

Pen Y Garnedd Permaculture Research Institute

This is a proposal that Permanent Housing Co-operative Limited purchases a 22.93 acre plot of land, known as Y Wern, at Pen y Garnedd, near Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant. The intention is to develop a demonstration and teaching site for low impact sustainable farming using permaculture design principles.

Overview

The Pen Y Garnedd Permaculture Research Institute will demonstrate and teach the practical skills required to develop low-impact and sustainable agricultural systems. Based on a working small holding it will demonstrate the principles required to help us face up to the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change. The project is keen to explore farming practices which are less reliant on fossil fuel inputs and are much friendlier to nature and wildlife whilst still being productive and profitable.

It will be owned by Permanent Housing Co-operative, which is a fully mutual co-operative and limited company dedicated to developing sustainable livelihoods for its members and sharing the experience and networks of that process with others interested in our work.

We take inspiration from permaculture pioneers like Sepp Holzer, Masanobu Fukuoka, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren as well as others. We will build on their work to develop a Permaculture model for upland Wales which will both complement the local economy and act as an inspiration and resource for farmers and food growers in the UK and beyond.

Challenges to modern farming practices

Modern farming practices are hugely reliant on external inputs: fertilizers, pesticides and of course machinery – all derived from fossil fuels which are now widely agreed to be in diminishing supply. It is not just the potential shortage of these inputs that is causing concerns for the next generation of farmers; it is also the damage to soil structure and wildlife which their use inadvertently causes and which is undermining the long-term sustainability of our farm lands.

Our vision is to transform a parcel of underutilized grazing land into an abundant mix of fruit trees, copice, plant nursery, vegetable growing, small livestock rearing and fish farming, as well as a place for education, retreat and contemplation. Using the minimum of powered machines and adhering closely to our organic and permaculture principles we want the land to be abundant and productive and at the heart of the local economy whilst also being a haven for the wildlife and biodiversity.

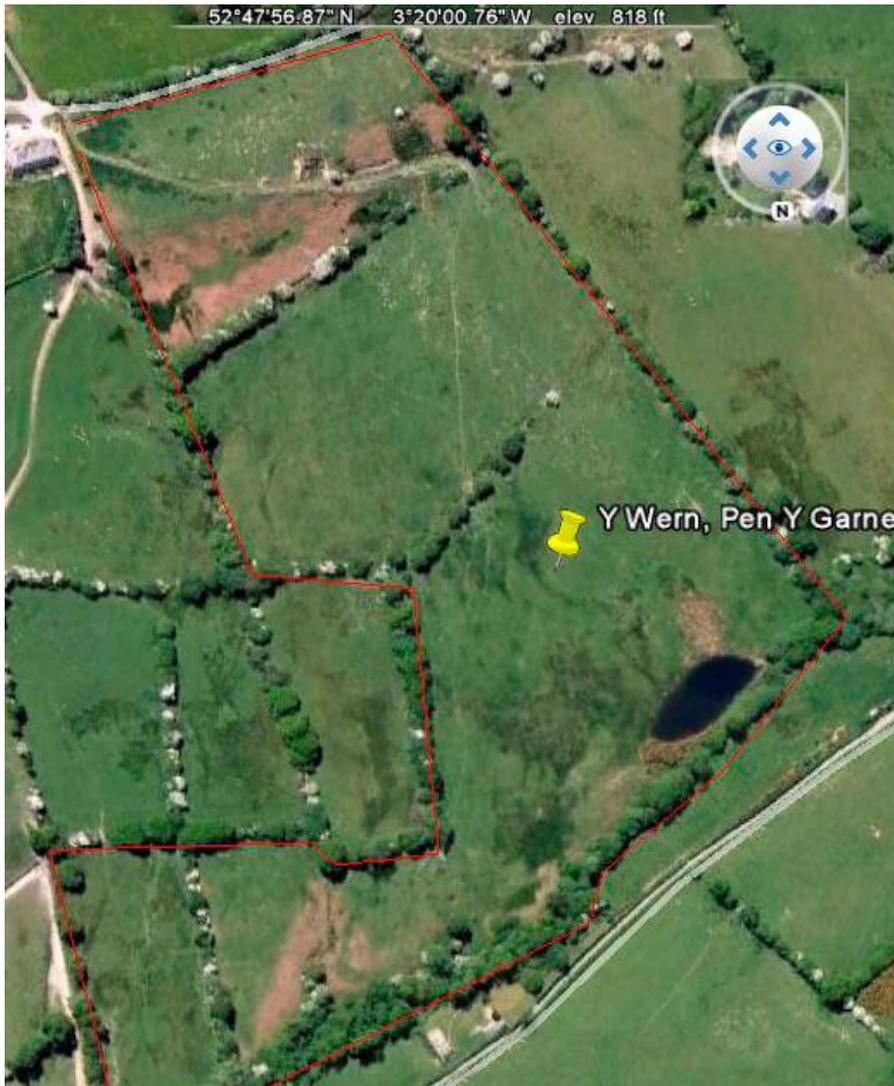
Co-operative ownership

The land will be owned by Permanent Housing Co-operative Limited and managed by a dedicated project team with a range of skills from teachers and growers to carpenters and foresters. Permanent Housing Co-operative Limited is a local affordable housing initiative interested in sustainable livelihoods and working with local partners to promote sustainable development.

This proposal has been written by project co-director Steve Jones, I am an environmental practitioner and permaculture teacher of 20 years or more standing and have worked with the Centre for Alternative Technology and other leading sustainability projects as well as making green programming with BBC Wales and Channel4. My partnership, Sector39 designs and runs training courses in permaculture design and other sustainable skills and is involved in project management for several local initiatives with similar objectives.

The plot at Pen y Garnedd

The 22.93 acre plot of land above Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant in North Powys which the group have identified as a potential starting point for the development is ideal for our purposes. It is slightly challenging in that it slopes gently Northwards in part and its elevation is from 958 feet above sea level at



its highest, dropping to 712 at its lowest point. There is a large constructed pond on the land and its northern edge is defined by a stream.

In the hills in the Welsh borders, it is both remote and accessible with stunning views down the Tanat valley, an abundance of water and is close to the homes of many of the project members. The land itself is nutrient poor, unimproved upland pasture, currently used for a hay harvest and occasional grazing and seems an ideal site to demonstrate the possibilities of diversification.

Current Discussions

We are currently in discussion with the vendors and with the Environment Agency about our plans and are also very interested in the Welsh Assembly Government's new guidelines for sustainable and low impact development. It is our intention that the Pen Y Garnedd institute will explore and demonstrate

some of the real possibilities allowed by the new planning guidelines as well as gaining a deeper understanding of working with natural systems, as afforded us by the Permaculture approach.

Investment and Financing

The co-operative group, Permanent Housing Limited, working with Sector39 is funding the first part of the development with a £100,000 loanstock issue, which will enable them to secure ownership of the parcel of land and provide some resources to begin the first phase of the project. Any shortfall of this target will be borrowed from Triodos bank as a commercial mortgage.

Ideally investors will make an investment of £500 - £10,000, for a minimum 3 year commitment period.

We are offering 0% interest on loanstock for the first three years, thereafter investors have the potential to withdraw their capital, and those remaining will be offered a percentage of profit and yield from the project in proportion to their investment as interest. Investors will be welcome to visit, attend relevant meetings and be active stakeholders in the project. There is also the potential to become a full co-op member via the co-op's joining procedure, although investment doesn't make that an automatic right.

Anyone interesting in investing or in finding out more about this ground breaking project should get in touch directly with the group via the website at www.permanenthousing.org.uk