

FWP 32

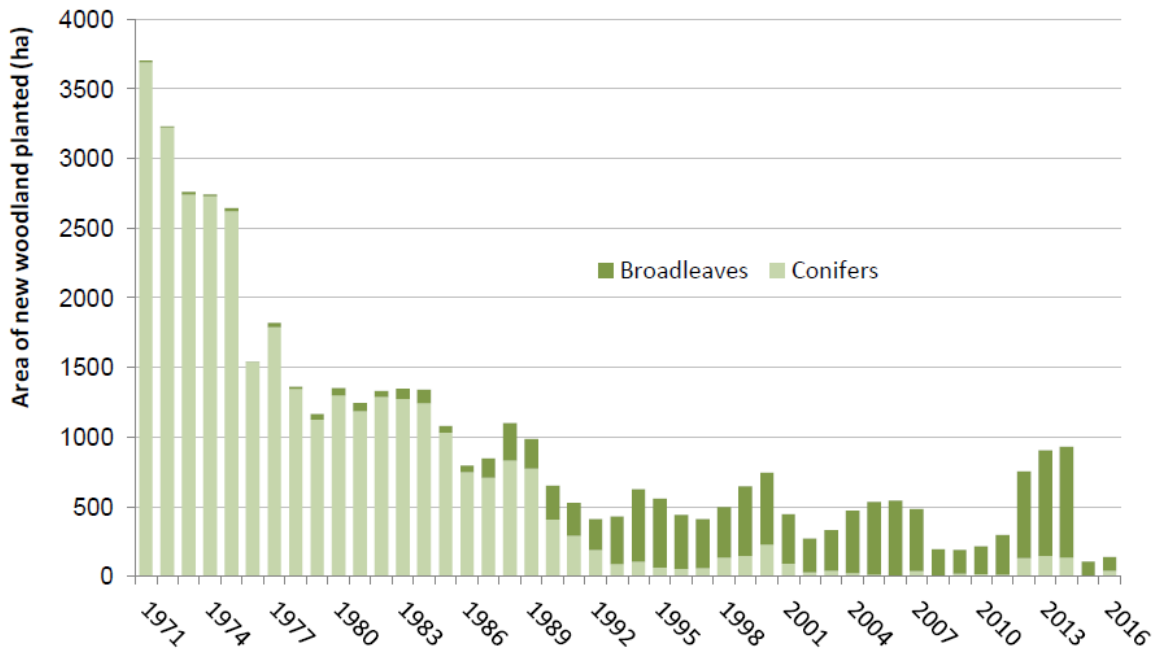
Ymateb gan : Panel Cynghori ar y Strategaeth Goetiroedd
Evidence from : Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel

The remit of Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel is to advise Welsh Government on forestry related matters. See appendix. Our response is structured under the seven headings of the consultation brief.

Responding to climate change – coping with climate change and helping reduce our carbon footprint

1. Well managed woodlands are a sustainable natural resource that can sequester carbon from the atmosphere and “lock it up” in utilisable timber as an alternative to steel and concrete which rely on finite raw materials and high energy costs of production. Wood is also an important source of renewable energy. Logs burnt in wood–burning stoves are used in 14% of Welsh households and Welsh wood is used commercially for electricity and heat generation. WG should encourage the carbon benefits arising from the use of wood in construction and for energy.
2. Fast growing conifers, thinned regularly, are an efficient woodland type for delivering carbon benefits and coping with climate change. (Combating climate change; a role for UK forests) <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/readreport> Conifers with relatively short rotation lengths of 30–35 years are well suited to adapt to changes in climate from one rotation to the next. They produce a range of timber products from marginal upland agricultural land.
3. WG continue with the aspiration of planting 100,000 hectares of new woodland over 20 years, starting in 2010, to enable Wales meet carbon reduction targets. This remains a welcome aim but as the following graph shows delivery is well short of the 5,000 ha per annum required and by 2016 we are already 32,000ha behind the target.

Chart 2: Area of new woodland planting per year by woodland type



Source: Forestry Statistics

4. If the Welsh countryside is to have a role in sequestering carbon to reduce Wales' contribution to global climate change, to providing resilience for the Welsh population against climate impacts such as flooding, or to creating a sustainable Welsh economy built on low-carbon materials, it is imperative that it begins creating new woodlands today, and sustains that woodland creation at a high level.
5. *Woodlands for Wales* (WfW) makes repeated reference to the need to bring undermanaged woodland back into management as a response to climate change and to maintaining the productive capacity of Welsh woodlands, but here also there is little evidence this is being achieved particularly following the withdrawal of Glastir woodland management support. There is a need to find new ways of incentivising woodland management that increase economic returns to the landowner such as through the expansion of local firewood markets.
6. A key target audience for woodland creation and management are farmers and the forestry sector has traditionally had an adversarial relationship with the farming sector with forestry still seen as an alternative to farming, particularly in the uplands. Trees planted and managed within the farmed landscape can provide a wide range of benefits to combat the impacts of climate change, contribute to farm productivity and deliver wide public benefit. New woodlands and forests will be created on farmland. There is a significant opportunity to improve the offer forestry makes to farmers, to give them a stake in the returns from forestry and develop new investment models that provide returns for multiple benefits from the woodland created.

7. Wales has an ideal climate for growing trees and there has never been a stronger economic case for dramatically increasing the forest area of Wales which will create a truly green economy, sustained growth and investment in high tech industries. Land management policy should be used to encourage woodland creation for Wales, as once established, forestry can deliver a strong economic output and will rely far less on public subsidy.
8. Recently launched projects under the Rural Development Programme such as the Cooperative Forest Planning Scheme (<http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/cap/ruraldevelopment/wales-rural-development-programme-2014-2020/co-operative-forest-planning-scheme/?lang=en>) provide new and welcome support for encouraging planning for the creation of broadleaved and conifer woodland. We encourage WG to support the sector by making maximum use of the RDP measures while they are available.

Woodlands for people – serving local needs for health, education and jobs

9. WfW places great emphasis on woodlands for people, it aspires to community involvement in woodlands and greater understanding of the sector by increasing education which will lead to more people using woodlands and having healthier, prosperous lives as a result. In several respects WG's delivery of this theme has been successful. WfW Indicators shows that public perception, community involvement and use of woodlands for passive and active recreation are all increasing and this is welcome. (<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/woodlands-wales-indicators/?lang=en>)
10. The basis of any cohesive community is decent jobs. If people are gainfully employed they are more likely to be healthy with incomes to support local facilities. The forestry and timber processing sector offers a full range of employment opportunities from semi-skilled to highly skilled labour, technical and senior managers. Importantly this range of employment opportunities is delivered mainly within our rural communities where jobs are so important. The sector offers a wide range of potential careers to future generations in both major forestry companies and in small scale contracting and other woodland-based enterprises and especially in rural areas. WG initiatives aimed at expanding Wales's woodland area and management of woodlands is a sure way of keeping the momentum going on these employment benefits.
11. Jobs are directly related to economic output – the main indicator being gross value added. The timber sector's overall GVA of around £499m is highly dependent on imported timber. We need to encourage processing of more timber in Wales and greater higher value uses and based on life cycle analysis of timber products. WG policies supporting these objectives e.g. favouring public procurement of Welsh timber in construction could play a vital role.

A competitive and integrated forest sector – innovative, skilled industries supplying renewable products from Wales

12. The forest industry in Wales provides the raw material for a thriving processing sector producing timber and timber products that are capable of being both sustainable and renewable. The problem is that we are in danger of not growing sufficient timber in the future to maintain current levels of production. The downturn in coniferous timber production is forecast from around 2030 onwards and needs to be addressed now. The reason for this drop is that as we harvest current crops planted since the 1960s we are not replacing them at the same rate with productive species. There is also concern that restocking levels on the WGWE are not keeping pace with felling and there is an ever increasing “land bank” contrary to the objectives of WfW and likely at some point to bring into question certification of WGWE to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS).
13. WfW highlights the importance of a “thriving, skilled workforce in the forestry sector” (WfW section 5.4) but the low numbers of young people on forestry-related education and training courses are a concern. We would like to see NRW expanding its apprenticeship scheme, offering sandwich year placements and reviving the former forest education programme of Forestry Commission Wales.
14. The recently launched Timber Investment Scheme is a welcome development by WG. <http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/cap/ruraldevelopment/wales-rural-development-programme-2014-2020/timber-business-investment-scheme/?lang=en> This provides funding for capital investments that add value to forests by enabling woodland management activities, timber harvesting and/or timber processing.

Environmental quality – making a positive contribution to biodiversity, landscapes and heritage, and reducing other environmental pressures

15. The vast majority of managed woodland in Wales “achieves high standards of environmental stewardship” (section 6.1 WfW), and woodlands continue to contribute to “the special landscape character of Wales” (6.4 WfW) However, most ancient semi-natural woodland in Wales is in unfavourable condition. As much of it is also unmanaged, it is difficult to see how this might change without new models of support and incentives to woodland owners.
16. The contribution that woodlands could make to flood alleviation is now widely recognised, but little is being done to realise this potential. In order to proceed we need clearer incentives, based on sound evidence to target woodland creation for this purpose and improve the offer to farmers to create and manage woodland.

17. The loss of timber producing areas, often for good environmental reasons, of species and age diversity, windfarms, managing riparian zones, creating open space and habitat restoration is leading to a decline in productive woodland. This loss of productive area is recognised within WfW which at the strategic level looks to balance the loss with more woodland creation to maintain the productive capacity of Welsh forests. It is a major failing that the required compensatory planting has not taken place. Only 140 hectares of new woodland planted last year is insufficient compensation and of insignificance in contributing to the aspiration of 100,000 hectares of new woodland over 20 years.
18. Forests managed as a minimum to the UK Forest Standard (UKFS) and often to the more exacting UKWAS, with limits on the proportion of single species and the promotion of open space, native broadleaves, natural reserves and long term retentions, can make a positive contribution to biodiversity and landscapes
19. This Panel has had lengthy discussions on the WG programme on Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and produced policy recommendations to WG. A key issue which remains unresolved for both private owners and the WGWE is the loss of potential timber production resulting from the removal of commercial plantation crops on these sites. Encouraging new farm woodlands offers a way of offsetting these losses.
20. It is vital that WG continues to address and support measures on plant health and deer and squirrel management.

How the strategy is contributing to the delivery of duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016

21. The strategy contributes directly to all seven goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and to Part 1 (Sustainable management of natural resources) of the Environment (Wales) Act and we hope with the future NNRP. However, the reduction of forest cover in Wales (see above) could compromise these contributions.
22. The longevity of forestry cycles demands a long term vision and it is important for WG and NRW to foster this vision by maintaining the employment of forestry professionals.

How the strategy will be considered in the context of emerging policies, plans and statements (e.g. National Natural Resources Policy, Biodiversity Plans and Area Statements)

23. Forests / woodlands are a natural resource, and as the four strategic themes of WfW are still fit for purpose, they should form part of the National Natural Resources Policy.

24. Several Panel members are concerned that the lack of clarity about the content and role of area statements which is creating uncertainty and confusion for forest planning and for land managers. There has also been insufficient engagement with the private sector on the topic. These difficulties need to be addressed urgently.

The challenges and opportunities that arise from leaving the European Union

25. Challenges

There will be less public funding available for rural land management, and any funding that is available will be increasingly focussed on ensuring that support is paying for public goods enjoyed by a majority of Welsh society. For forestry this will probably mean reduced financial support which will affect the sector's ability to deliver non-market ecosystem services unless new models for rewarding land owners for these benefits are implemented.

26. Opportunities

Brexit could be of benefit to the Welsh forestry sector. We have a massive market for home grown timber on our doorstep without the need to trade beyond our shores. The fall in sterling should be a benefit in making home grown timber more competitive. It is assumed subsidies will be reduced for farmers which should make more marginal land available to plant and at lower land prices. However assuming no reduction in "environmental standards", regulations will remain as a significant barrier to new planting in the uplands.

Other comments

27. We are seriously concerned that the future of management of the WGWE is jeopardised by the continuing loss of professional forestry staff in NRW. This must be addressed.

28. There is inadequate financial information in the public domain on NRW's income and expenditure on the WGWE. This makes it impossible for the Panel and the public to monitor NRW's performance of its operations on the estate and to ensure value for money.

Appendix

WALES WOODLAND STRATEGY ADVISORY PANEL – REMIT AND MEMBERSHIP

1. From 1st March 2015, WSAP will be responsible for:

- a) Advising the WG Forestry Policy Team (WGFPT) on the development of policy relating to trees and woodlands in Wales including any refresh of the WG Woodland Strategy and/or Action Plan;
- b) Advising the WGFPT on the implementation of the Wales Woodland Strategy based on a thorough understanding of the legislation, policies and activity relating to trees and woodlands in Wales;
- c) Advising the WGFPT on the commissioning of research and evidence to support the development of forestry policy, including reviewing the progress of the delivery in Wales of the Forestry Commission Science and Innovation Strategy;
- d) Developing networking opportunities, through partnership, to promote sustainable woodlands and forests capable of delivering a range of benefits for the people of Wales;
- e) Horizon scanning to ensure that forestry policy, through the Strategy process, responds to new issues and agendas of relevance to Wales;
- f) Acting as the panel from which a committee of reference can be drawn to report to the Welsh Ministers on disputed decisions of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) in the exercise of its functions, as prescribed in the Forestry Act;
- g) Acting as the panel from which a sub-committee can be drawn to provide advice in disputed cases under Glastir Woodlands (particularly related to woodland creation) through the provision of a case report to either the relevant senior Welsh Government official, or to the Glastir Independent Review Panel, for a decision.
- h) Advising on specific issues that the WGFPT assigns to the Panel.

2. Key issues on which members of the Panel will be expected to advise the WGFPT include:

Economic – highlighting the contribution forestry makes to the Welsh economy through the creation of sustainable jobs, increasing skills and combating poverty 2

Environmental – with a particular emphasis on the relationship between trees and water, agriculture, landscape, heritage and the development of a low carbon economy

Social – providing opportunities for the people of Wales to increase their health, well being and education through the greater use of woodlands

Diversity and Resilience – driving increased species and age diversity of the Welsh woodland estate (public and private) to improve bio-diversity and resilience to the expected impacts of climate change and increased threats to tree health

3. Members will be invited to declare their interests when joining the panel and to withdraw from discussions that may cause them to have a specific conflict of interest.

4. NRW is represented on the Panel but its members will not be eligible to be part of a committee of reference as described in 1 f) above and will be asked to withdraw should

an agenda item, or Panel discussion refer to a specific case regarding the delivery of their regulatory functions.

5. The Panel will consist of up to 22 members appointed to serve for two years from 1 March 2015 with the possibility of renewal for a further two years.

6. The Panel will meet at least 3 times per year with travelling, incidental and accommodation expenses met by the Welsh Government. Members invited to form a committee to deliberate on disputes into the actions of NRW, or the delivery of Glastir, will be paid a daily fee for this element of the work.