key voluntary or statutory services in order to reduce ‘bed blocking’.

Sonia Moreland received help from the Lighthouse Project’s Hospital Tenant Support Worker when she was admitted to hospital with a broken ankle as well as being on the waiting list for knee reconstruction. Due to her mobility issues, she was unable to return to her home which meant that she would become homeless.

Her Support Worker liaised with her housing department to make sure that she had medical priority and was moved to the top of the waiting list. As a result, the housing department directly offered Sonia suitable accommodation.

Sonia said:

“This is a brilliant service which has really helped me out of a difficult situation, and my family is also really appreciative. They’ve helped me so much I could cry, and I’m so happy with my new flat! I now feel safer in my new home, as well as being closer to my children. It’s also allowed me time to rest and recover and has helped me to live more independently.”
A Collaborative Approach
In One Place

The economic and social consequences of locating out of county patients who require continuing health care (CHC) is a recurrent theme that has usefully occupied professionals within the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), local authorities and housing associations in Gwent.

As part of a re-organisation of the NHS in Wales, each new Health Board was asked to put a stakeholder reference group in place made up of representatives from a range of interests across the Gwent area. The group provides independent advice on any aspect of the business of the Health Board and contributes to health policy by representing stakeholder views from across the respective communities.

In 2011, Mark Gardner (Chief Executive of Melin Homes) was appointed Chair of this group and, in this capacity, the Minister for Health and Social Services also appointed him as an Associate Independent Member of Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, thus linking the work of the Group and the Board.

This collaboration has also led to the launch of the ‘In One Place’ model, which was launched in January this year. This programme brings together Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, the five former Gwent Councils (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen) and eight housing associations (Bron Afon, Linc, Melin Homes, Monmouthshire Housing, Newport City Homes, Seren Group, Tai Calon and United Welsh).

Lion Court, Blaenavon. True partnership working - In One Place
A Collaborative Approach
In One Place

The In One Place model is a collaborative approach for providing a joined up service which will meet individual health, housing and social care needs whilst at the same time promoting choice and independence.

Melin Homes and Torfaen County Borough Council have identified the first property suitable for inclusion in the In One Place Programme. The accommodation consists of four flats. Three will be used for the service users and one will be used as the support worker’s office.

All service users will become housing association tenants and will have the same rights and responsibilities as any other tenant. Twenty-four hour care and support services will be commissioned by the Health Board; referrals to the supporting people team may be made for additional housing related support.

Two service users/new Melin tenants have been identified and their journey into semi-independent living has begun. One of these tenants is currently living in an out of county low secure placement. He wishes to live nearer home and his family in an independent setting. The savings to the Health board are projected to be £2,000 per month. The social benefits of this placement will also be monitored and recorded.
‘Together’ Programme
United Welsh

United Welsh launched its innovative ‘Together’ engagement programme in 2011. Its aim is to find jobs and training opportunities for its tenants. As a member of ‘Together’, tenants receive information about a range of opportunities within United Welsh. These may be short term unpaid work experience opportunities, free courses, or current job vacancies.

United Welsh staff also provide sessions for tenants to practice interview techniques with volunteers who are experienced interviewers and provide support to help tenants prepare their CVs. Since the launch of ‘Together’ three years ago, more than 400 tenants have signed up. Of those, 106 tenants have taken advantage of work experience, training courses and full and part-time jobs.

A ‘Together’ member, Mark Edwards, found work with United Welsh’s subsidiary Celtic Horizons after reading an article in Link Up, their tenant magazine. Mark contacted United Welsh and was asked to come along to an open evening where representatives from United Welsh, Celtic Horizons and Mears would be on hand to discuss opportunities.

Mark said:

“I came from there thinking, ‘That’s the company I want to work for.’ I’d never felt so energised. I filled in the form, had an interview, a week later I got the job and I’ve been there ever since. My confidence has come back, it’s sky high. I’m out on site with different boys, talking to different clients – to me the clients always come first and that’s the way Celtic Horizons likes it. I’m learning every day.”
Go Girls Project
Charter Housing and Bron Afon Community Housing

Go Girls is a partnership between Charter Housing and Bron Afon Community Housing to increase the confidence and self-esteem of young women aged 15-25. It encourages young women to develop self-respect and believe in themselves and their abilities. Through issue-based workshops and monthly support meetings, Go Girls raises awareness, empowers young women and builds their resilience, enabling them to cope better with life’s challenges.

From a core group of 10, Go Girls has recruited 39 young women and the project introduces them to issues and challenges that face women both at home and abroad.

Go Girls came from an idea put forward at Bron Afon’s Youth Forum to combat domestic abuse against girls and young women as well as recognising the effect on the wider community. Go Girls is about sharing ideas and thoughts about what it is like to be a young woman in Wales, aiming to develop a strong sense of identity, respect and pride.

Go Girls is a three stage programme. The first stage is engagement/ introductory workshops on issue-based topics which are delivered by specialist organisations e.g. domestic abuse, positive mental health and equality.

Together, girls stand strong; members of the Go Girls project wear masks they made as part of a workshop around safer relationships. The masks represent both inner feelings and outward appearances.
Go Girls Project
Charter Housing and Bron Afon Community Housing

The girls quickly began to drive the direction of the project and, for the second stage, they wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the issues and to share their experience with others. They devised and delivered their own workshops and used digital stories and artwork to express themselves. Many described this as therapeutic and empowering.

Taking action to make a difference to other people through campaigning, charity work and peer led learning, and an awareness of global issues affecting women and children, was the third stage. This month, the Go Girls will travel to Belarus to ‘make over’ an all women run orphanage. The self-funded trip will help others and also enable the girls to identify what is positive and important in their own lives. As well as their own campaigns, Go Girls have raised awareness and campaigned for ‘Emily Matters’, ‘Bring Back Our Girls’, ‘No More Page Three’ and attended the House of Commons to debate ‘Gender Inequality in the Media’.

Go Girls has seen a visible transformation in the lives of the young women involved, not only in increasing their confidence and self-esteem but in raising their awareness and educating them about issues that are never touched upon in their communities or in school.

Through Go Girls’ passion to raise awareness and educate others, they have developed a toolkit to deliver workshops in schools and youth groups, maximising local impact and contributing to the sustainability of the project.
A Caernarfon woman turned her life around by helping fellow North West Wales residents to save money on their energy bills. Just over six months ago, 50-year-old Sandra Kargin was out of work, had lost her confidence and was even struggling to leave her home in Cadnant.

However, a place on Grŵp Cynefin and Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd’s energy warden’s scheme, which offers an opportunity for people out of work to train as energy efficiency advisors, has given her a new sense of purpose – helping to reach out to people experiencing fuel poverty.

As well as building a new sense of self-worth, Sandra and her fellow wardens have helped more than 600 people across Gwynedd and Anglesey to save more than £18,000 on their household bills.

After being selected as one of six initial participants in the scheme, Sandra underwent an intensive month-long course in order to learn about the energy industry, from money-saving tips to practical skills like energy meter reading. Sandra is one of 18 people who have completed the programme, which has been funded in partnership between the Welsh Government, Gwynedd Council, Isle of Anglesey County Council, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd and Grŵp Cynefin.

Energy warden Sandra Kargin

Sandra said:

“\[quote\]I didn’t know what to do with myself. I would get up, stay in my pyjamas, and often sleep for most of the day. I was put in touch with the programme by the job centre, but didn’t really have any hope of getting an interview, never mind a job at the end of it. The energy warden scheme really was a turning point for me. It’s changed my life. Since getting on to the course I’ve had a new sense of purpose, and really feel like I can be of value to people.\[/quote\]
Earlier this year, Wales & West Housing installed 26 Air Source Heat Pumps in combination with solar panels (electricity) and solar thermal panels (hot water) in Mill View, Llandrindod Wells.

The renewable heating systems have been installed by WWH to tackle fuel poverty among its rural residents who are not able to benefit from mains gas supplies. Air source heat pumps, in combination with solar thermal panels, were first installed by Welsh renewable heating specialists, Thermal Earth, in 15 properties in neighbouring Clos Llwynbrain last year. They replaced old-fashioned and expensive electric night storage heaters.

The 26 properties in Mill View Close have also now benefited from the award-winning heating systems thanks to a £162,000 grant from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and an investment of £240,000 from WWH.

Brian and Joyce Bibb, who have lived in Mill View Close for 30 years, say they are delighted with their new heating. “The new system is great,” said Brian, aged 66.

Air source heat pumps work by extracting latent heat from the air and bringing it into a home. A key feature of the air source heat pumps installed by WWH is their ability to be monitored and controlled remotely. This means that residents who need a little bit of extra help in getting their heating systems to run as efficiently as possible – and to cut down waste – get that help.

WWH also makes sure that residents’ individual systems are optimised over the first three months, the remote control system removing the need to make regular site visits to often far-flung, rural locations.
Tackling Fuel Poverty in Rural Wales
Wales & West Housing

Brian said:

“The new system is great. It’s easy to use and the house is lovely and warm. In fact, when it was first installed in January, we were almost too warm! I can’t fault the chaps from Thermal Earth at all. They were clean and tidy and so helpful throughout the whole installation process, and afterwards when we were getting to know how to work the system.”

In addition to the installation of air source heat pumps on Mill View Close, WWH has also insulated all cavities and lofts, replaced all windows and doors with A rated double glazing and replaced electric showers with mixer showers incorporating eco shower heads and flow restrictors.

Electricity monitors have also been installed for all residents who were interested in having them and, finally, WWH is currently working with residents to switch tariffs to ensure the lowest possible bills.
Major Environmental Improvements in Parc Peulwys
Cartrefi Conwy

The £1.1m environmental scheme at Parc Peulwys estate in Llysfaen was carried out over an eight month period. 98% of the work was carried out by local labour and four tenants from the estate gained employment. The scheme included a successful horticultural training programme and 12 young people were involved in a graffiti project. A dramatic new entrance to the estate was created along with landscape improvements, traffic management, a nature trail and play areas.

A community woodland was also created with the planning of 1,625 trees. Cartrefi Conwy worked in partnership with Conwy County Borough Council to deliver road resurfacing, five new roads and dozens of new paths.

The scheme re-energized an existing Go Green tenant association in order to ensure the area’s sustainability. An unemployed father was one of those who landed a job working on the £1.1m project on the housing estate where he lives.

Steve McLeod has been helping to build a future for himself and for his community.
Steve said:

“I moved here to the Peulwys estate with my wife and daughter four years ago. I’d been unemployed for quite a while and had applied for hundreds, or even thousands, of jobs. I enrolled on the horticulture course that was being run by Cartrefi Conwy and really enjoyed it. After we started work on the nature trail, I was offered a full-time job with Brenig Construction and I couldn’t be happier. I understand it’s because of all the volunteering work I’d been involved with around the estate. The whole Peulwys estate looks so much better now. Everything that is being done is making a huge difference and I’m really pleased to be playing a part in it. It’s given me a huge boost getting a full-time job, especially doing something I really enjoy.”

Steve McLeod, 45, helped to transform the estate after he enrolled on a horticulture course run by Cartrefi Conwy and put in hours of unpaid voluntary work. He gained a full-time job with sub-contractors Brenig Construction after impressing Cartrefi Conwy managers and bosses of contractors G Purchase Construction Ltd with his dedication and willingness to learn.

Following the completion of the estate’s transformation, Steve has gone on to set up his own landscape business.
Maximising the benefits of retrofit energy efficiency measures in Wales

Melin Homes

Sustainability is a central organising principle for awarding and managing contracts. It is vital in order to maximise the social, economic and environmental benefits that may be achieved. Following a European compliant tendering exercise in 2012, Melin Homes was appointed Scheme Manager for delivering Welsh Government’s key energy efficiency retrofit scheme, the Arbed Phase 2 ERDF Project for South Wales and the West. Since then, Melin Homes have delivered over 3,000 energy efficiency measures to the most deprived households and communities in Wales, created or sustained over 340 jobs, secured over 42,000 training hours and awarded 100% of contracts to Welsh SMEs.

Melin Homes reports that more than 13 employment places are created for every £1m spent, with these being both sustainable and meaningful. From the outset of the project, the Melin Homes Team insisted that their supply chains provided enduring opportunities extending beyond the duration of works.

Melin Homes has also embraced the Value Wales Community Benefit Measurement Tool. Interim results demonstrate a direct spend of £14.3m, linked to £29.1m effect in the Welsh economy, achieved by high levels of local goods, services and labour procurement, minimising waste to landfill, community donations and by taking people out of worklessness and into employment.

Further community benefits have been the provision of Solar PV and Thermal to community buildings, insulation improvements to community buildings and an extensive programme of projects with schools.

The activities of Melin Homes demonstrate the extended reach of the movement in Wales, going beyond social housing, and this case provides evidence that the social housing sector’s approach to procurement and project management for large scale/value projects maximises the benefits to people, communities and businesses.
Community Cohesion

Hafod Housing’s Fir Tree Centre and Café

Hafod Housing Association has 96 homes in Fir Tree Drive, Treharris, with a dedicated Community Investment Team who have been working with tenants since 2002.

The group has gone from strength to strength with Hafod’s support, becoming the Fir Tree Community Association, a Company Limited by Guarantee and a registered charity.

In 2008, they started a campaign to build a new purpose built community building fit for the 21st Century. Since this time, there have been many unforeseen challenges to overcome. However, with the ongoing support of local residents, Hendre Development and B3 Architects, they have now achieved their goal. The new eco-friendly building, constructed by Holbrook Construction, was completed in October.

Fir Tree Centre includes a new IT suite, training and meeting rooms, and a community café. It will be run by local people and the planned programme includes a Food Cooperative, Credit Union Collection Point, activities for children and young people, both formal and informal learning opportunities, healthy living initiatives, and a range of advice and support services.

The project has received funding from a range of sources including Ffos Y Fran Community Benefit Fund, WCVA Communities Investment Fund, The Tudor Trust, and the Community Economic Development Programme, which is supported by the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government. Hafod, along with a significant amount of staff time, has also contributed £25k towards the new building as well as covering the costs of the initial feasibility work.

The building will enhance and regenerate the local landscape. The project is very much about protecting a vital community resource, energising and empowering local people, and providing a long term foundation for enterprise and renewal.