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Wales' Woodland Strategy (Draft)

Preface – By Carwyn Jones (Minister for Rural Affairs)

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Executive Summary

PART 1: Introducing the Strategy

1.1 Introduction

Devolution has provided the impetus for a new and distinctive Welsh agenda for its woodlands. We can now develop a new approach to woodlands in Wales through this strategy. Sustainable woodland management will contribute towards the National Assembly's aim of social justice and prosperity for all. Our aim is to develop high-class woodlands in Wales, with outstanding environmental quality and social provision, set within an industry that contributes positively to the economy by providing safe and long-term employment. In forestry, decisions taken now will not show their full impact for fifty years or more, so the National Assembly is committed to continual development of this strategy for the first half of the 21st century.

1.2 Our Vision

OUR VISION for the next 50 years, is that Wales will be known for its high-quality woodlands, that enhance the landscape, are appropriate to local conditions and have a diverse mixture of species and habitats.

These will:

- Provide more social and community benefits, both locally and nationally;
- Support thriving woodland-based industries; and
- Contribute to a better quality environment throughout Wales.

This vision will be realised through five programmes of action:

- Woodlands for People;
- A new emphasis on woodland management;
- Wales as a location for world-class forest industries;
- A diverse and healthy environment; and
- Tourism, recreation and health.

1.3 Guiding Principles

The principles of sustainable development, social justice and equality of opportunity, as expressed in **Sustainable Wales; Putting Wales First: a Partnership for the People of Wales**; and the National Assembly's Corporate Plan entitled **Betterwales.com**, will apply to all the objectives of this strategy. Our vision for the future of Wales' woodlands will be achieved through these guiding principles:

a) Sustainability

By statute and by choice, the National Assembly is committed to sustainable development . The woodlands of Wales have a key part to play in achieving the triple goals of social, economic and environmental development. This woodland strategy is an integral part of the overall sustainable development plan for Wales.

b) Social Inclusion

Woodland can make a difference to the quality of people's lives. Through community involvement, local people can help woodland owners to ensure that opportunities are provided for economic development, recreation and preventative health care through greater access to the fresh air and for exercise close to where they live. The National Assembly has a special responsibility for ensuring that

its own woodlands provide social benefits to communities.

c) Quality

Welsh woodlands must deliver quality outputs for everyone whether through recreation, timber production, community involvement or their visual and aesthetic impact. Woods can contribute to the image of Wales, by attracting visitors and enhancing the quality of life. To achieve quality, those managing the woodlands throughout Wales must have a good understanding of best management practices, through appropriate training, and should set long-term objectives for improvement.

d) 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 embraces people's knowledge and enthusiasm. Only through effective partnerships between the public and private sectors, industry, volunteers and individuals will the vision be achieved.

e) Integration

The National Assembly will integrate this woodland strategy into all its programmes at national, regional and local levels. There are strong links between forestry and agriculture. Both industries face challenges from falling market prices, competition from cheap imports, and the need to adapt to social and environmental issues. Closer integration between the various social, environmental, forestry and agricultural programmes could greatly assist this process. The Assembly's National Economic Development Strategy will begin to deliver much of the development support to forestry businesses, particularly through the Objective 1 partnerships. Integration is also possible in urban policies, where trees and woods in and around our towns and cities can greatly improve the quality of life for those who live and work there.

1.4 Context

a) History

The woodlands of Wales have a long history, as explained in some detail in Part 4 of this strategy. During the last century, the Government took positive action to double the woodland coverage in the UK, in response to timber shortages experienced during the two World Wars. This forest estate was largely developed on poor-quality farmland and moorland in the uplands. Woodlands, created in the public and private sectors through direct action and financial incentives, were predominantly single-purpose plantations of conifers, which would grow timber quickly in these harsh environments.

Towards the end of the century, growing environmental awareness brought changes in practice, and a new emphasis on the use of woodlands for multiple benefits. New policies were adopted, restructuring

these plantations through improved forest design, to deliver multi-purpose benefits - a better landscape; greater biodiversity; more public access and recreation; and continued economic outputs from timber and other products.

b) The Resource

The National Assembly has the largest single woodland ownership in Wales - the Forestry Commission woodlands. This is a huge resource, taking up about 6% of the land area of Wales, which will be used for the public good. We will use these woodlands as exemplars of best practice, to deliver social, environmental and economic benefits through innovative management - woodlands of which the people of Wales can be rightly proud. In the private sector, there are large numbers of relatively small woodlands, created and maintained by individual owners, providing varied and diverse benefits. We will encourage all woodland owners to play their part in contributing to the rich tapestry of woodlands that will achieve our vision.

c) Looking Forward

This strategy will continue a multi-purpose approach to forestry and will seek to develop further the social benefits that woodlands can bring to the people of Wales. The National Assembly recognises that this will require it to develop a new and innovative approach through this strategy. Forestry is a long established sector, and much of today's woodland inheritance is the result of careful stewardship by generations of individual owners. These owners are under pressure in today's challenging financial climate, where timber prices have fallen steeply in the late 1990s. The National Assembly is committed to working in partnership with woodland owners, industry and the voluntary sector in taking forward its strategy.

d) Delivering our international commitments in Wales

This strategy will help the UK Government to deliver its international commitments to sustainable forestry, as set out in the **UK Forestry Standard**, published in 1998.

All of the National Assembly's woodlands in the care of the Forestry Commission have been independently certified as meeting the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS) standard. The international non-governmental Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) accepts this standard as meeting their requirements for certification of sustainably managed woodlands. We will champion sustainable forest management amongst other woodland owners in Wales, and help develop chain of custody systems for wood using businesses so that full sustainability can be clearly demonstrated.

1.5 Timescale

This strategy is about a commitment to change the way in which we manage and use our woodlands in Wales in the long-term. Our vision is for the next 50 years, but history teaches us that much can change

in that time. The conditions when trees are felled are rarely those anticipated when the same trees were planted. Social, economic and environmental conditions will continue to change, and the effects of this strategy will be visible well into the future.

We do not yet fully understand the likely impact of climate change, nor can we foresee the extent of future technological advances or the evolution of society's demands. Because of these effects, it is essential that this strategy is sufficiently flexible to facilitate change and we will be setting up a *Wales' Woodland Forum* to update and fine-tune the specific actions over time.

We shall also consult more widely from time to time to ensure that people's expectations continue to be met. We are confident that the basic tenets of this strategy will continue to be relevant and that decisions taken now will contribute towards creating a better environment both for the people of Wales, and our many visitors, well into the future.

PART 2 : Strategic Objectives

2.1 Introduction

In this section we set out the principal objectives. Achieving the vision requires action across a range of objectives and progress towards these must be clearly described and measurable. Achieving these objectives will be neither easy, nor quick, but with enthusiasm and support throughout Wales we can start to make progress

Programmes of action are collected into five broad areas:

- **Woodlands for People**
- **A new emphasis on woodland management**
- **Wales as a location for world-class forest industries**
- **A diverse and healthy environment**
- **Tourism, recreation and health**

2.2 Woodlands for People

Community development is a priority for the National Assembly. The Assembly's commitment to regenerate our most disadvantaged communities has been set out in the *Communities First* consultations.

Woodlands can provide environmental and social benefits to local communities, support opportunities for learning and contribute to local sustainability. Trees can also provide an important link between local people and their landscape and heritage. Key objectives of providing woodlands for people through this strategy are:

- **To use woodlands as a social and cultural asset for some of our most disadvantaged communities;**
- **To maximise the use of woodlands for learning; and**
- **To provide opportunities for communities to have their say in the management of woods close to where they live.**

2.2.1 To use woodlands as a social and cultural asset for some of our most disadvantaged communities

Woodlands can often prove an effective way of developing community spirit. Research shows that people respond positively to trees and woodlands, considering them to be a part of the cultural heritage of Wales. Proposals for managing local woodlands or for creating new woodlands can generate considerable community benefit and interest. This interest can lead to concern for other local environmental issues, and action by volunteers. The National Assembly woodlands provide many opportunities for direct action throughout Wales. In rural parts of Wales, woodlands can be a stimulus to rural development centred on communities. Most woodlands are robust habitats that can support many forms of recreation and can also yield a sustainable supply of wood and other products to support local businesses.

- *We will encourage the use of woodlands as catalysts for regenerating local communities, with effort being concentrated in those communities with the greatest disadvantage.*
- *We will develop a series of community woodlands throughout Wales, using existing woods or creating new woods, involving local people in their management for the benefit of their communities.*
- *We will promote woodland planning as a way of encouraging people to get involved in local sustainability, looking for opportunities to source materials and services for local businesses and to encourage biodiversity.*
- *We will undertake research to help identify the barriers to community involvement, and will work with partners to ensure that we maximise the value of woods to local communities.*
- *We will encourage the planting of woodland as an interim use for vacant industrial sites before redevelopment, providing beneficial environmental use and some advance landscaping.*

In 2000 the woodland initiative, *Tir Coed*, undertook an innovative community consultation exercise in the Ystwyth valley in Mid Wales. The communities involved expressed high levels of interest in the management of their local woodlands. We will use the Ystwyth valley as an innovative, large-scale pilot to seek maximum benefit for the local communities, integrating woodland management, tourism and environmental objectives in order to meet some of their aspirations and help to improve the rural economy in a sustainable way. We believe that there are exciting opportunities to use the National Assembly's woodlands more widely to maximise the delivery of local benefits so as to regenerate some of Wales' rural and urban communities, stimulating local economies and enhancing their quality of life.

2.2.2 To maximise the use of woodlands for learning

Trees and woodlands can be used to support learning at all levels and across a wide range of subjects. They can be an effective introduction to biological sciences, geography, mathematics and economics, and figure 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 the destruction of the tropical forests and their interaction with global climate, links back to the local environment and woodland as part of the local heritage.

The Forest Education Initiative seeks to increase young people's understanding of trees, the woodland environment, the timber trade and forest industries. It is supported by a wide range of interest groups, from forestry and wood processing industries, with the object of bringing environmental education to schools and colleges throughout Wales. Woodlands have potential to be used as an integral part of lifelong learning programmes, especially those linked to local heritage, sustainability and the environment.

- *We will develop the Forest Education Initiative to promote the use of woodlands as an educational resource.*
- *We will use the Assembly's woodlands to develop links with schools, with opportunities for every school in Wales.*
- *We will promote the use of woodlands as an opportunity for further education and lifelong learning*
- *We will encourage Wales' universities to develop a centre of excellence in forest science and study the benefits of woodlands for communities, the economy and the environment.*

2.2.3 To provide opportunities for communities to have their say in the management of woods close to where they live

This woodland strategy has been an opportunity for the people of Wales to have a say in the National

Assembly's future policies for forestry. Both individuals and 'communities of interest' such as land managers, environmentalists and wood-using industries have welcomed and participated in this process. It is important for all of these people to continue their involvement and for there to be opportunities for them to help implement and review this strategy. This woodland strategy is the beginning of a process, not the final product.

- *A Woodland Forum will be established, with a membership drawn from a wide range of organisations across Wales, to guide implementation, monitor progress, and to oversee the development of targets and indicators needed to keep the strategy under review.*
- *Mechanisms will be created to involve local people and build consensus among communities.*
- *The understanding of woodland issues in Wales will be promoted through partnerships with professional bodies, private owners and managers, voluntary groups and the education sector.*

2.3 A New Emphasis on Woodland Management

A key priority of the Strategy will be to manage our woodlands, in a way that delivers a wide range of outputs. In Wales, we have a wide spectrum of temperate woodland habitats, from native woodlands to conifer plantations. Over recent decades, many coniferous forests have been diversified to increase the variety of species and ages present, and to increase the areas of open ground and native trees. This process will continue and improvements in biodiversity will appear, creating mixed woodlands of more natural appearance. The greatest priority will be devoted to managing our existing woodlands, but there are also important opportunities to provide benefits from extending our woodland cover. New trees and woodlands can play a role in urban and rural regeneration and help to deliver conservation and landscape benefits while also creating a reserve of timber for the future. The key objectives for woodland management are:

- **To promote best practice in woodland management;**
- **To move to a greater use of continuous-cover systems; and**
- **To find appropriate sites for new trees and woodland.**

2.3.1 To promote best practice in woodland management

The key to this objective is attaining a flexible woodland resource, better able to meet the challenges and opportunities of this new century. Too often in the past, woods have been managed for only one purpose or have not been managed at all, left unthinned and in decline. There are many different woodland types, providing a range of benefits that suit their location and ownership. Woodlands are usually robust habitats, but incremental changes in climate and increases in populations of some insects and mammals, raise concerns for the future management of some woodland habitats and species.

- *We will develop ways of encouraging the use of best practice in managing woodland, and of*

extending long-term planning.

- *We will encourage the thinning of woodland to increase the future flexibility of management, to create greater diversity within woodlands and to produce more valuable timber products.*
- *We will ensure that fair and equitable mechanisms are established for recognising the social and environmental benefits from woodlands.*
- *We will continue to monitor the condition of woodland, providing managers with information about the consequences of management operations.*

2.3.2 To move to a greater use of continuous-cover systems

There is a strong case for moving away from single-aged plantations and the use of clear-felling systems. Clear-felling, followed by replanting, is a silvicultural system used on much of the National Assembly's estate, but the potential benefits of using alternative systems, which do not involve the clear felling of sizeable areas, and which rely more on natural regeneration, will be fully investigated. Continuous-cover (where low-impact silviculture protects the soil and retains a woodland appearance) is not possible in all circumstances, but our favourable site conditions allow this type of management to be used in most sheltered woodlands. The National Assembly owned woodlands are predominantly plantations of conifers, on sites which were previously open habitats. These woodlands, though often more diverse than the open upland they replaced, are generally less diverse than those in private ownerships and will benefit most from conversion to a more stable woodland environment.

- *We will aim to convert at least half of the National Assembly woodlands to continuous cover over the next 20 years, where practical, and encourage similar conversion in private sector woodlands.*
- *We will continue to gather information about continuous cover systems and how best to manage these systems for the range of benefits that society demands.*

By 2002, we will establish three large-scale trial areas in Wales, to pioneer techniques for transformation to continuous cover systems and to collect information to guide future transformation in all woodland types.
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2.3.3 To find appropriate sites for new trees and woodland

Trees and woodlands occupy about 14% of Wales' land area, compared with the European Union average of 32%. They provide a range of benefits to society, which can be increased through appropriate expansion. New woodlands could link and protect the irreplaceable remnants of our ancient, semi-natural woodlands, provide shelter on farms and help diversify agricultural businesses, contributing to a

sustainable supply of timber for industries large and small. New woodlands also make a valuable contribution to the restoration of the landscapes left by mineral extraction or other past industrial activities, re-establishing the links with surrounding natural habitats. New woodlands and trees can also bring benefits in urban areas and on the urban fringe, helping maintain air quality and creating a landscape setting for homes, commerce and industry.

- *We will encourage landowners and managers to look for opportunities for appropriate woodland expansion, seeking to maximise the value to society of new woodlands.*
- *We will work with community groups and landowners, encouraging the use of trees and woodlands to improve air quality and urban landscapes.*

2.4 Wales as a location for world-class forest industries

Forestry, like other primary industries such as agriculture, is facing very difficult trading conditions with low prices for wood on world markets. However, wood-processing industries continue to invest in Wales, and we can help increase the value of Welsh forests as a source of wood for processing, on both a large and small scale. Some 4,200 jobs, generating £61 million of disposable income, depend on the home-grown timber industry (Welsh Forestry Multiplier Study 1999). Many of these jobs are linked to rural areas and are significant contributors to local economies.

The same study estimated that the gross output of the Welsh forestry industry is £400 million per year. These outputs come from the full range of industries, from large-scale international companies producing wood pulp, paper and panel board, to small, family businesses making fencing and garden furniture. By encouraging entrepreneurship, business collaboration and by promoting good design across all product ranges we will help create and sustain skilled woodworking jobs, and enhance the reputation of Wales for producing high-quality products using hardwood and softwood from sustainable woodlands. Jobs are also being created as a result of the increased use of our woodlands for tourism and recreation.

Total timber production in Wales is predicted to increase substantially by the end of the next decade, as forests reach maturity. Much of this increase will come from coniferous woodlands planted by the private sector during the 1960's, 70's and 80's. Maximising the value to the economy from these woodlands will largely depend on the efforts of wood-processors and on innovative techniques for processing this wood. In future, we must concentrate more on improving the quality of the timber grown, through attention to species choice, thinning and other management operations. Only by retaining a flexible resource will Welsh growers and processors compete in the future. The key objectives are:

- **To provide Welsh forest industries with effective business support;**
- **To develop the wood supply chain, product development and marketing;**
- **To provide support for farm woodlands and the wider rural economy; and**

- **To foster the development of renewable energy based on wood.**

2.4.1 To provide Welsh forest industries with effective business support

The key to achieving this objective is the delivery of the National Economic Development Strategy through the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) and other partners. Maximising the impact of EU Structural funding under Objectives 1, 2 & 3 will be important in the short-term. All forest industries, from forest nurseries, through woodland management, to harvesting, haulage and processing, at all scales, from sole traders to international companies, have a part to play in contributing to the economic wealth of the country. Each of these businesses requires different levels of support to enable them to plan their operations and develop in a sustainable way.

- *We will seek to increase the competitiveness of our forest industries, working in partnership with industry to develop and implement action plans across the industry sector.*
- *We will develop and promote the availability of systems for business support and training.*

2.4.2 To develop the wood-supply chain, product development and marketing

There are many benefits to the Welsh economy through direct employment and the multiplier effects from woodland work. 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. Those businesses which form the first link in this chain, are under severe financial pressure due to the fall in timber prices during the late 1990's. The other 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 continue to support industry by bringing the forecasted timber volumes to the market from National Assembly woodlands, to help provide confidence for industrial development.*
- *We will use marketing techniques for timber from the Assembly's woodlands, which give long-term assurance to customers and suppliers, so that they can invest in safe and efficient modern technology and systems.*
- *We will work with industry representatives to support and develop businesses in the wood-supply chain, helping provide information on the quantity and quality of wood available, and encouraging the processing of Welsh-grown timber in Wales.*
- *We will help promote the use of wood and encourage businesses to develop local added value, and to market their products more effectively, using the clean green image of Welsh wood to present an image of sustainability.*

The development of a forest industries cluster group can harness energies throughout the sector to support and develop businesses. We will work with the Welsh Timber Forum and with forestry businesses to develop such a process, and prepare an action plan for a cluster in Wales and the Welsh Marches. Our aim is to publish an action plan by 2002

2.4.3 To provide support for farm woodlands and the wider rural economy.

About a quarter of the woodland area of Wales is found on farms. These woodlands are most often native woodlands of small size, have poor access and poor timber quality, but they have high environmental values. The careful management of these woodlands as a farm resource could contribute to farm incomes and the diversification of farm enterprises as well as providing additional benefits to the landscape and environment. Farm woodlands, together with small woodlands in other ownerships, will have a key role in rural development, which must be integrated with all the farming and rural economic and social programmes across the Assembly. Supporting sustainable businesses in rural areas is an important objective for this strategy.

- *We will work closely with the farming sector, looking to the Woodland Forum to establish a farm woodland subject group, building on the expertise developed in Wales in the late 20th century.*
- *We will encourage farmers to diversify their agricultural businesses through Farming Connect, providing information on woodland management, contracting, and development of small scale wood processing.*
- *We will help farmers make best use of farm woodland resources for livestock shelter and for timber products for on-farm use, better integrating the woodlands into the farming businesses and into the landscape*
- *We will help Coed Cymru to continue delivering support to farmers, championing best practice in broadleaf woodland management and using case studies of real farms as examples for others.*

2.4.4 To foster the development of renewable-energy based on wood.

The development of a vibrant renewable-energy sector in Wales is a key target for the National Assembly, as part of our responsibility to respond to global climate change. Wood has a number of advantages as a fuel, particularly where such wood fuel is an additional product from the management of woodland. We believe the development of wood-fuel technologies can make an important contribution to the production of renewable energy in Wales. The development of facilities to burn wood at appropriate locations where there are constant demands for heat, such as community facilities, hospitals, or industry, can provide both power and background heating. Such combined heat and power plants will contribute to our target of maximising energy efficiency in Wales.

- *We will integrate energy from wood fuel into the Assembly's renewable-energy strategy, ensuring that it is recognised as a key fuel.*
- *We will work with WDA and other partners to develop information and advice for Local Planning Authorities on wood-based renewable energy.*

2.5 A diverse and healthy environment

Well-managed woodlands can deliver diverse outputs as well as being exemplars of sustainability. In order to achieve true sustainability, the physical and biological resources within forests, such as the water, soil, flora and fauna, must be maintained or improved. Woodlands also provide habitats for people to enjoy and they can enhance the landscape, increasing tourism potential in rural areas. We all depend on the environment, and the health of the environment is crucial for the development of rural and urban communities. Woodland habitats cannot be considered in isolation, they are intimately connected with other land uses and the management of woodlands can have significant effects on neighbouring land and vice versa. The key objectives for delivering a diverse and healthy environment are :

- **To conserve and enhance the biodiversity of our woodlands;**
- **To conserve and enhance the landscapes of Wales; and**
- **To better integrate woodlands with other countryside management.**

2.5.1 To conserve and enhance the biodiversity of our woodlands

Wales' woodlands contain some of the most diverse plant and animal communities of any habitat. Our ancient, semi-natural woodlands are irreplaceable assets and our upland oakwoods are internationally important. More recently planted woodlands with remnant semi-natural vegetation also have high existing or potential biodiversity values. The success of this strategy will be shown if we can improve the quality of these woodlands, linking and expanding their habitat networks without compromising other valued habitats or historic features. The prospect of global climate change demands that we consider how robust our woodland habitats are, so that we concentrate our conservation efforts on habitats that will be sustainable in the long term.

- *We will increase the quality of native woodlands for wildlife and implement the Biodiversity Action Plan targets for their restoration and extension, creating links between fragmented woodlands.*
- *We will increase the biodiversity of coniferous woodlands through the use of continuous cover-systems, developing multi-aged structures through natural regeneration and the incorporation of native species.*
- *We will increase the area of native woodlands, targeting extension and connection of existing woods and incorporating the concept of increasing the core area of native woodland habitats.*

- *We will encourage owners to incorporate different habitats, such as heath and bog, within woodlands, to maximise the connections between similar habitat types.*
- *We will increase the area of woodland achieving independent environmental certification to internationally recognised standards.*

2.5.2 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. Woods also contribute to our quality of life by enhancing the surroundings of our towns cities and commercial areas. Trees and woodlands can help restore landscapes following mineral extraction and past industrial activity. The rich archaeological inheritance in woodlands, historic landscapes, parks and gardens is cherished for its contribution to our society. Landscape is, however, dynamic and constantly changing. We must ensure that our woodlands enhance the landscape by recognising their history and by using modern design principles, when planning the future management and replacement of plantations following felling.

- *We will use woodlands to restore the landscapes of areas affected by past mineral extraction and other industrial activities.*
- *We will develop action plans to prioritise work in historic parks and landscapes and to extend the information on important historic features within woodlands.*
- *We will continue the restructuring of existing plantations, encouraging owners to look for opportunities to restore natural vegetation removing woodland where appropriate.*

2.5.3 To better integrate woodlands with other countryside management

Woodland management can have a significant effect on neighbouring habitats. These effects can be positive, where, for example, woodlands intercept and retain pollutants, or negative, where woodlands are the refuge for animals which act as pests on neighbouring land. By understanding these interactions and working with others, we will try to maximise the benefits and minimise conflict. Woodlands can have important effects on the water environment. Good design and management of woodlands can contribute to reversing the acidification of streams, enhancing stream biodiversity and influencing the flow of water, where woodlands form a significant area within a catchment.

- *We will use catchment management planning to develop the role that woodlands can play in the management of water and the reduction of flood risks.*
- *We will work to prevent further loss of ancient and semi-natural woodland, building on the National Inventory of Trees and Woods to improve our knowledge of the status of native*

woodlands in Wales and to assist in their protection.

- *We will work to develop appropriate links between woodlands and wider countryside management through Tir Gofal and other environmental schemes.*
- *We will continue to support scientific research into the interactions between woodlands and other land uses in the wider countryside, to develop our policies for the environment.*

2.6 Tourism, recreation and health

Trees and woodlands are prominent in the landscape, especially in some of the most beautiful parts of Wales, playing a vital role in tourism. Woodlands also provide a landscape structure and a setting for many tourist enterprises. They are also places to visit in their own right. Over 11 million visits are made to Welsh woodlands each year and, with the demand for outdoor recreation increasing, this number is rising.

The use of woodlands for exercise and enjoyment may also have beneficial effects on the health of the nation. Woodlands make a positive contribution to emotional and physical health, through public access and recreation. The key objectives for promoting tourism and health are:

- **To use woodlands to help create a high-quality visitor experience; and**
- **To promote health through access to woodlands for all communities.**

2.6.1 To use woodlands to help create a high-quality visitor experience

Trees and woodlands play an important role in creating an attractive image of Wales. The use of trees as a setting for tourist facilities enhances the quality of the visitors' experience. There is also scope for the development of more tourist accommodation in appropriate woodlands, and the greater use of woodland for siting recreational facilities.

- *Using existing partnerships, we will promote the use of woodlands to develop a high-quality visitor experience*
- *We will support the development of wood-using crafts as part of the visitor experience, as well as supplying products to the tourism industry.*
- *We will encourage the use of woodland as part of the setting for tourist developments.*
- *We will promote the development of specialist recreation in woodlands, including wildlife observation in appropriately zoned areas, and artistic pursuits, as well as more noisy and physical sports.*

- *We will work with the Wales Tourist Board and local authorities to identify suitable sites in Wales to develop forest-based holiday accommodation.*

PICTURE

The development of the mountain bike trails in the National Assembly woodlands at Coed y Brenin has created an internationally recognised outdoor recreation facility, and brings an estimated £5 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 an effective way of regaining health after illness.

Access to woodlands for exercise and enjoyment may also have beneficial effects on the health of the nation. Promoting access to woodlands as part of the wider access to the countryside is also important if the full benefits are to be realised, and the National Assembly woodlands will continue to play a part in satisfying the demand for public recreational facilities. Other woodland owners will also be encouraged to provide voluntary public access in a co-ordinated way. The Assembly is committed to extending public access and will be closely monitoring the effectiveness of the provisions in the recently enacted Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000.

- *We will extend access to woodland, particularly for disadvantaged communities, using good design and community involvement, to help overcome some peoples' perceptions of risk when using woodlands on the urban fringes.*
- *We will support research to help seek better understanding of the health benefits of trees and woodlands*
- *We will look for opportunities to use trees and woodlands in urban settings to maximise emotional and physical well being.*
- *We will continue to encourage visitors to all the National Assembly's woodlands, actively promoting the opportunities available.*

PART 3 : IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

3.1 Actions and milestones

This part looks forward to the implementation of the strategy. Each of the strategic objectives in part 2 is an important precursor, setting the direction for the programmes for action. Each programme will require a separate range of outputs, which require indicator targets, which must be clearly described and measurable. One of the first tasks for the *Woodland Forum* will be to convene a group to develop performance indicators, against which partners can regularly report. The National Assembly will ensure that all parts of the strategy are regularly reviewed and updated.

The table below sets out preliminary draft indicators and lists possible key partners who will be responsible to the *Woodland Forum* for collection and collation of the statistics for the whole or part of the programme for action.

Programme for Action	Possible lead partners	Preliminary draft Indicator
Woodlands for People	FC, LA's, NGO's	Number of communities involved in woodland management
More and better woodlands	FC, Industry, NGO's	Total area of woodland. Area of woodland in approved management scheme. Area of woodland with independent Certification.
Wales as a location for World-class forest industries	WDA, NAWAD, FC, Industry	Volume of timber harvested and processed. Number of people employed. Business health.
A healthy and diverse environment	CCW, NGO's, FC, EA, Cadw	Area of native woodland in Satisfactory condition. Achievement of Biodiversity Action Plan targets.
Tourism, recreation and health	WTB, CCW, LA's, Cadw	Number of visits to woodland. Number of tourist businesses Using woodland in advertising.

Developing indicators that are easily measurable, give a good record of progress against an objective, and can be agreed by the whole forum will be a difficult task. In some areas, there are statistics already collected to agreed protocols which can be used (such as business health scores). In other areas, entirely new measures will need to be considered, and surrogate measures may need to be adopted which integrate the progress across a series of actions. Typically, the success of some bird populations is used as an integrated measure of environmental health in some habitats.

This task needs to be carefully considered so that the same statistics can be used for long-term monitoring. Forestry, though a long-term land use, has suffered through lack of continuity of measurement protocols. Often in the past, survey data from one period cannot be compared with another because what is measured, or the way of measuring it has changed significantly.

Each main programme for action will have a single headline strategic indicator. These headline indicators may be a composite of several sub indicators for individual actions, or be a surrogate indicator of the condition of the whole set of actions.

The extent, composition and condition of the woodland, community or product are likely to be key measurements. These indicators must, as far as possible, be compatible with the indicators chosen to measure the Wales Sustainable Development Scheme, and for measurement against the UK Forestry Standard. Where possible, indicators should be measurable characteristics, which are already collected for some other purpose.

Each partner organisation in the *Woodland Forum* will be expected to set out their own commitments in an action plan against one or more of the programmes for action. The *Woodland Forum* will also monitor the range of actions proposed and report to the National Assembly on progress towards milestone markers for the key objectives, ensuring that there is integrated delivery across all of the programmes.

3.2 Evaluation and Review

While the vision set out in this strategy is expected to endure well into the future, the programmes of action will change as work is completed, and as external influences change the priorities. A feedback process has been built into the strategy from the outset so that the strategy remains relevant, but should not need constant change. Efforts should be concentrated on the delivery of programmes rather than on needlessly repeating the process of strategy development, but there will be periodic public review to respond to the Welsh people's concerns and expectations.

PART 4 : Explanation and Evidence

This part sets out the background to the development of the strategy, why it is considered necessary and how people have been consulted on its contents

Understanding the context : the history of woodlands in Wales.

The Prehistory of Welsh Woodlands

Changes in climate and man's exploitation of natural resources, have led to dramatic fluctuations in the

extent and nature of woodlands in Wales. At the height of the last glaciation, some 18,000 years ago, nearly all of Wales was under a thick sheet of ice, the sea-level was about 100m lower than today and the edge of the land was far out into the modern sea. About 14,000 years ago, the climate began to improve, the ice sheet began to melt and sea-level rose. The land was open and barren, like arctic tundra. Birch trees and juniper bushes were the first woodland species to colonise these bleak grasslands. By 9,000 years ago, conditions were becoming milder. Hazel trees were taking over from the juniper bushes, and oak and elm woodlands developed in south Wales, mixed birch, pine and oak woods in the upland areas. As the weather improved, ash and lime trees colonised Wales from the east and alder began to grow around wetlands. The tree-line moved steadily up the mountain slopes. By 6,000 years ago, the climate was better than it is today. The landscape was largely blanketed with mature, mixed broad-leafed woodlands, the 'Wildwood', with some pine still growing on the hilltops. River valleys, the coastal fringe, heaths and mountain areas provided the main areas of open land, where the Mesolithic people of Wales hunted for and gathered their food.

From this time on, man's influence on the woodlands was to become as important as changes in the climate. Neolithic people, the first farmers, came to Wales about 5,500 years ago, clearing fields from woods on lighter soils. The arrival of bronze axes about 4,000 years ago and the increase in population led to faster woodland clearance and significant soil erosion. Settlement expanded into upland areas. Trees were felled and short-term cultivation led to the breakdown of the soil, and initiated the growth of peat, now seen as typical of these areas. Some tree species such as lime, elm and pine went into serious decline.

From about 3,000 years ago, there was a deterioration in climate, lower temperatures and higher rainfall. At the beginning of the Iron Age, settlement had been abandoned in much of upland Wales, and agriculture was intensified at lower altitudes, with increased woodland clearance and the cultivation of heavier clay soils. By the 4th century AD, the population of Roman Wales was as high as it would be just before the Black Death in the 14th century, and again, at the end of the Tudor period. The pattern of cultivated, pastoral and forested land may have been broadly similar to what can be seen today. Woodland and woodland products had become a valuable resource requiring careful management not further exploitation.

Traditional Woodland Management

Despite variations in climate, population and agricultural practice, the extent of woodland cover in Wales for several hundred years up to the beginning of the 19th century would have been fairly constant. Distinctive practices emerged so that woodland was managed as carefully as any other agricultural resource. *Coppicing* involved felling broad-leafed trees down to their boles, and then harvesting the regenerating shoots in rotation. Species and ages of wood were selected for specific purposes, basketry, hurdling, charcoal, firewood, tool handles, furniture etc. In coppice woods, some trees, known as standards, were left to grow to maturity, their side shoots pruned to form tall straight trunks. These standard trees were very precious and were used in houses, ships, bridges and major buildings. The king or great lords would often give them as presents to their most favoured subjects. *Pollarding* or *lopping*

was also common, where trees were cut above head height, still seen with some willow trees today, so that animals could graze the pasture beneath and so two crops were taken from one piece of land.

In 930, the laws of Hywel Dda mentioned the value of trees and Gruffudd ap Cynan (d.1137), prince of Gwynedd, was praised for planting woods. Many great lords and monastic houses created parks in the Middle Ages, protected with walls or wooden fences and ditches. These parks could be up to 2,000 acres (800ha) in size, and were as much to protect the trees, as to keep in the game. Many of these parks were to become the basis for the landscaped parks of the 18th century. Medieval forests were even larger areas, for example the Great Forest of Brecon of *Fforest Fawr* covered 40,000 acres (16,000ha). These were not all covered with woodlands, but were vast royal hunting preserves where special forest laws applied.

The pressure on woodlands increased from the end of the Middle Ages to supply more timber for building and charcoal for new industries, such as iron making, and lead and copper smelting. Yet despite this increasing demand, traditional woodland practices kept the supply going, except for the provision of standard trees. From the 17th century, with the growing interest in gardening and agricultural improvement, new species such as the two chestnuts, sycamore and a range of conifers were introduced, and new forms of silviculture encouraged. For example, by the end of the 18th century, Thomas Johnes had planted millions of trees on his Hafod demesne in mid-Wales, including extensive stands of European larch. During the 19th century, plant collectors brought back new coniferous species, such as Douglas Fir and Californian Redwoods, which are now such a feature of the landscape of the Marches. However the dramatic increase in demand from the coal, iron and other industries in Wales at the end of the 19th century far exceeded local supply, and the south Wales ports became major importers of timber. It was this pressure which saw the breakdown of traditional woodland management that had lasted for nearly 2,000 years.

It was the 20th century which was to produce the most dramatic changes in the distribution and composition of woodlands in Wales. During the First and Second World Wars, the nations demand for timber, led to the clear felling of many stands for the first time, to supply enough timber to replace that normally imported from abroad. By 1919, woodland covered about 5% of Wales, perhaps a third or a quarter of what it had been in the Middle Ages. This crisis led to the formation of the Forestry Commission in 1919, whose primary objective was to build up a strategic reserve of timber for the nation. Following these wars, the break up of many large estates, and the loss of many skilled foresters, many woodlands were abandoned as managed and productive resources.

The Modern Era

As with other parts of the rural economy forestry in the second half of the 20th century has been the subject of great change. It is the legacy of this change which provide Wales' woodland inheritance and set the immediate scene for the development of this strategy.

The last fifty years were most notable for the growth of commercial coniferous woodland. The greatest

expansion in woodland area took place in upland Wales and the Valleys during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This expansion coincided with technological advances which made possible the draining of wetlands and the successful establishment of trees on nutrient-poor upland heath. The 1970s saw an increased emphasis on maximising financial returns, by planting highly-productive conifers, especially Sitka spruce.

Whereas much of the earlier planting had been carried out by the Forestry Commission, the 70's and 80's also saw a major expansion in upland planting by private landowners responding to tax and grant incentives from government. This continued expansion proved controversial for a variety of environmental and socio-economic reasons. Local communities often felt unable to influence this rapid land-use change which affected both the local environment and the rural economy. These concerns led to a number of disputes over forestry and future land-use patterns in Wales.

The large-scale expansion of woodland area was largely halted in recent years due to changes in policy which saw the Forestry Commission withdraw from major new planting programmes, and by changes to the incentives offered to private owners introduced from 1988.

However the policy of successive governments to increase the national forestry estate had been achieved, with the area of Wales under trees having risen to about 13% of the land area. Of this, one third is planted with broadleaved species and two thirds with coniferous species.

Since substantial areas of coniferous forest will be harvested during the next 30 years, there will be the opportunity to reshape these woodlands to deliver wider benefits to society. The Forestry Commission's estate can play a leading role in this process since its estate is made up of over 80% coniferous species, compared to only half in private and other non-FC woodlands.

In recent decades, the objectives of woodland management have changed considerably, with increasing emphasis on multiple purpose woodlands managed for recreation, landscape and wildlife as well as for timber production. The realisation that trees play a vital role in absorbing carbon dioxide and so helping ameliorate climate change, has contributed to the importance now attached to promoting sustainable forest management globally. The overall impact of the Welsh economy on international sustainability, including the demand for timber products, needs to be considered alongside the management of woodlands in Wales. Contributing to true sustainability underlies the development of this strategy.

During the last century, there were huge changes in the use to which we put timber and wood products, and in the methods for harvesting and processing such timber. Heavy industry in Wales has declined and the expected pitwood markets for much of the smaller conifer timber have disappeared. As with farming and other rural industries, there is increasing emphasis on technical innovation to maintain international competitiveness through better productivity and employment in all these industries has declined as technology has advanced and machine productivity increased.

The world timber shortages predicted with such confidence in the 70's and 80's have failed to

materialise and the price paid for timber on the world market has declined in real terms. During the last four years, this decline in price has been exacerbated by the economic downturn in south-east Asia and the ready availability of highly competitive imports particularly from the Nordic countries and the Baltic States aided by a favourable exchange rate. Despite this, UK producers have successfully built market share. The industry 'wood-chain' is dominated by small and medium sized firms, many of which are sole traders or family based partnerships.

The Welsh timber-processing sector has seen major structural change and major new investment. Many smaller sawmills have been unable to compete and have closed, but a number of specialised mills, well adapted to producing value-added products or serving local markets, are competing effectively. The UK softwood sawmilling sector, in line with global trends, is concentrating into fewer but larger, modern units and panel-board and pulp mills now operate on a global scale.

Since 1985 over £150 million has been invested in high technology wood-processing industries. These investments depend on the availability of a competitive supply of timber and are close to both Welsh and English markets. Wales' conifer harvest continues to grow and by 2010 will have doubled in just over 20 years so providing scope for further expansion. The raw material supply for pulp and panel-board mills is supplemented by use of salvaged paper and wood, although this serves to depress demand for small roundwood.

There are many craft and specialist firms utilising the hardwood resource. However the closure of the mines ended a small but important hardwood based industry and the only bulk market for hardwoods is now the St Regis papermill at Sudbrook near Chepstow. A thriving firewood market exists in some parts of Wales but finding high-value uses for the hardwood resource remains a key challenge. Projects such as Coed Cymru have helped many small firms set up to process added-value products from small hardwood logs. These processors will need support and encouragement to develop into sustainable businesses.

The development of a significant energy market has the potential to boost substantially the market for small logs from thinnings, forest residues and co-products from existing wood processing businesses.

Wales boasts a major forest resource with a growing annual harvest of timber. Unlike many other natural resources our forests, providing they are wisely managed, will carry on producing sustainable timber supplies for centuries to come.

At the end of the last century, there had developed a growing concern for Wales' threatened species of plants and animals, many of which depend on woodland habitats. Native woodlands support more species than any other single habitat in Wales. The area covered by ancient, and semi-natural woodlands is now less than 2% of Wales, and many of the trees in our historic parks and landscapes are now over mature. The objective must be to protect and enhance these precious habitats and find ways of increasing the biodiversity of all of Wales' woodland.

Preparing the Strategy

In March 1999, the Forestry Minister for Wales asked the Forestry Commission to set up and chair an interdepartmental group to consider the development of a woodland strategy for Wales. The Working Group, comprising representatives from the Forestry Commission, the Welsh Office Agriculture Department and Environment Division, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency, Environment Agency Wales, the Welsh Development Agency and Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, with representatives of the Welsh National Parks and the Welsh Local Government Association, considered submissions and took views from academics and major industry and environmental stakeholders. This group then issued a public consultation document '*Woodland for Wales*' in November 1999, which sought views on the future direction for woodlands in Wales. Alongside this document, the Working Group organised five workshops across Wales to inform the consultation process and also published the document and sought responses on the Forestry Commission website.

The main findings of this consultation were: -

- 78% of respondents recognised the need for a new woodland strategy for Wales, with strong support for a strategy that is clear in its aims, inclusive in its approach and adequately supported by Government in its implementation. There was a strong call for the strategy to link with other rural land-use policy areas, particularly agriculture, to ensure that it forms part of an holistic approach to rural areas, and the work of other agencies, including the WDA, in promoting rural economic development. There was a consistent view across all sectors that the strategy should have a long-term vision – 50 years or more, providing flexibility within a firm framework.
- There was general support for the continuation of consultation in the development of the strategy. There was a wide ranging view that the National Assembly for Wales should have an active involvement with future strategy development, particularly in developing inter-departmental/ cross agency approaches relevant to strategy implementation. There was potential for developing a national Woodland Forum and possibly regional forums with a wide and inclusive membership to drive forward national and more local strategies.

A theme that ran through many of the responses was the vision of an holistic and sustainable Welsh woodland strategy, that achieves better integration of rural land uses, places equal weight on economic, environmental and social issues and delivers sustainable multi-purpose benefits. There was a general desire to place emphasis on quality rather than quantity of all 'products' provided by woodland and a recognition that new methods needed to be developed to value the very considerable non-market benefits that woodlands provide.

The Key Building Blocks identified for a Future Strategy:

Amount and type of woodland cover: The emphasis was on improving the management of the existing

woodland resource, rather than expansion. There was a call for an improved balance between conifer and broadleaves, both within individual blocks and across the resource as a whole.

Location of woodland cover: Amongst many respondents there was a desire to see the removal and conversion of uneconomic plantations in the uplands into a more diverse range of woodlands and other habitats. The primary emphasis in the lowlands was on the linking together of the fragmented broadleaf resource and the creation of new woodland in and around urban areas.

Silvicultural practices for the future: This was a major area of concern amongst respondents and at the workshops. Throughout the responses there was a clear and strong desire to move towards more natural silvicultural practices, with a strong emphasis placed on the use of continuous cover forestry.

Support for the existing timber industry: It was noted that there had been substantial investment in the high volume softwood timber processing industry. This sector needs reassurance that its future timber supply is secure, particularly given current international timber prices.

Adding value locally: There was widespread support for the concept of adding value locally, to both softwoods and hardwoods, in bulk and niche markets. This would increase local employment, retain benefits within the local community, reduce transport needs, and meet sustainability objectives.

Marketing and accreditation: Processors stressed that product development is best driven by business itself with the support of external commercial and academic expertise. There was a widespread call for an awareness raising campaign aimed at promoting Welsh woodland products.

Woodland as a renewable energy source: It was recognised by many that timber processing in conjunction with the development of combined heat and power plants in a local area could afford real economic, social and environmental benefits

Woodlands and agriculture: There was widespread support for the better integration of agriculture and forestry. However, the apparent disparity between agricultural subsidy and forestry grants received extensive comment.

Meeting biodiversity objectives: Amongst those representing the nature conservation sector there was a strong desire for the UK Biodiversity Action Plan to form a cornerstone of the strategy. There was also a strong call for ancient semi-natural woodlands to receive specific recognition in the woodland strategy, reflecting their high nature conservation value

Landscape character and local identity: There was a widespread desire to see the character of the Welsh landscape reflected in the woodland strategy, with woodlands reinforcing local distinctiveness.

Community woodlands and public participation: There was strong support for the creation of community woodlands, especially on derelict and damaged land. There was also considerable support

across the different sectors for wider community participation in the management of private and public woods.

Access: There was a call for greater public access to woodlands but general agreement that, in the case of private woods, this should be on a voluntary basis.

Scenarios: In the consultation document four scenarios were put forward to stimulate debate, namely, (1) a scenario based on *market forces*; (2) *an integrated rural economy*; (3) *the environment*; and (4) a projection of *the status quo*. Of these, where respondents favoured a single scenario, the integrated rural economy scenario was the most popular, but the strongest preference was for a combination of two or more scenarios.

Woodland Grants: There was a call for a long-term view with flexibility, so that grant could be directed at weak areas and at different areas over time. There was also strong support for the targeting of woodland grants as a means of achieving value for money. Targeting should be based on integrated multi-agency partnerships, which seek close linkages between woodlands and other land uses.

Research and Training : The need for further research was a reoccurring theme. Key areas for further research include: silvicultural practices; climate change and its implications for woodland management; valuing the non-economic benefits of woodland; and researching new products and markets

Management of the Public Forest Estate: There was widespread agreement that the public estate should be managed as an exemplar of best practice in delivering sustainable multi-purpose benefits – Flagship Forestry. There was very strong resistance to any further sale of the forest estate on the basis that the disposal was unlikely to fund as wide a range of public benefits as currently provided. However, some respondents wanted to see the careful rationalisation of the forest estate, with disposal of those woodlands that could be as easily managed by the private sector and the money so raised used for woodland creation.

The process following consultation.

The results of consultation were independently analysed and reported back to the Working Group which was expanded by the inclusion of representatives of the forest industries and the voluntary environmental sector. The report of consultation was distributed to all who had responded to consultation and published on the Forestry Commission Web site.

A report on the consultation process was also presented to the National Assembly's Agriculture & Rural Development Committee, who endorsed the production of this strategy. The extended Working Group developed a draft outline strategy which was discussed with stakeholders at a *Stakeholder Workshop* in November 2000. An amended outline strategy was again discussed at the Agriculture & Rural Development Committee in December 2000. The final draft strategy was considered by the Committee in March 2001.