

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate Change,
Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Ymchwiliad i bolisi coedwigaeth a choetiroedd yng Nghymru | Inquiry into Forestry
and woodland policy in Wales

FWP 04

Ymateb gan : Yr Athro D Skydmore – Prifysgol Glyndŵr Wrexham
Evidence from : Professor D Skydmore – Wrexham Glyndŵr University

I wish to comment on the aspects of policy contained within the Policy Position (July 2010) on “Heritage, Landscape and the Cultural Value of Welsh Woodlands and Trees”.

Protection:

That document clearly states the importance of trees and woodlands within landscapes. They are a central part of Welsh heritage and culture and in many cases it is the trees that make the distinctive Welsh landscapes. They create the cultural settings of historic Wales and are pivotal in education for sustainable development. Their role is proven in improving well-being and in restorative health.

However, the structure of the document highlights the range of legislation and guidelines that affect the conservation of historic, wooded landscapes and trees. There are further strategies that should include considerations of trees. An example is the use of the “The Welsh Historic Environment Strategic Statement: Action Plan Updated 31 October 2010” which does not make specific reference to ancient trees.

This plethora of independently constructed guidelines leads to conflicting priorities. A substantial proportion of the protection also depends on European structures including the European Landscape Convention.

So, there is a clear need to update the Policy Position and to state clear priorities within the conflicts of felling, land use pressures and commercial woodland creation. It will be necessary to include these policy priorities in replacements for European legislation and land use grant structures. Because of the centrality of woodland in Welsh culture and landscape, there is a particular and pressing need to produce an effective conservation policy that can be widely understood and implemented comprehensively.

The document recognises the role of Tree Preservation Orders but notes that these are mainly used in urban and suburban areas. The lack of effectiveness in conserving ancient trees across the country contrasts with the wish of people that they are preserved. This was shown in the case of the Brimmon Oak and the Newtown By-Pass. Legislation and guidelines were insufficient and protection was achieved through the initiation of a petition.

An updated policy position should include the distinction between ancient and veteran trees and provide for their protection and sustained management, as well as ancient and distinctive woodlands in landscapes. This will require the construction of a comprehensive inventory of these trees and distinctive woodlands in Wales. This should begin with the NRW estate where the sites of many trees are known but not their heritage values or conditions. Forest research will need to monitor the condition of the Welsh cultural tree assets and their sustainable management.

Threats:

This sustainable management of ancient trees and distinctive woodlands will particularly need to consider the pest and disease threats which have the potential to destroy Welsh cultural tree assets. The Welsh Government is developing comprehensive strategies for mitigating pest and disease risks but these are predominantly focused on commercial tree stocks. Attention needs to be given to cultural assets and the, now imminent, threats.