

Andrew Slade

Director General, Economy, Treasury and
Constitution Group, Welsh Government

8 August 2022

Dear Andrew,

Welsh Government purchase of Gilestone Farm

Thank you for providing evidence to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee on 14 July. We understand that Audit Wales staff are taking forward some further enquiries with Welsh Government officials over the summer to arrive at a fuller understanding of the circumstances leading up to the purchase of Gilestone Farm, including reviewing relevant supporting documentation. We expect that the Auditor General will draw to the attention of the Committee any further material details or issues of concern.

In the meantime, there are some specific matters arising from the evidence the Committee received and issues that have been brought to our attention by third parties that we would welcome further clarification on:

- Members asked about previous financial support for the Green Man festival and related companies. Some rounded estimates were provided but the Committee would welcome confirmation of a full breakdown of Welsh Government support over the period discussed during the evidence session, including funding that might have been provided by the Arts Council.
- Members also asked about the UK Government's support for festivals, citing Glastonbury and Notting Hill festivals in particular. You offered to look into this and provide further information if possible. We would ask that your response differentiates any support as part of wider COVID-related measures from more general development support.



- The Welsh Government has cited evidence of economic benefits associated with the Green Man festival. Has the Welsh Government undertaken any due diligence around figures relating to economic benefits from the existing festival and/or will it be doing so as part of its appraisal of the full business plan for Gilestone Farm.
- On sporting rights, you indicated in your evidence that 'Rights of this sort apply on many properties, especially in rural areas and over large areas of land, and we are in discussions with the individual, and that was part of the process of purchasing the farm'. The Committee has seen a copy of a letter to the First Minister dated 8 July 2022, the apparent purpose of which was to ensure the Welsh Government was aware of the sporting rights. It could be interpreted from your evidence that there were discussions with the owner of the rights as part of the purchase process, but the letter to the First Minister would suggest otherwise. We would therefore ask you to clarify whether you were referring simply to the sporting rights issue having been identified during the purchase process, but without any actual discussions having taken place at that point with the owner of the rights.
- Your evidence paper suggests that it was in February 2022 that Green Man first brought Gilestone Farm to the Welsh Government's attention. However, in response to a previous Written Question (WQ85337) about meetings in relation to Gilestone Farm, the Welsh Government referenced a meeting between officials and members of the Green Man Festival/Plant Pot Ltd on 22 October 2021. We would welcome clarification of the scope of that meeting and whether Gilestone Farm was, in fact, already under discussion at that point. We would also like to confirm the Welsh Government's understanding of how those associated with Green Man became aware that Gilestone Farm would potentially become available before notifying the Welsh Government of this in February 2022.
- Also during the evidence session, members questioned whether the Welsh Government had been aware of the apparent marketing of Gilestone Farm in February 2020 (the marketing materials the Committee has received were dated as last updated in February 2020). Your responses indicated the Welsh Government's belief that the property had not been on the open market at that time. We would welcome any further confirmation of this from your dialogue with the previous owner.
- We also raised concerns regarding the suitability of leasing Gilestone Farm as a site to a commercial festival company and potential environmental impact. For example, the Gilestone Farm site is known to be home to protected wildlife such as bats and curlews, is adjacent to a Special Area of Conservation and is understood to lack suitable access. During our evidence session we referred to concerns about the level of engagement and consultation by the Welsh Government on these matters.

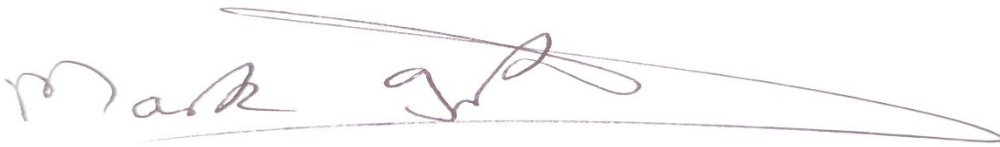
You stated that the Welsh Government would be undertaking a series of detailed checks,

through the due diligence process on the detailed business plan put forward by Green Man, and that will involve consideration of environmental factors. Please could you provide further details of this process including who you will be consulting with, when and how.

The Committee asks to be kept informed of developments as the Welsh Government appraises the full business plan and makes decisions on any future agreements with companies related to Green Man. Also as it engages with relevant authorities and the local community about plans for future activities before making any decision, as you committed to in your evidence. We appreciate that it may not be possible to share full commercial details. Nevertheless, we expect the Welsh Government to set out clearly to the local community the scope of the on-site activities that the Welsh Government is planning to support through any prospective agreement, including any intentions around the use of the site to support the existing Green Man festival.

I would welcome a response on these matters by Monday 12 September so the Committee can consider these as soon as it returns after the summer recess

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mark Isherwood', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Isherwood MS
Committee Chair