

Policy Brief – March 2026



SUMMARY

Wales has committed to urgent climate action and a legally binding path to net zero by 2050. Rural communities want to play their part, but they often face trade-offs – for example, with costs, access to services, heritage or land-use pressures – that can reduce support for climate measures. This brief presents a practical way forward: using ‘multisolving’ – actions that cut emissions while also delivering benefits people care about, such as lower bills, healthier homes, better transport options, thriving nature and culture, and stronger local economies. Multisolving builds public support because it links climate action to everyday wellbeing.

Our research identified real examples of multisolving across rural Wales and beyond and drew out what helps them succeed. The insights inform clear recommendations for: i) people-centred, place-based and inclusive climate action; ii) organisational skills and capacity for multisolving; and iii) system and funding reforms for long-term, integrated change. The aim is to support practitioners and decision makers at all levels - across voluntary, public and business sectors - to act now, using climate measures that also solve other local challenges.

BACKGROUND

Study Objectives

We investigated how actions to address the climate emergency and move towards net zero can also deliver wider benefits for rural communities. We looked for practical examples where environmental, social, cultural and economic gains are achieved together – for instance, insulating homes to cut emissions and bills; expanding community transport to reduce car use and rural isolation; or restoring landscapes that store carbon while supporting biodiversity, flood management and local livelihoods. These are detailed in table 1 and illustrated on page 1. Building on these examples, we developed recommendations to help organisations use multisolving as a tool for a just, inclusive transition.

Policy Context

Wales declared a climate emergency in 2019ⁱ and has a legally binding pathway to net zero by 2050, supported by statutory carbon budgets aligned with advice from the UK Climate Change Committeeⁱⁱ. These commitments form part of a broader governmental programmeⁱⁱⁱ that embeds climate action across all sectors and is reinforced by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), which promotes integrated, collaborative, long-term, and preventative decision-making to deliver wide ranging wellbeing outcomes. Yet according to a recent Audit Wales report,^{iv} progress can be difficult in practice, due to short-term funding cycles, siloed reporting, fragmented data and variable capacity. Rural areas also face particular trade-offs, which can erode goodwill if not addressed through inclusive, place-based approaches. Multisolving offers a way to use the existing policy framework more effectively by connecting climate action with tangible benefits that matter locally.

Although there is substantial literature on pathways to achieving net zero, practical insight on how to deliver multisolving remains limited. Knowledge is often sparse or still developing. Most documented win-win strategies have been concentrated in urban contexts, leaving rural areas underexplored. This report fills that gap by highlighting successful examples and providing practical recommendations to enable multisolving for net zero across rural Wales.

The Evidence Base

We conducted a desk-based review and 22 semi-structured interviews with organisations and projects engaged in multisolving, in Wales and comparable contexts. Interviews explored how co-benefits are achieved in practice, what enables or constrains progress, and how tensions and trade-offs are navigated. Thematic analysis identified common patterns, practical enablers, and examples of best practice. These insights underpin the findings and recommendations that follow.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Multisolving keeps climate action meaningful and doable.

One of the most pressing messages from this research is that we should not shy away from, or give up on, net zero action. Even where politics feel uncertain, multisolving helps organisations stay the course by linking net zero to everyday benefits – such as health, affordability, local capacity and cultural vitality. Leading with these co-benefits strengthens legitimacy and public support.

2. Place-based and people-centred approaches work best.

Initiatives embedded in local networks and led by trusted convenors achieve stronger uptake and more durable results. By prioritising bottom-up, participatory processes over top-down intervention, projects can be anchored in local priorities, avoid unnecessary trade-offs and make better use of shared resources.

3. Inclusion and identity are practical enablers, not add-ons.

Inclusive and culturally grounded engagement (including attention to the Welsh language) is essential to understanding and addressing structural inequalities and technological barriers. Recognising that some groups may face disproportionate challenges in climate adaptation allows the development of targeted initiatives, helping to build trust and achieve more equitable results.

4. Multisolving combines local knowledge with technical expertise.

The best results arise through co-production: local actors shape priorities based on lived realities, whilst specialists bring expertise on system interactions and risks. These come together to ensure interventions are both technically robust and socially desirable. Structured dialogue is needed to ensure everyday experience is not marginalised.

5. Lasting change requires systems change as well as behaviours.

Lasting shifts occur when infrastructures and everyday norms are redesigned so that sustainable choices become the easiest and most meaningful options. Embedding systems thinking into governance structures enables cross sector expertise to come together, anticipate co benefits, and identify potential trade-offs. This coordinated approach helps reshape entrenched systems - such as waste, energy or transport - enabling wider and deeper benefits.

6. Multisolving improves internal governance under external constraints.

Multisolving can strengthen internal governance by helping organisations coordinate strategies and integrate planning, monitoring and reporting. Applying a multisolving framework internally supports more joined up decision making, enabling organisations to pursue long term, wider benefits even when external funding and reporting structures encourage short term or siloed action.

7. Building partnerships and networks results in shared co-benefits.

Multisolving is not only about internal integration, it also influences how organisations connect and collaborate. Multisolving strengthens external relationships by aligning priorities and enabling resource pooling, which helps actors coordinate efforts and create synergies that extend to regional levels and beyond.

8. Scale matters: multisolving is often easier locally, harder institutionally.

Community-based organisations naturally work across issues, because their grounded approach cuts across silos, while larger institutions can be constrained by administrative structures, funding and reporting systems. Multisolving practices can help make integrated working easier at scale

9) Multisolving offers opportunities for more sustainable development planning.

Whilst multisolving works well in community settings, it should also inform development planning. It provides a practical mechanism for operationalising the Well-being of Future Generations ways of working, and when combined with co-benefits evaluation helps planning processes resist siloed pressures for growth or short-term economic gain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings summarised above, we propose a number of recommendations.

People-centered, place-based and inclusive climate action

Recommendation 1: Don't give up on climate commitments - Anchor net zero objectives in co-benefits people value.

- Map the top five local priorities (e.g., bills, transport access, jobs, housing, Welsh language and culture) and identify how climate action can respond.
- In business cases and public communications, lead with benefits people will feel within 6–24 months (e.g., warmer homes, lower running costs, safer routes, local skills pathways), with emissions savings as an added gain, not the sole driver.
- Build a simple 'multisolving scorecard' for each project (cost of living, health, nature, culture, jobs) and use it in approvals and evaluation.

Recommendation 2: Centre inclusion and identity through embedded community partnership.

- Budget for culturally grounded engagement from the start, prioritising Welsh language where appropriate in recognition of its significance in shaping community identity and coherence. Use trusted local convenors; avoid short, one-off consultations.
- Build relationships with communities: run workshops that surface lived experience, barriers and opportunities. Pay people for their time where appropriate and ensure feedback loops.
- Ask funders to resource facilitation and relationship-building as core deliverables, not overheads.

Recommendation 3: Align 'ways of knowing' to improve multisolving practices.

- Treat lived experience as expertise. Require decision papers to include both experiential evidence and technical analysis.
- Create simple, regular forums where communities and specialists can jointly frame priorities and plan together.
- Demonstrate clearly how community insight has shaped decisions by adapting project design to lived experience, keeping feedback loops open and ongoing.

Organisational capacity and skills for multisolving

Recommendation 4: Anticipate and mitigate rural trade-offs.

- Use participatory scenario tools to explore tensions (e.g., land use, grid capacity, service coverage vs. cost). Make trade-offs explicit and agree mitigations.
- Create a standing community panel (including lesser-heard groups) to test proposals early and track unintended effects.
- Where harms cannot be avoided, offer compensating measures (e.g. targeted retrofit support, habitat enhancement packages).

Recommendation 5: Develop capacities not just projects.

- Invest in ongoing professional development in systems thinking, place knowledge and thematic expertise, to support more integrated responses to complex challenges and reduce reliance on isolated or reactive interventions.
- Embed facilitation and relational skills as core competencies for staff, backed by ongoing training in participatory methods, to support sustained collaboration with communities, partners and strategic stakeholders over the long term.
- Strategic organisations should consider how they can support capacity building of staff through funding and support programmes.

Recommendation 6: Create, resource and mandate structural enablers for collaboration.

- Resource integrator roles (e.g., partnership leads, community brokers) to act as 'super connectors' with clear mandates, protected time and authority to convene across departments and organisations.
- Create space for collaboration, both physically for example through community hubs and conceptually by giving time to building trust.
- Invest in networks and convening mechanisms as a means for addressing capacity gaps, pooling resources and sharing knowledge over a sustained period of time.

System and funding reform for long-term, integrated change

Recommendation 7: Focus on systems change to unlock sustainable everyday practices.

- Identify 'locked in' systems in your area such as waste, energy or transport and work with communities and partners to co-design and trial new systems which are conducive to behaviour change.
- Shift from siloed, short term pilot projects to integrated packages that deliver multiple benefits to drive systemic change.
- Collaborate with communities to redesign services where the low-carbon option is the default e.g. repair/reuse first, active travel by design so that sustainable, affordable, and resilient practices become the easiest and most meaningful options.

Recommendation 8: Navigate financial limitations through strategic and integrated working.

- Embed integrated, co-benefit-focused thinking within internal governance, ensuring that individual projects contribute coherently to the wider mission.
- Build strategically on experience from previous successful approaches.
- Seek multi-year, flexible revenue funding; where this isn't possible, keep a rolling strategy so short-term grants add up to long-term change/ a broader interconnected vision.
- Funders should assess coherence of projects in relation to the organisations wider vision and use proportionate reporting, especially for small partners.

Recommendation 9: Reframe growth through multisolving in development planning.

- Embed co-benefit appraisal in planning workflows requiring proposals to evidence environmental, social, cultural and economic gains together.
- Routinely test, monitor and report on day-to-day intervention design decisions against the Well-being of Future Generations Ways of Working, translating them from high level principles into practical prompts and tests for delivery teams.
- Shift from narrow, output-driven indicators of growth towards measures that better reflect what communities value - such as quality local employment, resource efficiency, cultural resilience, and nature recovery - so that development planning supports systems change rather than short-term economic optimisation.



Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales
The Rural Wales Local Policy and Innovation Partnership

MULTISOLVING FOR NET ZERO-RECOMMENDATIONS



Illustration: Amanda Steer

WHAT DOES MULTISOLVING LOOK LIKE?

Table 1 below presents case study exemplars of multisolving practice, where actions for net zero enable environmental, economic and cultural co-benefits across a range of sectors. Some of these are illustrated on page 1.

Project type	Project description	Typical co-benefits	Example projects
Community transport	Community-run, flexible pre-bookable transport for underserved rural residents – boosts inclusion, lowers car use and emissions, while supporting social and cultural community cohesion.	 £  	O Ddrws i Ddrws Partneriaeth Ogwen community minibus & lift service Yr Orsaf community transport TrydaNi community EV car clubs Hooky Car Club Low Carbon (Oxfordshire)
Active transport	Enabling everyday active travel (walking, cycling) via bike hire/repair, green infrastructure, better access, and peer support, promoting health, cutting car use and emissions, and improving air quality, wellbeing, and community cohesion.	£  	Partneriaeth Ogwen (Beics Ogwen) Forth Valley Climate Action Hub Pen Llŷn Bikes Hub Eco Hub Aber Hope Valley Climate Action's Travelling Light (Peak District)
Education / schools awards	School-based environmental programmes making climate action practical and place-based, promoting energy reduction, sustainable transport, and cutting waste.	   	Gwyrddni Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly Eco-Schools (Keep Wales Tidy) The Darwin Experience Welsh Government Curriculum
Housing retrofit	Upgrading existing homes (e.g., insulation, improved ventilation, low-carbon heating) to enhance energy efficiency; reduces emissions, lowers bills, and improves wellbeing.	£   	Tai ar y Cyd pattern book for low-carbon homes Tŷ Gwyrddfai decarbonisation hub supporting retrofit skills
Energy (saving measures / community provision)	Projects that cut energy demand and deliver locally owned renewable energy (i.e. community generation, shared infrastructure), lowering costs and returning value to communities. Scope for education and skills training.	£   	Morlais (Anglesey tidal energy) Ynni Ogwen Community Energy Wales Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG) Ynni Anafon
Biodiversity / landscape protection	Landscape-scale nature recovery and habitat restoration that enhance biodiversity, mitigate flooding, and deliver ecosystem services. often generates economic returns from 'nature-based interventions'.	   	National Peatland Action Programme Woodlands for Wales Local Places for Nature Cambrian Wildwood Carneddau Landscape Partnership Fferm Ifan
Tourism	Low-impact, locally led tourism linking sites and routes with interpretation and wayfinding, combining trails with digital/print guides to manage access and visitor experience, celebrate cultural and natural heritage, and strengthen rural businesses.	    	Carneddau Landscape Partnership Yr Orsaf Community Tourism EcoAmgueddfa Carbon Neutral Islands (Scotland) North West Highlands Geopark (Scotland)

Health / social care provision	Community-based, preventative and supportive health/social care initiatives that improve access, reduce pressure on clinical services, and strengthen wellbeing.	  	Social Prescribing (Public Health Wales) Asthma + Lung UK (Wales)
Community assets / projects	Community-led assets (spaces, hubs, and shared resources) that build resilience, keep value local, and improve access, through hands-on activities like tool/equipment sharing, repair-and-reuse schemes, and community repair/making workshops.	    	Benthyg Cymru (Libraries of Things) Partneriaeth Ogwen Warp It (Hywel Dda UHB reuse platform) Repair Cafe Wales North Wales Nappy Collective
Skills & employment	Training, apprenticeships and workforce development to build local capacity for net zero delivery (e.g., retrofit, renewables, land management, food production, business management).	   	Tŷ Gwyrddfai Yr Orsaf 'Young People's Enterprise Centre' Llysfasi Net Zero Farm project Coleg Cambria Tywi Centre
Rural economy / investment	Finance, enterprise support and regional investment programmes that catalyse decarbonisation-aligned growth and innovation in rural regions.	  	North Wales Growth Deal (Ambition North Wales) Development Bank of Wales South Wales Industrial Cluster North East Wales Industrial Decarbonisation cluster (NEWID)
Cultural resilience	Projects that protect cultural heritage, sustain language and place-based identity, and strengthen community cohesion.	  	Carneddau Landscape Partnership cultural heritage & place names Gwyrddni Yr Orsaf (community activities) EcoAmgueddfa
Waste reduction / recycling	Initiatives that prevent waste and increase reuse, repair and recycling through circular economy approaches.	  	Benthyg Cymru Gwyrddni Repair Cafes Warp It (Hywel Dda UHB)
Food security	Creating food partnerships, supporting producers, shortening supply chains and/or increasing access to affordable, nutritious food.	     	FareShare Cymru Welsh Veg in Schools Bwyd Powys Food: Food for the Planet Food Partnerships

Legend

 Strengthening and diversifying the rural economy	 Supporting social cohesion
 Enhancing ecosystem health / landscape protection (incl. biodiversity, flood mitigation)	 Increasing investment in rural community projects and assets
£ Reducing cost of living (food, fuel, travel)	 Supporting educational attainment
 Enhancing availability of rural service provision	 Strengthening rural food security
 Improving rural public health	 Increasing opportunities for skilled employment in rural areas
 Decreasing waste / enhancing recycling	 Protecting cultural heritage and ensuring cultural resilience

PROJECT INFORMATION

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Further reading

The full project report can be downloaded from www.lpip.cymru

For more information

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ⁱ Welsh Government. 2019. Welsh Government makes climate emergency declaration. <https://www.gov.wales/welsh-government-makes-climate-emergency-declaration>

ⁱⁱ Climate Change Committee. (2025) Wales' Fourth Carbon Budget: Advice for the Welsh Government. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Wales-Fourth-Carbon-Budget-advice.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Welsh Government. 2021. Programme for government – update. <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/programme-for-government-update-december-2021.pdf>

^{iv} Audit Wales. (2025) No time to lose: Lessons from our work under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. <https://www.audit.wales/publication/no-time-lose-lessons-our-work-under-well-being-future-generations-act>