

Date: 6 December 2000
Time: 9.00am to 12.30pm
Venue: Committee Room, National Assembly Building

WOODLAND STRATEGY FOR WALES

Purpose

1. The Committee is invited to comment on the Draft Outline Strategy (Annex 1).

Summary

2. The Draft Outline Strategy has been prepared by a Working Group of officials from National Assembly departments and agencies chaired by the Forestry Commission. The Working Group has members representing Local Authorities and the National Park Authorities and was extended following public consultation to include representatives of the voluntary environmental sector and the forestry industries.

3. The Draft Outline develops the issues and aspirations raised by the public consultation which was reported previously to this Committee. This Draft Outline was also recently discussed with representatives of interest groups at a Stakeholder Workshop on 6 November 2000. The stakeholders largely supported the vision and objectives set out in the Draft Outline, but also wished to see:

- a greater importance given to farm woodlands and connections with the agricultural economy;
- recognition given to the importance of woodlands for developing and supporting communities throughout Wales and;
- recognition that biodiversity was an important consideration in all circumstances and work to support biodiversity should not be confined to the Habitat and Species Action Plans.

Timing

4. The Committee is invited to comment on these and other issues so that their views can be taken into account in drawing up a final draft strategy early in the New Year. Comments are required before Christmas so that the work can proceed towards publication of the Strategy in late spring 2001.

Compliance

5. Section 105 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 provides for the Assembly to make provision of

the funding for the Forestry Commissioners' functions in relation to Wales. This section of the Act has not yet been brought into operation. Appropriate arrangements will be put in hand to bring this operation when a decision is taken to transfer financial responsibility to the Assembly.

Contact Point

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ANNEX 1

Wales Woodland Strategy

Draft Outline Structure

Preface – **By Carwyn Jones (Minister for Rural Affairs)**

Executive Summary

PART 1: Introducing the Strategy

1.1 Introduction and Context

Devolution has provided the impetus for a new distinctive Welsh agenda for woodlands. We will use this opportunity to develop a new approach to woodlands in Wales. This strategy will deliver sustainable woodland management, contributing towards the National Assembly's aim of social justice and prosperity for all, set out in '**Sustainable Wales**'; '**Communities First**'; '**Better Wales.com**'; and '**Putting Wales First: A Partnership for the People of Wales**'

Delivering our International commitments in Wales.

The UK Government has made several international commitments to sustainable forestry and set out its response to these, in the "**UK Forestry Standard**" published in 1998. This strategy will help to deliver the UK commitment to sustainable forestry as well as contributing to our international commitments on Climate Change through a contribution to our renewable energy programme.

All of the National Assembly's woodlands managed by Forest Enterprise have been independently certified as meeting the UK Woodland Assurance Standard. This standard is accepted by the

international non-governmental Forestry Stewardship Council as meeting their requirements for certification of sustainably managed woodlands. We will champion sustainable forest management as part of our statutory commitment to sustainable development.

1.2

VISION : Our Vision FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS, is of high quality woodlands, sustainably managed, that enhance the landscape, are appropriate to local conditions and have a diverse mixture of species and habitats. These will:

- Provide an increasing range of social and community benefits both locally and nationally.
- Support thriving woodland based industries;
- Contribute to sustainable environmental quality throughout Wales; and

This will be achieved by:

- Delivering more and better woodlands, by promoting the most appropriate silvicultural practices, more continuous cover forestry and multi-purpose management;
- Developing Wales as a world-class location for forest industries;
- Improving landscape design standards, protecting biodiversity and cherishing our woodland heritage;
- Supporting community development; and
- Promoting tourism, recreation and health.

1.3 Guiding Principles

Overarching guiding principles of **sustainable development** will apply to all the objectives of the Strategy. The National Assembly is committed to sustainable development by statute and by choice and this strategy will apply the basic principles of sustainable development, social justice and equality of opportunity expressed in **Sustainable Wales; Putting Wales First: a Partnership for the People of Wales**; and the National Assembly's Corporate Plan entitled "**betterwales.com**". Our Vision for the future of Wales' woodlands will be achieved through these guiding principles, expressed as:

a) Social Inclusion

Woodland can make a difference to the quality of people's lives. Through community involvement techniques, woodland owners can ensure that their woodlands provide opportunities for local economic development, recreation and preventative health care. The National Assembly woodlands will be especially important for delivering social benefits to communities.

b) Quality

Welsh woodlands must be managed to deliver quality outputs for all sectors of the community, whether through recreation, timber production, community involvement or their visual and aesthetic impact. Woods should contribute to the quality image of Wales which attracts visitors and enhances the quality of life for all the people of Wales.

c) Partnership

This vision is not something that can be achieved by the National Assembly alone, it requires involvement and commitment from everyone. There must be a flexible approach, which allows people's enthusiasm to be used positively. Only through effective partnerships between the public and private sectors, industry, volunteers and individuals will the vision be achieved.

d) Integration

We will look for linkages with other National Assembly programmes to deliver joined-up approaches at National, Regional and Local levels. There are strong links with agriculture, which faces many of the same challenges, and with environmental programmes. The Assembly's National Economic Development Strategy will deliver much of the development support to forestry businesses, particularly through the Objective 1 programmes. Integration is also possible in urban policies, where so many programmes to develop communities, remove inequalities and improve the quality of life can be aided by using trees and woods as part of an integrated urban greenspace. We will maximise the positive linkages and look for innovative approaches to delivering our vision.

The National Assembly has the largest single woodland ownership in Wales, - the Forestry Commission woodlands. These woodlands are less diverse than those in the private sector. We intend to use these woodlands as exemplars of best practice, to deliver social and environmental benefits through changed management and to deliver woodlands of which the people of Wales can be rightly proud.

In the private sector, a large number of relatively small individual ownerships have created and maintain a varied and diverse range of woodlands. We will encourage woodland owners to play their part in contributing to the rich tapestry of woodlands that will deliver our joint vision.

PART 2 : Strategy Objectives

2.1 Introduction

Many objectives need to be achieved to fulfil the vision. These objectives must be clearly stated and the actions which are needed to progress towards these objectives must be measurable. In this section we set out the principal objectives, some indicative performance measures and, where appropriate, milestone markers for medium term achievements.

Our aim is to develop world class woodlands in Wales, with outstanding environmental quality, social provision and an industry which contributes positively to the economy through the provision of safe and sustainable employment.

Achieving these objectives will not be easy or quick, but with enthusiasm and support throughout Wales we can start to make progress. Where possible the lead partners are identified for delivering the objectives. Measures of achievement in the Assembly's own woodlands are identified. The programmes of action are collected into five broad objective areas:

- **More and better woodlands - promoting high quality woodland management**
- **Developing Wales as a world-class location for forest industries**
- **Producing a first-quality sustainable environment**
- **Supporting community development**
- **Promoting tourism recreation and health**

2.2 More and better woodlands - promoting high quality woodland management

The key objectives for woodland management are:

- **To promote best practice silviculture which delivers sustainable woodland management;**
- **To progressively move to greater use of continuous cover systems;**
- **and, To encourage expansion of appropriate woodland.**

2.2.1 To promote best practice silviculture

The key to this objective is attaining a flexible woodland resource, better able to meet the challenges and opportunities of this new century. There are, and should continue to be, many different woodland types, delivering the range of benefits which suit their location and ownership.

We will develop mechanisms to deliver best silvicultural practice, to extend long term holistic planning in woodland management and encourage thinning. We will ensure that fair and equitable mechanisms are established for recognising the social and environmental benefits from woodlands.

2.2.2 To move to greater use of continuous cover systems

There is a persuasive case for moving away from the use of clear cutting systems. The use of continuous cover will not be appropriate in all circumstances, but our favourable site conditions will allow this type of management in most sheltered situations. The National Assembly owned woodlands are predominantly plantations of conifers planted on sites which were previously open habitats. These woodlands are less diverse than those in private ownerships and will benefit most from conversion to a more stable woodland environment.

We will convert the National Assembly woodlands to continuous cover where practical and encourage conversion in similar private sector woodlands.

<p>We will establish 3 large-scale trial areas in National Assembly woodlands, to pioneer successful techniques for transformation to continuous cover systems and to collect information to guide future transformation of all woodland types.</p>

2.2.3 To encourage expansion of appropriate woodland

Trees and woodlands occupy about 14% of Wales' land area. They provide a range of benefits to society, which can be increased through appropriate expansion. New woodlands could link and protect our irreplaceable remnant ancient semi natural woodlands, enhance landscapes scarred by mineral extraction and restoration, provide shelter on farms and diversification of agricultural businesses as well as contributing to a sustainable supply of timber for industry.

We will develop an action plan to encourage appropriate woodland extension.

2.3 Developing Wales as a world-class location for forest industries

The key objectives for the economy are:

- **To provide effective business support to Welsh forest industries; and**
- **To develop the wood supply chain and product marketing**
- **To encourage interest and activity in farm woodlands**

2.3.1 To provide Welsh forest industries with effective business support

Key to achieving this objective is the delivery of the National Economic Development Strategy through the WDA and other partners. Maximising the impact of EU Structural funding under Objective 1, 2 & 3 will be important in the short-term.

We will develop action plans to increase the competitiveness of our forest industries and put in place systems for business support and training.

2.3.2 To develop the wood supply chain and product marketing

One of the factors limiting development in this sector, is lack of confidence in the wood supply chain. There are often many different businesses involved in handling any piece of wood before it becomes a finished product. Many of these businesses are under financial pressures due to the fall in timber prices during the late 1990's. Another key factor in business success is product marketing. Wood products have to compete in an international marketplace and the special characteristics of the product or service supplied by each business is crucial for success.

We will work with industry representatives to support and develop businesses in the wood supply chain, helping them provide information on the quantity and quality of wood available.

We will help promote the use of wood and encourage businesses to market their products effectively

The development of a forest industries cluster group in Scotland is harnessing energies throughout the sector to support and develop businesses. We will consider the fostering of a similar cluster in Wales and the Welsh Marches.

2.3.3 To encourage interest and activity in farm woodlands

Farm woodlands comprise around 25% of the woodland resource in Wales. The careful management of these woodlands as a farm resource will contribute to farm incomes and diversification of farm enterprises as well as providing additional benefits to the landscape and environment.

We will help farmers make best use of farm woodland resources through shelter, and development of

wood products and help farmers diversify their agricultural businesses through woodland management, contracting and wood processing.

2.3.4 Other economic development.

Links with the agricultural economy, the development of craft and specialist timber using businesses and the development of wood for the production of renewable energy are all important areas for economic development. There are many economic benefits to the Welsh economy through multiplier effects from woodland work. These wider benefits are vital to the support of thriving economic communities throughout Wales.

We will develop an integrated renewable energy plan, ensuring that wood is recognised as a key fuel for renewable energy production.

We will support the development of specialist timber using businesses.

2.4 Producing a first-quality sustainable environment

The National Assembly is committed to Sustainable Development. This strategy forms a vital part in the overall Wales Sustainable Development Plan. Key objectives for delivering a sustainable environment are conserving and enhancing our natural resources, in particular:

- **To implement the Biodiversity Action Plans in woodlands**
- **To conserve and enhance the landscapes of Wales**

2.4.1 To implement the Biodiversity Action Plans in woodlands

The woodlands in Wales contain some of the most important plant and animal communities of any Welsh habitat. Our upland oakwoods are internationally important and all our ancient semi natural woodlands are irreplaceable assets. Much of our recent semi natural woodland and many plantation woodlands with remnant semi natural vegetation also have high existing or potential biodiversity values. Improving the quality of these woodlands and linking and expanding their habitat networks demands that a strategic approach is taken.

We will increase the quality and quantity of native woodlands and work to prevent further loss of ancient woodland, continuing to target limited resources on strategic priorities.

2.4.2 To conserve and enhance the landscapes of Wales

Trees and woodlands have a high visual impact and are key components of our most treasured

landscapes, playing such a vital role in the tourism industry. Woods also contribute to quality of life by enhancing the surrounds of the towns cities and commercial areas where people live and work. The rich archaeological inheritance in woodlands, historic landscapes, parks and gardens should be cherished for its contribution to society. Trees and woodlands can be used to reconnect landscapes damaged by mineral extraction and restoration. Landscape is, however, dynamic and constantly changing. We must ensure that our woodlands enhance the landscape by using modern design principles when planning future management and replacement of plantations following felling.

We will use woodlands to restore degraded landscapes, develop action plans to prioritise work in historic landscapes and to progressively extend the information on important historic features within woodlands.

2.4.3 Further environmental enhancement

While biodiversity and landscape may be the key environmental issues, there are many others which also deserve attention. Woodlands can have important effects on the water environment. Reversing the acidification of streams, enhancing stream biodiversity and balancing the flow of water can all be achieved through good design and management of woodlands.

We will develop an action plan to help safeguard water resources

2.5 Supporting community development

Community development is a priority for the National Assembly, particularly to regenerate our most disadvantaged communities. Woodlands can be used positively to engage local communities, to support education to restore a positive environmental image and to contribute to local sustainability. Woods can also help reconnect local people with their landscape and heritage. Key objectives of supporting community development are:

- **To use woodlands as an aid for social reconnection of our most disadvantaged communities**
- **To maximise the use of woodlands for education**

2.5.1 To use woodlands as an aid for social reconnection of our most disadvantaged communities

Woodlands can often prove an effective way of developing community spirit. People feel very connected with trees and woodlands and proposals for managing local woodlands or for creating new woodlands can generate considerable interest. This interest can lead to volunteer action and to concern for other local environmental issues. The location of the National Assembly woodland estate in the South Wales Valleys provides many opportunities for direct action.

We will use the National Assembly and other woodlands as a focus for regenerating their surrounding

2.5.2 To maximise the use of woodlands for education

Woodlands are a resource which can be used to support education at all levels and over a wide range of curricular subjects. They can be an effective introduction to biological sciences, geography, mathematics and economics as well as in leisure and artistic pursuits. Woodlands and the use of wood as a material introduces the concept of sustainable development in an understandable way. Interest in tropical forest destruction and its interaction with global climate provides another relevant topic which links back to the local environment and woodland as a local heritage resource. The development of the Forest Education Initiative to involve local woodland owners, managers and wood processors provides scope to bring this educational use to all parts of Wales.

We will promote the use of woodlands as an educational resource and woodland planning as a tool for community involvement

There is huge scope to use woodland to develop communities, but poor understanding of the techniques involved and the benefits to be gained. We are undertaking research to help identify the barriers to community involvement and will use other specialists to ensure that we maximise the value of woods to local communities.

2.6 Promoting tourism recreation and health

Woodlands provide a landscape structure and a setting for many tourist enterprises. Woodlands are also places to visit in their own right and many facilities in woodlands attract thousands of visitors each year. Woodlands contribute positively to the emotional and physical health of our people through public access and recreation. The key objectives for promoting tourism and health are;

- **To support tourism in Wales by using woodlands to create a high quality visitor experience**
- **To promote preventative health care through access to woodlands for all communities**

2.6.1 To support tourism in Wales by using woodlands to create a high quality visitor experience

Trees and Woodlands play a huge role in creating an attractive image of Wales as a tourist destination. The use of trees as a setting for tourist facilities enhances the quality of the tourist experience. There is scope for the development of quality tourist accommodation in appropriate woodland and the greater use of woodland for siting recreational facilities.

We will develop a woodland tourism plan to support the use of woodlands in developing a high quality visitor experience

The development of the mountain bike trails in the National Assembly woodlands at Coed y Brenin has not only created an internationally recognised outdoor recreation facility, but also brings an estimated £4 million a year into the local community.

2.6.2 To promote health through access to woodlands for all communities

Woodlands can play a role in supporting the physical and emotional wellbeing of individuals and communities. The use of woodlands for quiet enjoyment as well as for sport and recreation is an effective way of keeping fit and healthy. Walking in woodlands can also be effective therapy to regain health after illness. Encouraging access to woodlands for all communities will contribute to the health of the nation. Promoting access to woodlands as an integrated part of wider countryside access is important if the full benefits of access are to be realised. The National Assembly woodlands will be particularly important in satisfying the demand for access to woodlands with recreational facilities, but other woodland owners will be encouraged to provide voluntary public access in a co-ordinated way.

We will develop an action plan to extend woodland access, to provide better information on the health benefits of trees and woodlands and to increase access to woodlands for disadvantaged communities

PART 3 : Actions and Milestones

This part sets out commitments for partners in **Programmes of Action** and suggests indicative **Indicators of Achievement** for the short and medium term.

This section will include a table setting out the Actions required as a programme for each Objective. Actions for the National Assembly woodland estate will be set out clearly to show which parts of the strategy will be delivered directly and which by encouragement of others.

Evaluation and Review

Establishing a **‘Woodland Forum’** is a key commitment for monitoring and review of programmes. The Woodland Forum will provide a mechanism for partners to report on progress and to ensure that all parts

of the strategy are regularly reviewed and updated.

PART 4 : Explanation and Evidence

This part sets out the background to the strategy, why it is considered necessary and how people have been consulted on its contents. It also sets out some of the history and background necessary to understand the context of the strategy.

Understanding the context : the history of Wales' woodland development

i) Woodland changes through time

ii) The Modern Era

Preparing the Strategy

Responses to Consultation

Sustainable benefits from woodland

Supporting information on the benefits from following the Objectives in PART 2