

## ROCP 30, Coalfields Regeneration Trust

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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

### **Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee**

Adolygiad o flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd | Review of the Committee's priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan Ymddiriedolaeth Adfywio'r Meysydd Glo | Evidence from Coalfields Regeneration Trust

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### **Your views**

#### **1. What are your views on the Committee's three strategic priorities: Climate Change; Sustainable Communities; and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment?**

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CRT welcomes this opportunity to engage with the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee on their consultation to review its priorities.

The Trust is supportive of the three strategic priorities as these are still highly relevant.

#### **2. To what extent are the Committee's three strategic priorities still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?**

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Established in 1999 the Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT) is a national charity and social enterprise that is solely dedicated to building prosperity and opportunity in former mining communities across the UK. Since inception CRT has prioritised the development of sustainable communities, including the development of circular economy (including community owned renewables) and the development of local services and assets in some of the most deprived areas of the UK. We achieve this by working in long term partnerships to develop resilient communities and local economies for the future.

In Wales CRT operates across 12 Local Authority areas providing support to grass roots community and voluntary sector organisations who are responding to their local needs. This includes providing support on the asset transfer of land for community-led food growing projects, supporting community owned renewables

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and supporting social enterprise development.

However, since the last review of the committee's priorities the gaps in wealth inequalities have grown, due to the cost of living crisis and with the anticipated further cuts to public sector services these are likely to further compound health inequalities for the most vulnerable and poorest in Wales.

Research has shown that both temperature growth and extreme temperature events have positive and statistically significant effects on all measures of wealth inequality in the longer term. This was particularly pronounced when comparing the 10% wealthiest households with the 10% poorest. It also found that climate risk shocks harm the poorest the most relative to the richest households, exacerbating long-term wealth inequality. Researchers believe this could be because of several factors, including the impact on health of poorer people due to increased air pollution and the effect on food supply chains.

25% of the Welsh population live in former coalfield communities and the South Wales coalfield region is the poorest in Wales and climate change is likely to have a disproportionate impact upon this region. Housing stock within former coalfield communities is likely to be more difficult and expensive to retrofit and to make more low carbon. Since 2020, CRT has supported 3 former coalfield communities, distributing grant funding to home-owners impacted by flooding so we are starting to see the impact of climate change in former coalfield communities. With a further 327 tips identified as 'high risk' of destabilisation in Wales it is imperative we meet our decarbonisation targets.

We would urge for an additional priority - the committee to focus on a place based approach to allow a stronger focus on policy delivery and outcomes for the poorest communities in Wales.

### **3. What are your view on the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work for Years 3 to 5 of the Sixth Senedd (set out in its report, [Priorities for the Sixth Senedd?](#))**

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The Trust is supportive of the work proposed.

#### Priority 1 – Climate Change

Large scale renewable energy schemes

In addition to the work proposed CRT would like to see a review of the community benefit of large scale renewable energy schemes, in relation to local

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wealth retention and socio-economic regeneration.

Large scale renewable energy projects can help Welsh Government meet 70% of electricity requirements from renewable energy by 2030 and net zero targets by 2050. Alongside tackling climate change an opportunity exists now to utilise community benefit and community funding for local socio economic regeneration. Any delays in strengthening community benefit will reduce the amount of investment and support available. We currently have 44 wind farms and 123 solar farms in operation in Wales and a further 26 wind farms and 36 solar farms proposed many of which are noted as developments of national significance (DNS) due to their scale.

CRT would like the programme of work to include a review of the community benefit linked to large scale renewable energy schemes to ensure there are consistent and proportionate measures to maximise the benefit in our communities. Community benefit is not always included in the form of a socio economic or collaborative impact report. Where these reports do exist there appears to be a lack of clarity between social value (pre and post construction), community funding and local and community/shared ownership with often ambiguous and confusing messaging. There is also no requirement for developers to provide a community fund there exists a minimum recommended industry standard of £5,000 per MW for wind farms and no recommended minimum standard for large scale solar farms. Large scale developments which are validated and due to be recommended may therefore contain no community benefit fund. There is no recommendation to include community benefit as part of a Local Impact Assessment.

Greater co-ordination and collaboration between large scale renewable energy developers, who were required to deliver community benefit, some Local Authority areas may have several small and large scale renewable energy farms proposed for their area. If greater collaboration existed this would maximise community benefit for their area of benefit and assist developers to meet their targets. A collaborative, strategic approach to community benefit is likely to result in greater wealth retention and community benefit, maximising the impact for local communities. This would also support the delivery of the committee's priorities - sustainable communities, climate change and protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

#### Coal tips

327 tips identified as 'high risk' and with a number of landslides in former

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communities CRT would suggest that the committees work includes a review of the approach to engaging and communicating with local communities on the announcement of these sites, their reclamation (including regeneration for wider community use e.g. biodiversity sites, active travel routes, recreational areas, etc.), proposed developments (e.g. within close proximity to windfarm developments which communities fear that these will destabilise land) and coal tip legislation.

## Priority 2 – Sustainable Communities

### Planning

CRT would support the plans for a review of the Planning Framework. The CRT believe that there is a disconnect between Planning Policy Wales policy statement on local ownership of energy generation in Wales and the interpretation of the guidance for developers, local communities and decision makers. Local ownership can mean wholly owned or based in Wales or simply have their principal headquarters in Wales. This has meant that developers which are wholly owned by shareholders from other countries are registering businesses in Wales to meet this requirement but they are not 'locally owned' and therefore do not offer the same opportunities for local wealth retention.

## **4. To what extent are the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?**

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Response continued from above Question 12 (Planning).

CRT's suggestion of a review of the community benefit linked to large scale renewable energy schemes would include a review of the planning process (including capacity at PEDW and LPS levels) as resource to meet current timescales for responses is stretched. A review would also identify community benefit best practice throughout a renewable energy developments lifespan, helping to inform a consistent and proportionate approach to community benefit.

### Transport

CRT would urge a continued focus on transport and infrastructure (including digital skills and infrastructure) as there remain challenges, particularly within the Heads of the Valleys region. Job densities within our communities are some of the lowest in the UK (42 per 100 of the working age population (<https://shura.shu.ac.uk/25272/1/state-of-the-coalfields-2019.pdf> Christina Betty et al., 1999 Sheffield Hallam University) so this is a vital element of ensuring a just transition and delivery of the well-being goals. In addition, the potential for green

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skills to provide well paid jobs and innovative local companies to support socio-economic regeneration within the poorest communities highlights the need for a place-making approach.

### Priority 3 – Protecting and enhancing the natural environment

CRT would urge the committee to further review river pollution and mitigation measures due to unlicensed sewage discharges. Data maps from the River Trust show that the issue is disproportionately affecting former coalfield communities in South Wales, which they report as extremely bad news for environmental and human health. There are cases where sewage overflows are happening on recreational grounds where sports are played and following their contamination the monitoring to ensure it's returned to a "safe" contamination level is unclear.

### **5. Are there any other matters related to the Committee's priorities/work programme/ways of working that you would like to comment on?**

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#### Community Voice

CRT would like to see a more communities and individuals, particularly those with lived experience of inequality and inequity, becoming engaged in the priorities of the committee. How we communicate and engage with individuals on these critical agendas is key in galvanising community responses and a call to action which is needed across all the priority areas. With charities warning of a difficult winter period ahead, due to increased costs in everyday essentials affecting large proportions of the population, there is likely to be a much bigger appetite for individuals to want to lead low carbon lifestyles, such as decarbonising homes, utilising public transport, community owned renewable schemes, etc. Networks such as Community Movement Cymru could be key in enabling this.

### **6. Other information**

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No response.

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