

Climate Change, Environment and
Rural Affairs Committee

Branching out: a new ambition for woodland policies

July 2017



National Assembly for Wales

Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

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Rural Affairs Committee

Branching out: a new ambition for woodland policies

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National Assembly for Wales
Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

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The Committee was established on 28 June 2016 to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising expenditure, administration and policy matters, encompassing (but not restricted to): climate change; energy; natural resources management; planning; animal welfare and agriculture.

Current Committee membership:



Mike Hedges AM
Welsh Labour
Swansea East



Gareth Bennett AM
UKIP Wales
South Wales Central



Jayne Bryant AM
Welsh Labour
Newport West



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David Melding AM
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South Wales Central



Jenny Rathbone AM
Welsh Labour
Cardiff Central



Simon Thomas AM
Plaid Cymru
Mid and West Wales

The following Members were also members of the committee during this inquiry:



Mark Reckless AM (Chair)
UKIP Wales
South Wales East



Vikki Howells AM
Welsh Labour
Cynon Valley

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government must, as a matter of urgency, refresh its woodland strategy with the aim of significantly increasing planting rates. The refreshed strategy must include long term targets for woodland cover and must incorporate commercial forestry..... Page 19

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government must address the barriers to increasing planting, in particular by:

- Aligning the regulatory and funding processes, and providing additional guidance and support to applicants.
- Examining the potential for adopting a presumption of approval for applications in areas identified by the Woodland Opportunities Map as having a high suitability for woodland.
- Making the Woodland Opportunities Map more user-friendly to a range of different user groups, and linking it in with the land use planning system. Page 20

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government must specify how it will use trees and woodlands as a nature-based solution to flooding, and facilitate expansion of the Woodland Carbon Code. Page 23

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government must commit to ensuring a minimum of 20% urban tree canopy cover, to be addressed through Local Well-being Plans and Area Statements. Page 31

Recommendation 5. Woodlands can be an effective tool for regeneration and engaging local communities. The Welsh Government must harness this and, as a starting point, should:

- Increase support to community woodland groups.
- Assess the potential of developing a National Forest Company to help regenerate the south Wales valleys.
- Ensure that woodland education is incorporated into education policies. Page 31

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government must extend and better manage access to public woodlands, especially for marginalised groups. NRW should examine options for recovering costs from user groups for certain recreational activities in the woodlands it manages..... Page 31

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should clarify its timetable for bringing forward proposals on access reform. Page 31

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government must address the constraints on the commercial forestry sector, in particular by:

- Facilitating coniferous woodland creation and commercial operations on both public and private land.**
- Promoting to the farming community the commercial and other benefits of planting trees on agricultural land, and enabling farmers to do this through additional, simple and flexible grant payments.**
- Providing and promoting training in forestry, woodland management and woodland planning..... Page 36**

Recommendation 9. The potential for growth in the commercial forestry sector should be actively supported by Welsh Government. In particular it should:

- Agree with the forestry sector ambitious targets for Wales to become increasingly self-sufficient in timber production and less reliant on imports.**
- Consider changing the building regulations to promote the use of timber in construction..... Page 36**

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government should reintroduce the Glastir Woodland Management Scheme and ensure that planting meets the UK Woodland Assurance Standard..... Page 43

Recommendation 11. The Welsh Government must work with stakeholders to ensure its tree health strategy demonstrates the lessons learnt from the outbreaks of Ash Dieback and Larch Disease. Page 43

Recommendation 12. The Welsh Government must improve delivery of the Woodlands for Wales strategy, in particular by:

- Addressing the barriers to woodland creation as a matter of urgency.**
- Revising the strategy by early 2018, and specifying how it will support and be supported by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, and the Natural Resources Policy.**
- Improving the transparency and power of Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel to drive the strategy forwards. Page 49**

Recommendation 13. As recommended in the Committee’s report on the future of land management in Wales, the Welsh Government must ensure that future funding should be based on sustainable outcomes. This approach could be supported by innovative methods such as Payments for Ecosystem Services and pension fund investment in green infrastructure..... Page 49

Chair's Foreword

The trees, woodlands and forests of Wales provide a wide range of benefits for our citizens and for our economy.

They lead to improved health and well-being due to opportunities for healthy exercise and relaxation. They can also revitalise our landscapes and make our towns more attractive. Woodlands and forests can be used to enhance resilience to the effects of climate change, by alleviating extreme weather conditions such as flooding, and removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. They also provide improvements to the quality of our air, water and soil, and enhanced biodiversity. As such, woodland and forestry is ideally placed to help meet the goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The commercial forestry sector in Wales has considerable potential to contribute to Wales' economic development. The push for increased sustainability in construction and reduced carbon footprints in the UK and beyond means that demand for home-grown timber is set to rise substantially. Wales has a fantastic opportunity to meet substantially more of this demand, and to become increasingly self-sufficient in timber production and less reliant on imports.

However, annual woodland creation in Wales is far behind the targets set out in the Welsh Government's Climate Change Strategy (2010), and this is seriously undermining the delivery of the Welsh Government's strategy, 'Woodlands for Wales'.

We are calling on the Welsh Government to address, as a matter of urgency, the regulatory, financial, bureaucratic and cultural barriers to woodland creation, with commercial forests and trees in urban areas being a particular priority. This will require innovative solutions, such as funding based on delivery of public benefits, and the development of an integrated, sustainable land management policy.

I am grateful to those who contributed to our inquiry and hosted our visits, including commercial foresters, farming unions, environmental protection groups, community and recreational groups, and academics, as well as Natural Resources Wales. If we all work together, I am confident that Wales can have a woodland resource to be proud of.

Mike Hedges AM
Chair

Introduction

Woodlands for Wales (2009) is the Welsh Government's 50 year strategy for woodlands and trees. The strategy is implemented through five-year action plans; the first published by Forestry Commission Wales in 2010, and the second by the Welsh Government in 2015. The current action plan¹ runs until 31 March 2020.

The Committee held an inquiry into how well Woodlands for Wales is being delivered.² The inquiry ran from February to July 2017. This report sets out our findings, and our vision for taking Welsh woodlands forwards.

Terms of reference

1. The inquiry aimed to assess the delivery of the Woodlands for Wales strategy against its four strategic themes:

- Responding to climate change: coping with climate change and helping reduce our carbon footprint;
- Woodlands for people: serving local needs for health, education and jobs;
- A competitive and integrated forest sector: innovative, skilled industries supplying renewable products from Wales; and
- Environmental quality: making a positive contribution to biodiversity, landscapes and heritage, and reducing other environmental pressures.

2. The inquiry also investigated:

- How the Strategy is contributing to the delivery of duties under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (the Environment Act)³ and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Future Generations Act)⁴;
- How the Strategy will be considered in the context of emerging policies, plans and statements (e.g. Natural Resources Policy, Biodiversity Plans and Area Statements); and
- The challenges and opportunities that arise from Brexit.

Approach

- We sought written evidence in relation to these themes, and received 35 responses. Further information on written evidence is provided in Annex A.
- We held oral evidence sessions with a variety of commercial, environmental and academic stakeholders, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), and the Welsh Government. Further information on oral evidence is provided in Annex B.
- We held a stakeholder workshop in June 2017 to discuss issues around access, recreation and community involvement. Further information on the workshop is provided in Annex B.

¹ Welsh Government, [Woodlands for Wales Action Plan, 2015-2020](#)

² National Assembly for Wales, [Forestry and woodland policy in Wales, 2017](#)

³ [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#)

⁴ [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)

- We visited woodlands in Newport, Dinas Powys, Crumlin, Merthyr, Newbridge, Pwllheli and Maesteg to learn more about the challenges and opportunities facing woodland owners and managers regarding commercial forestry, conservation, and community access and recreation.

01. Woodland creation and restocking

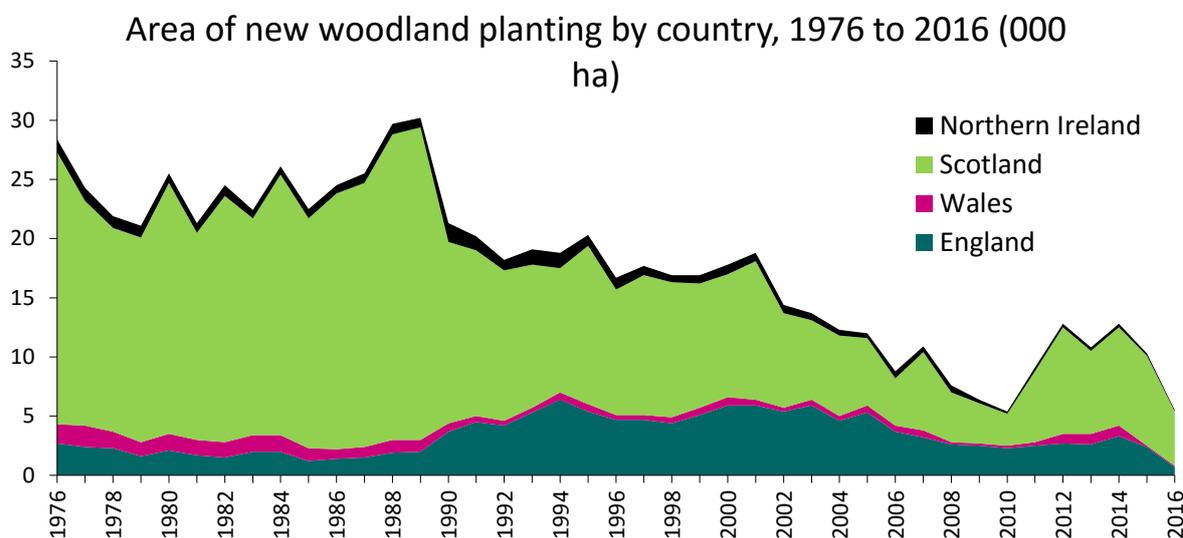
This chapter highlights the delivery of the Welsh Government’s targets for planting trees, also called afforestation. Since 2010, annual planting rates have averaged approximately one tenth of the target rate, with coniferous planting being negligible during this period. The main barriers to woodland creation are regulatory and financial, with a perception amongst woodland investors that Wales is closed for business.

Woodland creation in the UK

3. The Forestry Commission reports annually on woodland area planting and restocking in the UK. The 2016 report⁵ revealed that, as at 31 March 2016, the area of woodland in the UK stands at 3.16 million ha. This “represents 13% of the total land area in the UK: 10% in England, 15% in Wales, 18% in Scotland and 8% in Northern Ireland”.⁶

4. The report showed that woodland area has increased by around 240,000 ha since 1998, a rise of 8% over the period. However, new planting rates decreased by 82% between 1988-89 and 2009-10, partly due to unfavourable changes to the tax benefits from owning forestry in the UK, introduced in the Finance Act 1988.

5. Planting levels picked up again after 2010, with the area of new planting in the UK in 2014-15 around double that reported for 2009-10. As shown in the chart below, this increase was largely attributable to Scotland, which the report said resulted from the country’s introduction of Rural Development Contracts (RDCs).⁷ New planting in the UK decreased to a new low in 2015-16, at just 5,500 ha, which the report suggested “is likely to have been influenced by recent changes in grant schemes across the UK.”⁸



Source: Forestry Commission, June 2016

⁵ Forestry Commission, [Woodland Area, Planting and Restocking: 2016 Edition](#)

⁶ Forestry Commission, [Woodland Area, Planting and Restocking: 2016 Edition](#)

⁷ RDCs were a mechanism aimed at delivering targeted environmental, social and economic benefits and were open to farmers, crofters, forest and estate managers and community groups. Take up was initially slow, but by 2012 woodland planting was close to Scotland’s target of 10,000 ha per annum, with about 75% focusing on native woodland planting.

⁸ Forestry Commission, [Woodland Area, Planting and Restocking: 2016 Edition](#)

6. Forestry Commission statistics from 2016⁹ showed that only Scotland has continued to plant conifers in significant numbers, while broadleaf planting has declined rapidly across the UK since 2013-14. Annual planting in Wales and Northern Ireland is now negligible.

Area of new conifer and broadleaved planting by country, 2011 to 2016 (000 ha)

Nation	Planting type	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
England	Conifers	0	0	0	0.1	0
	Broadleaves	2.7	2.6	3.3	2.3	0.7
Wales	Conifers	0.1	0.1	0.1	0	0
	Broadleaves	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.1	0.1
Scotland	Conifers	3.3	1.7	2	2.5	1.9
	Broadleaves	5.7	5.3	6.3	5.1	2.7
N. Ireland	Conifers	0	0	0	0	0
	Broadleaves	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1
UK	Conifers	3.5	1.9	2.2	2.6	1.9
	Broadleaves	9.3	8.9	10.7	7.7	3.6

Source: Forestry Commission, September 2016

Afforestation across Europe

Ireland, Moldova and France are three sparsely wooded countries (compared to the European average), that have seen large increases in woodland cover since 1990 (with increases of 62%, 28% and 18% respectively). In Ireland this was driven by an ambitious Government strategy, *Growing for the Future*,¹⁰ which sought afforestation levels of 25,000 ha per annum up to the millennium, and 20,000 ha per annum from 2001 to 2030. The French Government has supported coniferous afforestation on former agricultural land, with recent initiatives focusing on increasing timber harvesting and developing the wood processing and forest biomass industries.

Lack of new woodland creation and restocking

7. The biggest issue raised by respondents to the inquiry was the lack of new woodland creation in Wales. The Welsh Government’s *Climate Change Strategy (2010)* called for:

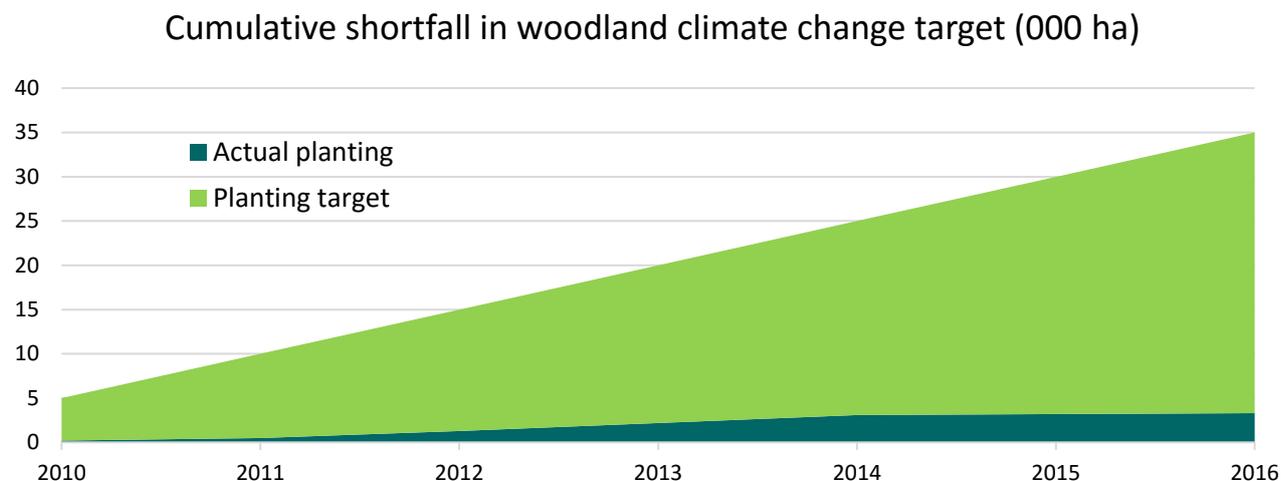
“...expansion of woodland in Wales by increasing the average planting rate from about 500 ha to 5,000 ha per annum maintained over 20 years.”¹¹

⁹ *Forestry Commission statistics from 2016*

¹⁰ *Growing for the Future*

¹¹ Welsh Government, *Climate Change Strategy 2010*

8. This equates to 100,000 ha of new woodland creation between 2010 and 2030. However, the Woodland for Wales Action Plan (2015-2020) stated that only 3,203 ha of new planting had taken place between 2010 and 2015. This deficit against the target is shown in the chart below.



Source: Welsh Government, December 2015

9. Confor stated:

“Woodland creation in Wales has been a catastrophic failure. Wales needs to plant 31,800ha of the 35,000ha which should by now have been planted, simply to get back on track... The disastrous failure of WG since 2010 to meet agreed tree-planting targets puts the economic, social and environmental sustainability of our countryside at risk.”¹²

Barriers to planting

10. Stakeholders revealed a number of different barriers to woodland creation. For the commercial forestry sector, overly-rigorous enforcement of regulation is the biggest obstacle to new woodland creation in Wales. For example, David Edwards (Tilhill Forestry) told the Committee:

“... there’s much more of a will in Scotland to enable planting, whereas in Wales it’s much more about reasons not to plant.”¹³

11. Martin Bishop (Confor) added that much of the legislation and regulation surrounding new woodland creation (including Environmental Impact Assessment) requires the planter to demonstrate that the activity will not have a “significant impact”. He believed that this was being interpreted as having “no impact”.¹⁴

12. Some considered the Glastir woodland schemes to be a barrier rather than an enabler of woodland creation. Farming unions were the most critical of Glastir; they believed the schemes are too complex and deter farmers who would otherwise be interested in new woodland creation to

¹² Confor written evidence

¹³ CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 235

¹⁴ CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 239

supplement their income. Results from a 2015 Welsh Government survey of farmers' attitudes towards Glastir Woodland grants¹⁵, support with this point.

13. Furthermore, respondents said that funding support for new woodland creation in Wales is directed towards creating small, mainly native woodlands on farms. The Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW) added that its members:

“... have reservations on planting on the most productive land as once planted, [this land] will be lost permanently to production.”¹⁶

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)

14. The Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999,¹⁷ (the EIA Regulations), require NRW to consider whether proposed forestry projects (including afforestation, deforestation, forest roads and forest quarries) will have a significant effect on the environment. If this is the case, an application for consent is required, which must include an Environmental Statement.

15. In late 2016, Defra led a consultation on amendments to the EIA Regulations¹⁸ on behalf of itself and the three devolved administrations. The proposed changes were aimed at reducing the burden on applicants with a view to encouraging more ambitious woodland creation proposals. One proposed change was to increase the threshold for mandatory EIAs in “non-sensitive areas” in Wales from 5 ha to either 20 ha or 50 ha. A total of 95 responses addressed this issue. 80% of respondents were not supportive of an increase in the threshold for non-sensitive areas due to the potential for environmental damage.

16. The amended Regulations came into force on 16 May 2017, but did not include the proposed changes to the thresholds suggested in the consultation. A written statement from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs on 7 June explained:

“... there is no evidence the current threshold has been a barrier in increasing new woodland planting in Wales.”¹⁹

17. Jonathan Cryer (RSPB) agreed and suggested, instead, that projects have “not gone ahead for financial reasons”.²⁰ However, Alec Dauncey (Bangor University) told the Committee that EIA requirements “clearly are something that puts people off because it’s a bureaucratic burden”.²¹

18. Representatives of the commercial forestry sector agreed. David Edwards (Tilhill Forestry) said that the Welsh Government’s decision not to increase the threshold for mandatory EIAs was “disappointing”²² and that going through the full EIA process can cost between £150,000 and £300,000:

¹⁵ Welsh Government, [Glastir Woodland Element Up-take Survey](#), 2015

¹⁶ Farmer’s Union of Wales written evidence

¹⁷ [The Environmental Impact Assessment \(Forestry\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 1999](#)

¹⁸ [Environmental Impact Assessment – Joint Technical Consultation \(December 2016 – January 2017\)](#)

¹⁹ [Statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs](#), 7 June 2017

²⁰ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 64

²¹ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 234

²² CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 307

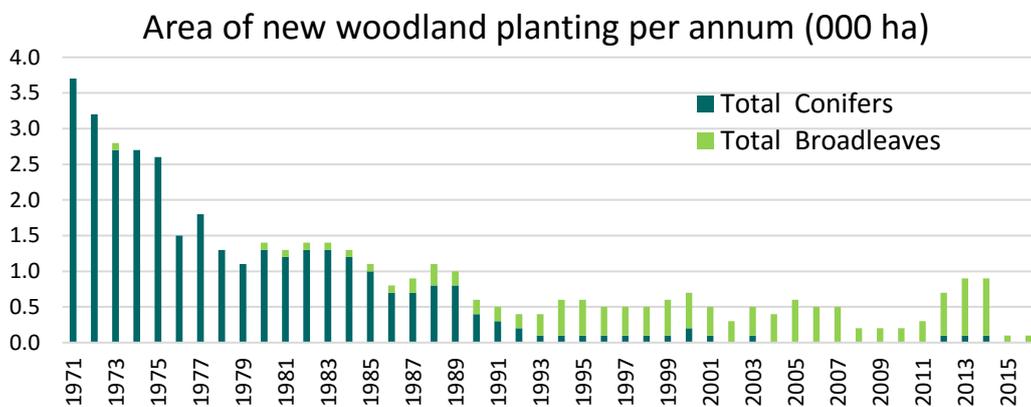
“Nobody is prepared to spend that sort of money when they’ve got no certainty of what they’re going to get out of it at the end. And that’s one of the big differences between Scotland and Wales currently.”²³

Implications for commercial forestry

19. The commercial forestry sector is concerned that the low planting and restocking rates will reduce the future supply of commercial timber, which will impact on the long term viability of the sector in Wales. BSW Timber said its supply of softwood timber will start to “fall dramatically”²⁴ in ten years’ time.

20. Only 300 ha of commercial conifers have been planted since 2010, and 700 ha since 2000. Tillhill Forestry, the UK Forest Products Association (UKFPA) and Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel (WSAP) stated that the situation is compounded by low rates of restocking of commercial conifers on NRW managed land.

21. The chart²⁵ below, highlights the extent of the decline in conifer planting, remaining at less than the area of broadleaf planting since 1992:



Source: Welsh Government, 2016

22. UKFPA and BSW Timber contrasted Wales with Scotland, where they said the woodland creation target has been increased from 10,000 ha to 15,000 ha per year by 2025, with a focus on commercial timber crops to sustain the processing sector.

23. Hamish MacLeod (BSW Timber) said that woodland creation in Scotland had recently begun to meet the Scottish Government’s target, leading to confidence that tail-off in the supply of timber will ultimately be mitigated. There was no such confidence in Wales. David Edwards (Tilhill Forestry) added that:

“... large-scale investors have already taken the view that Wales is closed for business for woodland creation and they’ve gone to Scotland.”²⁶

²³ CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 264

²⁴ BSW Timber written evidence

²⁵ Welsh Government, [Woodlands for Wales Indicators 2015-2016](#)

²⁶ CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 311

Possible solutions

24. Confor suggested a number of actions to address barriers to planting, including:

“a. A protocol for consultees, the regulator, and WG responding to woodland creation and management plans, including a deadline after which no response is regarded as consent, and guidelines as to reasonable burdens on applicants.

b. Better guidelines, and guidance, on EIAs.

c. A strategic plan to identify uncontroversial areas and fast-track woodland creation with a presumption in favour of woodland and forestry creation in some areas.

d. Clearer guidance for woodland officers to make proportionate and balanced decisions.”²⁷

25. Bangor University made similar suggestions, for example:

“There is a need for more objective appraisal of which areas of land are most suited for each purpose, and therefore where in the Welsh landscape there should be a presumption in favour of woodland establishment that would not be over-ridden by narrower restrictions.”²⁸

26. The Welsh Government’s Glastir Woodland Opportunities Map²⁹ goes some way towards achieving this. It shows areas of Wales that are most suited to new woodland creation, based on data identified to best meet the requirements of Glastir.

27. David Edwards (Tilhill Forestry) and Martin Bishop (Confor) said that the Glastir Woodland Opportunities Map is a good start, but that it should include more reasons to plant trees, rather than reasons not to plant trees. However, the FUW, NFU and RSPB criticised the map as being limited by the quality of the underlying data.

NRW’s position

28. NRW said that action against the planting target

“... has seen little progress and requires radical change in the level of [financial] support available including an enabling approach to regulation.”³⁰

29. They believed that the lack of coniferous planting “poses a risk to wood supply, jobs and the growth of the forest industry”.³¹

30. Regarding the barrier of regulation, Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) said that improvements could be made, but that regulating for land-use is “complex” and “extremely site specific”.³² NRW had wanted an increase in the threshold for EIA to 20 ha (as it is now in England) but emphasised that woodland creation should be balanced with environmental protection.

²⁷ Confor written evidence

²⁸ Bangor University written evidence

²⁹ [Glastir Woodland Opportunities Map](#)

³⁰ Natural Resources Wales written evidence

³¹ Natural Resources Wales written evidence

³² CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 22

31. Michele van-Velzen (NRW) pointed out that “in Scotland and England, the grants and the regulation and the information and advice is much closer. It’s done from one place”,³³ whereas in Wales applicants must deal with three separate organisations. Peter Garson (NRW) said:

“It’s about how we align the regulatory processes with the grant-aid process. At the moment, it can be difficult for people to align their applications, get them through regulation and then have their grant application approved in time, and then implement their planting scheme.”³⁴

32. In terms of funding, Peter Garson (NRW) stated that “budget allocations within [Glastir] would not be sufficient in themselves to meet the targets”.³⁵ Furthermore Glastir schemes are unappealing to applicants as “they tend to be quite prescriptive, and they don’t give that much scope for applicants to design a woodland that meets their needs”.³⁶ Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) added that financial incentives are greater in Scotland, especially for commercial softwood species.³⁷

33. Despite this, Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) said that progress had recently been made. The Glastir Woodland Creation scheme “has been oversubscribed for the first time in quite a long time”, and she expected planting rates for 2016-2018 (around 1,800 ha) to be much higher than that planted in previous years.³⁸ The situation was different on public sector land, however. Whilst NRW is restocking mixed woodlands on Welsh Government land (and thus gradually reducing the proportion of coniferous woodland), it is not planting new woodlands.

34. Regarding the Glastir Woodland Opportunity Map, Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) suggested that as a result of mixing opportunities and constraints, the map is:

“... not necessarily that useful for the customer at the other end, trying to have an interface into that scheme. I think that there’s more to do between Welsh Government and us to provide more spatial information that’s much more user-friendly.”³⁹

35. NRW noted that improvements to the map are ongoing, but are limited by financial constraints and the availability of up-to-date data at different scales.

Welsh Government’s position

36. The Cabinet Secretary acknowledged that it can be difficult to find the right place for new woodlands and that the current process for gaining permission to plant woodlands can be a barrier to woodland creation. She recognised that:

“Raising the level of ambition in respect of tree planting in Wales is likely to require additional funding as well as further examination of regulatory/policy issues to ensure we can deliver our objectives.”⁴⁰

³³ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 89

³⁴ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 87

³⁵ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 85

³⁶ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 40

³⁷ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 93

³⁸ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 91

³⁹ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 49

⁴⁰ Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

37. The Co-operative Forest Planting Scheme⁴¹ (funded via the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020) should assist in tackling barriers to new woodland planting. The scheme funds a bottom-up approach whereby woodland managers work with stakeholders to agree where woodland can be created.

38. She said that the Welsh Government would work with NRW and others to improve the way the EIA process is implemented:

“This will include assessing consistency between the application of the EIA regime for forestry and agriculture and testing new approaches to protecting important habitats while also allowing for an increase in the amount of new woodland creation.”⁴²

39. The Cabinet Secretary said that whilst she did not believe that EIA is “any more onerous in Wales than anywhere else”⁴³, implementation of the regulations needed to be improved. The Cabinet Secretary had recently met NRW and the commercial forestry sector to discuss the real and perceived regulatory barriers to woodland creation. The Cabinet Secretary had tasked officials to consider “innovation in the use of regulation”⁴⁴ and report in early 2018.

40. The Cabinet Secretary said that one of the issues regarding planting on agricultural land is that the investment is long term. As such, the Welsh Government needs “to look at innovative ways by which farmers can get a regular income from woodland”⁴⁵. This might include the use of lottery funding, taxation and carbon credits paid for by businesses, adding that a form of Payments for Ecosystem Services could also be suitable for securing water and biodiversity benefits from woodlands.

41. Regarding the Woodland Opportunity Map, the Cabinet Secretary was unaware that stakeholders considered it to be a barrier to planting, but agreed to consider this issue. In her opinion the map is effective because it highlights:

“...where the most appropriate areas for woodland creation are right across Wales. If it’s viewed at a strategic level, I think it enables our priorities then to be recognised, for instance where we need more trees in relation to air pollution... I think it’s a decision support tool, not a decision-making tool, if you like, but I do think it’s very beneficial.”⁴⁶

Our view

Lack of new woodland creation

Since 2010, Wales has managed to plant just one-tenth of its target of 35,000 ha, with 90% of this being broadleaved woodland, and planting rates since 2014 have been especially poor.

We are pleased that the Welsh Government will maintain the target of 100,000 ha of new woodland creation between 2010-2030, and will refresh the Woodlands for Wales strategy. However, there is a

⁴¹ [Co-operative Forest Planning Scheme](#)

⁴² Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

⁴³ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 205

⁴⁴ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 208

⁴⁵ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 220

⁴⁶ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 244

massive gap between aspiration and reality, and fundamental change in the approach to woodland creation in Wales is needed. It is unclear how the Cabinet Secretary intends to address this.

We urge the Welsh Government to incorporate long term targets for woodland cover in Wales by 2050 and 2100, and to better reflect the economic benefits of forestry. The Welsh Government must lead by example and increase afforestation on public land, and NRW must be more proactive in seizing opportunities for woodland creation on such land.

Barriers and solutions

The greatest barrier to woodland planting was believed by the commercial forestry sector to be the overly-rigorous enforcement of EIA regulations. We are pleased that the Welsh Government and NRW are willing to investigate innovative ways to improve the implementation of the EIA process, provide additional guidance and support to applicants, and to better align the regulatory and funding processes. This must be progressed as a matter of urgency and must deliver an increase in planting.

Farmers are deterred from planting woodland by a number of bureaucratic, financial and cultural barriers. Glastir woodland schemes are too complex and prescriptive, and the payments are too low compared to the Basic Payment Scheme payments received for agricultural land. Furthermore, they are put off by the permanence of the land use change, and the long-term nature of the payback.

The end of CAP funding after 2020 provides an opportunity to reconsider the approach to such payments. We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to consider innovative approaches to payment, including Payments for Ecosystem Services. Funding post-Brexit is discussed further in Chapter 6.

The Glastir Woodland Opportunities Map, despite its shortcomings, is a good starting point. However, its primary use appears to be limited to being a tool for use at a strategic level. We believe the map should be refocused so that it is a decision making tool and enabler of woodland creation on the ground. Aligning the map with the regulatory process and local authority planning would lead to greater benefits. For example, regulatory barriers could be relaxed for areas that the map reveals as being most suitable for woodland creation. The Welsh Government should also work with NRW to make the map more user-friendly for specific user groups.

Showing land use and land cover data on the Woodland Opportunity Map would also make it more relevant to land use planning. We note that forestry is excluded from the legal definition of 'development' in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and that forestry does not feature prominently in Local Development Plans (LDPs) or the Welsh Government's national planning policy. However, LDPs also designate land for non-development uses such as open space, green belt, and environmental protection areas. As such, we suggest that there is potential for local authorities to use the map to guide decisions on land for afforestation. We believe that Welsh Government should consider how it can encourage such an approach.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government must, as a matter of urgency, refresh its woodland strategy with the aim of significantly increasing planting rates. The refreshed strategy must include long term targets for woodland cover and must incorporate commercial forestry.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government must address the barriers to increasing planting, in particular by:

- Aligning the regulatory and funding processes, and providing additional guidance and support to applicants.
- Examining the potential for adopting a presumption of approval for applications in areas identified by the Woodland Opportunities Map as having a high suitability for woodland.
- Making the Woodland Opportunities Map more user-friendly to a range of different user groups, and linking it in with the land use planning system.

02. Responding to climate change

This chapter discusses how trees and woodlands can help us mitigate the effects of climate change. The role of trees and woodlands in sequestering carbon and managing flood risk were highlighted by respondents as being particularly important.

Sequestering carbon

42. Trees act as a sink for carbon dioxide (CO₂) by fixing carbon during photosynthesis and storing excess carbon as biomass.⁴⁷ Carbon sequestration refers to the annual rate of CO₂ storage in above- and below-ground biomass. Increasing the number of trees can therefore slow the accumulation of atmospheric carbon, a contributor to climate change. Larger and faster-growing trees tend to sequester and store more CO₂, though rates diminish once the tree reaches the post-maturity stage.

43. Tilhill Forestry emphasised that:

“Well managed woodlands are a sustainable natural resource that can sequester carbon from the atmosphere and ‘lock it up’ in utilisable timber ... Fast growing conifers, thinned regularly, remain the most efficient woodland type in delivering carbon benefits and coping with climate change.”⁴⁸

44. However, as a result of reduced woodland planting (especially coniferous trees), BSW Timber and Jonathan Cryer (RSPB) believed that Wales is missing out on the opportunity to maximise the benefits of carbon sequestration.

45. Bangor University suggested that a life cycle assessment should be undertaken to understand the full net impact of forest management and products on climate change mitigation. Wales Environment Link (WEL) and RSPB similarly noted that the end use of timber products should be factored in when considering the contribution forestry can make to responding to climate change. Jonathan Cryer (RSPB) said:

“... when we talk about carbon, it’s important to factor in the end use of the timber as well. Broadleaf trees will be there for a longer period of time, but they do accumulate the carbon much more slowly [than coniferous trees]. But, over a longer term, the carbon benefits could balance out, particularly based on the end use of the timber ... I think, with the kind of planting we’re seeing at the moment, it’s such a small scale that it’s going to have limited carbon benefits anyway. If we do want full carbon benefits, then we do need more planting...”⁴⁹

Managing flood risk

46. Trees and woodlands regulate stormwater by intercepting and storing rainfall on their leaves, which either subsequently evaporates, or reaches rivers and groundwater more slowly. Trees also improve infiltration into the soil by channelling water onto pervious surfaces around the trunk, and through the soil along root channels. Trees with large trunks, a high leaf area to surface area ratio, and multiple layers of branching are thus particularly beneficial.

⁴⁷ Forestry Commission, [Delivery of ecosystem services by urban forests](#), 2017

⁴⁸ Tilhill Forestry written evidence

⁴⁹ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 44

47. The Forestry Commission and Environment Agency report “Woodland for Water”⁵⁰ suggested there is a good case for riparian and floodplain woodland mitigating downstream flooding, whilst the Forestry Commission research report⁵¹ suggested that corridors of trees located adjacent to rivers or roads can be effective in urban areas. Similar points were made in the Woodland Trust’s report *Holding Back the Waters*:

“... management of flooding caused by excessive rainfall is most effective if the rainwater is managed where it falls, rather than where it floods ... [though] interception by trees in urban areas can be critical in reducing the pressure on the drainage system and lowering the risk of surface water flooding.”⁵²

48. The Woodland Trust pointed to the success of the Pontbren Scheme in Powys, whereby farmers have worked together to plant trees and hedges and create ponds in order to reduce run-off.

49. However, the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) and the WSAP stated that not enough is being done to realise the flood alleviation potential of woodlands due to a lack of clear incentives. Bangor University added that there is still insufficient evidence “about which types of woodland, in which locations, would have the greatest net benefit for flood risk mitigation”.⁵³

NRW’s position

50. NRW’s paper drew attention to the Committee on Climate Change’s Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) 2017 Evidence Report⁵⁴ which set out risks and opportunities for woodlands in a changing climate.

51. Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) highlighted the successful example of Greener Grangetown⁵⁵ whereby NRW is working with Cardiff City Council and Welsh Water to increase tree cover and reduce surface water run-off in a densely populated urban environment. However, other local planning authorities do not always follow NRW’s recommendations regarding tree planting or sustainable urban drainage.⁵⁶

Welsh Government’s position

52. The Cabinet Secretary’s paper stressed the important role trees can play in carbon sequestration. It also stated that the Welsh Government will be looking at proposals to ‘scale up’ woodland planting as part of the process for developing its Low Carbon Delivery Plan by spring 2019.

Our view

Trees and woodlands act as a nature-based solution to tackling the effects of climate change, both by sequestering carbon and by helping to manage flood risk in both urban and rural areas.

Unfortunately, the lack of planting has reduced the ability of Wales to use new woodland as a tool to mitigate against climate change. We note the Welsh Government’s commitment to look at proposals to ‘scale up’ woodland planting as part of the process for developing its Low Carbon Delivery Plan by

⁵⁰ Forestry Commission and Environment Agency, *Woodland for Water*, 2011

⁵¹ Forestry Commission, *Delivery of ecosystem services by urban forests*, 2017

⁵² Woodland Trust, *Holding Back the Waters*, 2014

⁵³ Bangor University written evidence

⁵⁴ Committee on Climate Change, *UK Climate Change Risk Assessment Evidence Report: Summary for Wales*, 2017

⁵⁵ *Greener Grangetown*

⁵⁶ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 185

spring 2019, and encourage the wider adoption of the Woodland Carbon Code. Further detail is needed from Welsh Government about how this will be achieved.

Adaptation to the increased risk of flooding also requires a greater focus on planting more trees, especially upstream of flood-prone environments and in urban areas. The Welsh Government must provide clear incentives and guidance for land owners and managers to plant trees for this purpose, and to develop and introduce Payments for Ecosystem Services schemes. We believe that the refreshed Woodlands for Wales strategy must explicitly encourage the planting of trees and woodlands to help manage flood risk.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies in Wales to adopt more long-term thinking and to address issues such as climate change. Woodlands are ideally placed to deliver both the aspirations of the Act and to help tackle climate change. The revised strategy should aim to encourage Public Services Boards to promote woodland creation and sustainable drainage in their Local Wellbeing Plans.

Recommendations

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government must specify how it will use trees and woodlands as a nature-based solution to flooding, and facilitate expansion of the Woodland Carbon Code.

03. Woodlands for people

This chapter explores how well the Welsh Government’s strategy is meeting its objectives to increase the number of people benefitting from trees and woodlands in terms of: quality of life in urban areas; community engagement; lifelong learning and health and wellbeing. The Woodlands for Wales Indicators 2015-16⁵⁷ showed that public perception, community involvement, and use of woodlands for recreation are all improving. We heard that good progress has been made under this theme of the strategy; however there is still room for improvement.

Trees in and near to urban areas

53. The Woodland Trust, Wildlife Trusts Wales (WTW) and others set out the benefits of trees in and near to urban areas. The Woodland Trust said:

“The trees which have the greatest positive impact on people are probably those in our towns and cities. Compelling international evidence demonstrates the massive health and well-being benefits afforded by tree-filled green space.”⁵⁸

54. However, WTW highlighted the recent decline in tree cover in Wales’ towns and cities. The Woodland Trust drew attention to a petition⁵⁹ submitted to the National Assembly for Wales in January 2016 calling on support for the principle that every town and city in Wales should benefit from a minimum 20% tree canopy cover. The **Cabinet Secretary responded⁶⁰ to the petition** in October 2016 without committing to further action and saying there was already a large body of research and information supporting the benefits of planting trees in urban areas. The Petitions Committee discussed it on 11 July 2017, concluding that the Cabinet Secretary should commit to using Area Statements⁶¹ to increase tree canopy cover in priority urban areas.

55. Forest Research has also recently called on decision-makers in England’s towns and cities to set a minimum tree canopy cover target of 20%.⁶² This follows the publication of a Forestry Commission research report which set out delivery indicators for urban forest ecosystem service provision.⁶³

56. WTW and the Woodland Trust mentioned the i-Tree Eco surveys⁶⁴ carried out in Wrexham, Bridgend and the Tawe catchment that quantify the ecosystem services provided by urban trees, including flood mitigation, air quality improvement and carbon sequestration. This information can be used to inform local tree management strategies and urban planning policies, as has been the case in Wrexham.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ [Woodlands for Wales Indicators 2015-16](#)

⁵⁸ Woodland Trust written evidence

⁵⁹ [Trees in Towns petition](#)

⁶⁰ [Cabinet Secretary’s response to the petition](#)

⁶¹ Area Statement are required under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to be published by NRW and/or public bodies by 2019. Their purpose is to identify the risks, priorities and opportunities for natural resource management within an area.

⁶² [The Canopy Cover of England’s Towns and Cities](#)

⁶³ Forestry Commission, [Delivery of ecosystem services by urban forests](#), 2017

⁶⁴ [i-Tree Eco surveys](#)

⁶⁵ Wrexham County Borough Council, [Wrexham Tree & Woodland Strategy 2016–2026 \(PDF 3,251 KB\)](#)

57. WTW, RSPB and WEL suggested that the need to plant urban trees should be addressed through Local Well-being Plans⁶⁶ and Area Statements.

Support for community woodland groups

58. The term “community woodland” refers to any woodland where the local community has some degree of control over how the woodland is run or managed. They are usually supported by a community woodland group and may be owned or leased by the community group, or managed in partnership with another organisation (usually the landowner). Around 27% of community woodland groups own their woodland, while over 70% care for the woodland through a management agreement with the owner. Around 59% of community woodlands in Wales are located on local authority owned land.⁶⁷

59. Several respondents were supportive of community woodland groups, such as those within the Llais y Goedwig network. WEL, WTW and the Youth Hostels Association advocated for enhanced funding for Llais y Goedwig.

60. Stakeholders who participated in the workshop in Maesteg echoed the view, that Llais y Goedwig and NRW were underfunded in terms of supporting community woodland projects. There was also a feeling that it is difficult for communities to manage community woodlands effectively if they do not own the land.

61. Frances Winder (Woodland Trust) told the Committee that there is a lack of advice available for small scale and community woodland managers:

“... there are far more people out there who are willing to do [woodland management] than who have the woods either close to them or have the ability to do it. If we could upskill them, they would be able to do it.”⁶⁸

62. However, in correspondence to the committee, Martin Bishop (Confor) stated that he did not accept this premise, and listed the range of advice sources.⁶⁹

Woodlands and community regeneration

63. Members of the Committee discussed the potential role of forestry and woodlands in contributing to the regeneration of former mining communities in the south Wales valleys. One possible route is through the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, which operates across Great Britain, and in Wales is funded by the Welsh Government. Its mission statement is:

“To champion and strengthen coalfield communities, generate resources to respond to their needs and deliver programmes that make a positive and lasting difference.”⁷⁰

64. Two successful examples of woodland creation contributing to community regeneration in former mining areas are provided below.

⁶⁶ Local Well-being Plans are required under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to be published by Public Services Boards by May 2018 (and no later than 12 months following an ordinary local government election). Their purpose is to help the boards achieve the well-being goals for their areas.

⁶⁷ Llais y Goedwig, [Community Woodlands](#)

⁶⁸ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 71

⁶⁹ Letter from Confor, 6 July 2017!

⁷⁰ [The Coalfields Regeneration Trust](#)

The Spirit of Llynfi Woodland⁷¹

NRW is working with the communities in the Upper Llynfi Valley to restore the former Coegnant Colliery and Maesteg Washery sites into a new community woodland. Local residents, community groups and schools have all been involved in tree planting, as well as contributing ideas about what they want to see at the site, for example fruit trees and cycling trails. The project's main driver is the health and wellbeing of the surrounding communities (which have a life expectancy 20 years shorter than people in nearby Bridgend), as well as environmental benefits such as reducing flood risk and promoting biodiversity.

England's National Forest⁷²

The National Forest is located in central England, and is run by the National Forest Company. Since 1995, over eight million trees have been planted across 200 square miles in an area that was in need of regeneration after the end of coal mining. Funding from Defra has enabled woodland cover to increase from 6% in 1991 to more than 20% by 2016, with 86% of this being accessible to the public.

Woodlands and lifelong learning

65. WEL stated that policies should provide opportunities for people to gain experience of woodland wildlife, to get involved in conservation and woodland management, and to benefit physically and psychologically from doing so.

66. At the stakeholder workshop in Maesteg, it was suggested that there should be a mechanism for lifelong engagement. The Mosaic Wales⁷³ project was cited as a positive example of this; however funding for the project was only short-term.

67. The Woodland Trust, WEL and YHA called for every child to have the opportunity to plant trees through the National Curriculum. WEL stated:

“The educational value of woodland must be materialised together with the provision or retention of interpretation centres in appropriate forest areas. Budgets from health, education, infrastructure, tourism and business ought to contribute.”⁷⁴

68. Stakeholders in Maesteg suggested that there is a need to make woodlands “cool” again to engage with young people, and that the Welsh Baccalaureate work with community groups should be maintained. Schools and universities were not seen as being involved enough with their local woodlands and wider countryside; however, a positive example was given of Communities First working with NRW to take a group of Year 6 pupils to the Spirit of Llynfi Woodland. The pupils were encouraged to say what they would like to see in the woodland and to write poetry. Some of the pupils' ideas, such as dog trails, have been put in place.

⁷¹ [The Spirit of Llynfi Woodland](#)

⁷² [The National Forest](#)

⁷³ The [Mosaic Wales](#) project ran between 2012-2015 and supported people from black and minority ethnic groups (BME) living in Wales' towns and cities to learn about National Parks and promote them to others in their community.

⁷⁴ Wales Environment Link written evidence

Access to woodlands for recreation

69. The Woodland Trust emphasised that “whilst timber value is substantial, the Office for National statistics calculates the recreational value of woods to be 10 times higher”.⁷⁵

70. During the workshop at Maesteg, stakeholders said that NRW’s approach to managing access to public woodlands varies from area to area and a more strategic approach would bring a number of benefits:

- Increased access opportunities for all user groups (based on principles rather than a zonal approach);
- Opening up areas of woodland that are currently underused;
- Reduced trespassing and illegal activities, through provision of access where there is demand and self-policing by users;
- Increased access for disabled people and those recovering from health conditions; and
- Increased revenue for NRW as some user groups, e.g. those involved with motorised vehicles and shooting, are happy to pay for access.⁷⁶

71. Suggestions for addressing issues of access to woodlands in future included: reflecting this in Area Statements and Local Well-being Plans; and incentivising land managers to improve access to their land as part of a post-Brexit land management payment scheme.

72. The Youth Hostel Association (YHA) stated that it had located hostels near woodlands in recognition of their recreational benefits, and called on the Welsh Government to ensure that private woodland owners maintain public rights of way to a high standard.

Conflicts between different user groups

73. FUW highlighted examples of antisocial behaviour in woodland areas:

“... the detrimental impact visitors to the countryside were having on the well-being of others, as reported recently in terms of damage to footpaths and litter in National Parks, and fly-tipping. As such, it was felt that a Wales-wide policy to educate the general public and younger generation regarding the impacts of such actions should be implemented.”⁷⁷

74. The British Horse Society (BHS) stated that all user groups should be consulted when proposed developments (e.g. new mountain bike trails) are considered in NRW woodlands.

75. Despite the potential for conflict between horse riders, cyclists, walkers and other woodland users, there was much consensus between the user groups. At the stakeholder workshop held in Maesteg, the different users showed an understanding of the needs of others and believed that an approach based on principles and self-policing would facilitate more access overall, rather than zoning land for different recreational uses.

⁷⁵ Woodland Trust written evidence

⁷⁶ User groups such as walkers, horse riders and cyclists already have access rights to public woodlands – there is no suggestion that they should pay.

⁷⁷ Farmers’ Union of Wales written evidence

76. However, the user groups did point to a problem with illegal activities, such as motor vehicle use, mountain biking or shooting. They suggested that this could be addressed through a strategic approach to more and better managed access.

NRW's position

77. NRW also referred to the three i-Tree Eco surveys carried out in Wales, as well as its Tree Cover in Wales' Towns and Cities report.⁷⁸ NRW emphasised the importance of understanding the extent, nature and trend of urban forests in Wales:

“There is just 1% of urban tree cover to be found in modern high density housing, which is often in our most deprived wards where more tree cover could provide health and well-being benefits.”⁷⁹

78. Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) added that NRW had recommended to the Welsh Government⁸⁰ that urban trees lost to development are replaced. However, NRW had no power to enforce this.⁸¹ NRW also said that their Tree Cover study should inform the activities of Local Authorities and Public Services Boards.

79. In terms of the support and guidance available to community woodland groups, Peter Garson (NRW) said:

“I think it is helpful to improve the guidance and to give some case studies that give a bit of inspiration. There is some work going on with Llais y Goedwig and NRW to try to develop a better set of guidance... I think the Maesteg project at Llynfi does demonstrate that, if you put that time into developing a dialogue, you can get some really great results.”⁸²

80. He added that other “priority woodland locations” close to deprived communities would benefit from similar initiatives, but the cost of restoring brownfield sites requires additional support from other sectors, for example the Spirit of Llynfi woodland had received additional support from Ford.⁸³

81. NRW highlighted that the Welsh Government's consultation on the sustainable management of natural resources,⁸⁴ and proposed White Paper on Access Reform included a proposal to extend NRW's power to delegate its forest management functions to others (e.g. local communities). NRW agreed with stakeholder comments about anti-social behaviour, raising concern about increasing numbers of illegal mountain bike trails (known as wild trails) and illegal off-roading activity, particularly in the South Wales valleys.

⁷⁸ NRW, [Tree Cover in Wales' Towns and Cities \(PDF 2,199 KB\)](#), 2016

⁷⁹ Natural Resources Wales written evidence

⁸⁰ Through a response to the Welsh Governments' [consultation](#) on new regulatory approaches to the sustainable management of natural resources in Wales.

⁸¹ CCERA, 6 July 2017, paras 171 and 173

⁸² CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 145

⁸³ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 147

⁸⁴ The [consultation](#) (open from 21 June until 13 September 2017) seeks views on new regulatory approaches to the sustainable management of natural resources in Wales.

Welsh Government's position

82. The Cabinet Secretary also drew attention to the NRW study “Tree Cover in Towns and Cities” which showed average urban canopy cover in Wales to have fallen from 16.8% in 2009 to 16.3% in 2013. The Cabinet Secretary said this work provided a baseline to plan targeted action, and suggested that over 35% of land in major towns could theoretically be planted with trees. The study results had been shared with Public Services Boards and others to influence local plans including the development of Local Well-being Plans.

83. The Cabinet Secretary reiterated these points in oral evidence and added that:

“Everywhere where we have, as I say, new roads, new housing developments, new parks, for instance, I think we should make sure that there is a significant [number of trees planted]. So, I’m looking to maybe issue guidance to local authorities going forward.”⁸⁵

84. The Cabinet Secretary set out the health and well-being benefits of woodlands, describing the Welsh Government woodland estate as a “huge recreational asset”.⁸⁶ This should be improved further by proposals to increase the range of activities on Access Land and Public Rights of Way as set out in the Welsh Government’s consultation on the sustainable management of natural resources.⁸⁷ These include creating a new type of public right of way, ‘cycle paths’, which would prioritise cycling and walking, and allowing (with appropriate authority) organised cycle racing on bridleways. However, no such legislation relating to access issues was announced in the Welsh Government’s legislative programme.

85. The Cabinet Secretary said that a consultation on access reform could potentially be launched, but that the priority for future legislation within her portfolio would likely be Agriculture and Fisheries Bills.⁸⁸ She also said that she would consider the possibility of introducing licenses for ‘noisy’ users to access public woodlands. Regarding initiatives like the National Forest in England and the potential to create something similar in the south Wales valleys, the Cabinet Secretary suggested she was open to such radical thinking.⁸⁹

86. The Cabinet Secretary explained that the Welsh Government had provided core funding for Llais y Goedwig since 2016 and said she would look to increase funding for small community woodland groups from 2018.⁹⁰

Our view

Urban trees

Trees in and near to urban areas have substantial environmental, social and economic benefits, including direct and indirect improvements to people’s health, wellbeing and quality of life. The Welsh Government must address the declining trend in urban tree canopy cover across Wales, and set out a plan to achieve at least 20% tree cover in each of Wales’ towns and cities by 2030. There is a need to

⁸⁵ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 353

⁸⁶ Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

⁸⁷ Welsh Government consultation on “[Taking forward Wales’ sustainable management of natural resources](#)” (June – September 2017)

⁸⁸ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 333

⁸⁹ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 301

⁹⁰ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 348

increase urban tree canopy cover – especially in priority areas where canopy cover is low – and this should also be addressed through Local Well-being Plans and Area Statements.

However, increasing canopy cover is just the start. In order to increase provision of ecosystem services in our towns and cities – to address issues such as flooding, air pollution, and physical and mental health issues – it is necessary to ensure that the right trees are planted and managed in the right places. We welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s commitment to issue guidance to local planning authorities on planting and replacing urban trees, and recommend that this draws on research undertaken by the Forestry Commission⁹¹ and others⁹².

Community engagement and regeneration

We welcome the Welsh Government’s intention to increase funding for small community woodland groups, and work that is already underway with NRW and Llais y Goedwig to improve guidance (including case study examples) for these groups. We also support the proposal to extend NRW’s power to delegate its forest management functions to local communities.

We believe that forestry and woodlands have a significant role to play in regenerating the former mining communities of the south Wales valleys. As such, we welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s willingness to consider ‘radical’ initiatives such as a Welsh ‘National Forest’, and suggest that she looks into this further. We hope that woodland regeneration can be pursued more vigorously by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust across Wales. We also encourage linking regeneration policies with other initiatives in Area Statements and Local Wellbeing Plans.

Regarding education, the Welsh Government should ensure that tree planting and woodland education is incorporated into the National Curriculum, and extend its support of the Welsh Baccalaureate work with community groups.

Access and recreation

The recreational value of woodland is substantial; however there are still many woodlands that are inaccessible to the public, and various groups of people that are marginalised. We encourage NRW to open up areas the public woodland estate that are currently underused, and to focus on promoting and improving access for disabled people, deprived communities and minority ethnic groups. In terms of privately owned woodlands, we support the use of Payment for Ecosystem Services schemes to incentivise land owners to enable recreational access to their land.

In the absence of new legislation on access reform, we encourage NRW to be proactive regarding extending and better managing woodland access. For example, where appropriate, we recommend opening up woodlands to licensed, and therefore paid, use by groups engaging in noisy or high-speed activities such as shooting and use of motorised vehicles. Not only will this increase woodland revenue, but it should also reduce illegal use of woodlands elsewhere.

⁹¹ Forestry Commission, [Delivery of ecosystem services by urban forests](#), 2017

⁹² [Challenges for tree officers to enhance the provision of regulating ecosystem services from urban forests](#)

Recommendations

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government must commit to ensuring a minimum of 20% urban tree canopy cover, to be addressed through Local Well-being Plans and Area Statements.

Recommendation 5. Woodlands can be an effective tool for regeneration and engaging local communities. The Welsh Government must harness this and, as a starting point, should:

- Increase support to community woodland groups.
- Assess the potential of developing a National Forest Company to help regenerate the south Wales valleys.
- Ensure that woodland education is incorporated into education policies.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government must extend and better manage access to public woodlands, especially for marginalised groups. NRW should examine options for recovering costs from user groups for certain recreational activities in the woodlands it manages.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should clarify its timetable for bringing forward proposals on access reform.

04. A competitive and integrated forest sector

This chapter considers how well the Welsh Government’s strategy is meeting its objectives to: improve the integration and competitiveness of the forest sector; increase the amount of Welsh-grown timber used in Wales; and ensure a thriving, skilled workforce. Responses from the commercial forestry sector emphasised that the sector is competitive and has significant growth potential; however this is jeopardised by the low level of tree planting, investment and skills.

Potential for growth

87. Hamish McLeod (BSW Timber) noted that British sawmilling has “been an exceptionally successful sector”⁹³ but that there is no rationale for further investment in Welsh sawmilling capacity while planting and restocking rates are so low.

88. The commercial forestry sector commented that Wales has great potential to improve self-sufficiency in timber production post-Brexit. Confor stated:

“The UK is the third largest importer of wood products in the world, we already have a huge market for the products right next door to Wales without having to access the single EU market... Wales produced 1.6m cu m of roundwood in 2015, just 6% of the UK demand so there is a massive market opportunity for Wales to exploit.”⁹⁴

89. BSW Timber added that:

“...there is opportunity to expand market penetration of locally produced timber in local construction. For example, Powys County Council... are to be commended for introducing a Wood Encouragement Policy whereby they will ensure that all briefs for new Council housing projects incorporate the requirement to use wood where it is deemed suitable and cost effective.”⁹⁵

90. However, the Farmers’ Union of Wales (FUW) expressed concern “that there is no current supply chain for the production of timber”,⁹⁶ and recommended that this is explored in more detail as an opportunity post-Brexit. Professor Elizabeth Robinson (Reading University) added that there will be trade-offs involved in replacing imported with home-grown timber, as the latter may be more expensive.

Conflicts between forestry and farming

91. Evidence submitted to this inquiry, and the Committee’s inquiry into the future of land management,⁹⁷ highlighted a tension between the forestry and agriculture sectors when it comes to prioritising rural land use, particularly in marginal areas. The Woodland Trust suggested that “separate agriculture and forestry policy have undermined each other in key ways”.⁹⁸

⁹³ CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 245

⁹⁴ Confor written evidence

⁹⁵ BSW Timber written evidence

⁹⁶ Farmers’ Union of Wales written evidence

⁹⁷ CCERA Committee, [Future of Land Management in Wales](#) (PDF, 2.9 MB), March 2017

⁹⁸ Woodland Trust written evidence

92. However, the CLA suggested that Wales should seize the opportunity for a more joined up land management approach:

“The cultural identity of rural Wales is fundamentally based on farming, and the forestry community needs to establish how to integrate with this structure. We must stop setting forestry against farming, it does not have to be an either/or situation, many farmers are already also woodland owners. The farming sector needs to look at the benefits that forestry, especially collaborative planting and management, can deliver to their existing farm businesses to improve resilience and potentially provide additional income streams. Forestry and farming must learn to work alongside each other again and government must provide the knowledge, advice and support to break down barriers and deliver beneficial, sustainable land use change.”⁹⁹

Skills, training and research

93. Tilhill Forestry and Confor emphasised the technological advancements within the sector which offer a full range of employment opportunities from semi-skilled to highly skilled labour, as well as technical and senior management roles. However, they were concerned that there are not enough young people with the right skills to take up these opportunities, and would like the Welsh Government’s support to remedy this. The RFS and WSAP also shared these concerns. WSAP in particular:

“... would like to see NRW expanding its apprentice scheme, offering sandwich year placements and reviving the former forest education programme of Forestry Commission Wales.”¹⁰⁰

94. In terms of more manual work, for example tree planting, it is becoming more difficult to recruit. David Edwards (Tilhill Forestry) said:

“Going down to the people who are actually physically doing the work on the ground, again, there’s an ageing population and it’s about trying to encourage people to come in and do the work. Tree planting is not a particularly attractive job.”¹⁰¹

95. Bangor University said better integration between commercial, research and educational organisations would make the sector more competitive, and add much greater value to products harvested from Welsh forests.

96. RFS stated that forestry research must be coordinated across the UK and internationally, and was concerned that the ability of scientists in Wales to participate in relevant research projects may be affected once the UK leaves the EU. Alec Dauncey (Bangor University) said a more bottom-up effort may be needed post Brexit.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ CLA written evidence

¹⁰⁰ WSAP written evidence

¹⁰¹ CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 324

¹⁰² CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 175

NRW's position

97. NRW supported the view of the commercial forestry sector that Welsh wood processing has great potential to add value to Wales' economy.

98. NRW also agreed with stakeholders that declining numbers of foresters and woodland managers with professional and specialist skills in Wales is a concern. In oral evidence, NRW said it had worked with Farming and Forestry Connect to educate land managers; with the Chartered Institute of Foresters to offer field trips to young people; and had supported Forest Schools by training the Forest School leaders. NRW also said that the Trees and Timber Apprenticeship was oversubscribed, and could be expanded in future.

Welsh Government's position

99. The Cabinet Secretary said that the Welsh Government would like:

“A strong focus on improving processing and added value within supply chains to improve competitiveness; and

An increased market share of home produced timber and less reliance on imports.”¹⁰³

100. The Cabinet Secretary also described the benefits of using Welsh-produced timber in construction:

“... the increased use of timber will help to deliver the domestic supply chain to meet demands of the construction sector for a sustainable supply of raw material... The shorter travelling distance reduces the amount of emissions produced during its transport and finally the absorbed carbon in the form of timber can then be locked up for a very long time in a wide range of construction uses.”¹⁰⁴

101. The Cabinet Secretary said that changing the building regulations to promote the use of timber in construction is a possibility¹⁰⁵ and added that she would discuss this in more detail with Woodknowledge Wales¹⁰⁶ and the Structural Timber Association¹⁰⁷.

102. In terms of some of the cultural barriers to planting within farming communities, the Cabinet Secretary said that the advisory network supporting farmers needed to take account of the benefits of tree planting. As an example, the Cabinet Secretary mentioned the Sheep and Trees Forestry Grant Package¹⁰⁸ that had recently been introduced in Scotland. The grant provided funding for both woodland creation and road building on the same piece of land at the same time, whilst

¹⁰³ Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

¹⁰⁴ Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

¹⁰⁵ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 292

¹⁰⁶ [Woodknowledge Wales](#) is focused on the development of companies and organisations involved in the supply, demand and use of wood in Wales.

¹⁰⁷ The [Structural Timber Association](#) aims to drive quality and product innovation in the structural timber sector.

¹⁰⁸ The [Sheep and Trees Forestry Grant Package](#) was launched by Forestry Commission Scotland at the Royal Highland Show in June 2017. It follows on from [research undertaken at Bangor University](#) which shows that sheep are more likely to survive extreme weather conditions if they are provided with shelter in the form of trees, shrubs and hedgerows.

simultaneously maintaining stock numbers and Basic Payment Scheme rates. The Cabinet Secretary said that she was considering introducing such a grant in Wales.¹⁰⁹

103. The Cabinet Secretary agreed with stakeholders about the need to encourage more young people to pursue careers in forestry, and had discussed this with the Minister for Skills and Science and with Bangor University.¹¹⁰ She drew attention to the Welsh Government's Focus on Forestry First¹¹¹ project, and said she would consider the possibility of introducing apprenticeships to support the training needs of the forestry and agriculture sectors.¹¹²

Our view

Constraints on the sector

The British sawmilling sector is one of the most technically advanced in Europe, but with planting and restocking rates so low, investment in sawmilling capacity is leaving Wales and moving to Scotland. We are greatly concerned about the impact this, along with the declining supply of softwood, will have on the future of Welsh sawmilling, and also on our rural communities.

We are also concerned at the lack of restocking and woodland creation on NRW managed land and the reducing scale of commercial forestry operations by NRW. Given the significant shortfall in woodland planting towards the annual 5,000 ha target, and the desire to increase production of home-grown timber, we are concerned that the Welsh Government and NRW are not practising what they preach.

Another constraint on the sector is the long-standing cultural divide between forestry and agriculture. The Welsh Government must use Brexit as an opportunity to bring the two sectors together, including promoting the commercial and other benefits of woodlands within the farming community. We are pleased at the Cabinet Secretary's commitment to this, and support the introduction of a 'Sheep and Trees' grant in Wales.

Like the farming sector, forestry is also suffering from an ageing workforce, with young people seemingly unaware of the broad range of technical, planning and managerial roles available in the sector. The Welsh Government should address this by reviving the forest education programme; expanding NRW's Trees and Timber Apprenticeship scheme; extending the Focus on Forestry First project; promoting qualifications such as the City & Guilds diploma in Forestry and Arboriculture; and ensuring that careers advice in schools promotes rural as well as urban employment opportunities.

Potential for growth

Wales currently supplies just 6% of the timber demanded in the UK each year, with the UK importing substantial quantities from abroad. Provided the shortfall in afforestation can be addressed, we believe Wales has a fantastic opportunity to meet substantially more of this demand, and to become increasingly self-sufficient in timber production and less reliant on imports.

¹⁰⁹ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 295

¹¹⁰ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 313

¹¹¹ **Focus on Forestry First** is a three year project funded by the Welsh Government and the EU that supports new and existing businesses in the forestry sector to build upon their skill and knowledge base.

¹¹² CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 317

The push for increased sustainability in construction and reduced carbon footprints in the UK and beyond means that demand for home-grown timber is set to rise substantially. We commend Powys County Council for introducing a Wood Encouragement Policy, and we encourage all local authorities to take a similar approach. As such, we support the Cabinet Secretary's willingness to consider changing the Building Regulations to promote the use of timber in construction.

Overall, we commend the intention of the Cabinet Secretary to address the barriers faced by the commercial forestry sector. We feel this should be driven by a substantial change to the Woodlands for Wales strategy, with far greater focus placed on the economic and sustainability benefits of well managed commercial forestry. We also encourage the Welsh Government and NRW to engage in more open public-private-third sector partnerships to improve communication within, and the perception of, the commercial forestry sector.

Recommendations

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government must address the constraints on the commercial forestry sector, in particular by:

- Facilitating coniferous woodland creation and commercial operations on both public and private land.
- Promoting to the farming community the commercial and other benefits of planting trees on agricultural land, and enabling farmers to do this through additional, simple and flexible grant payments.
- Providing and promoting training in forestry, woodland management and woodland planning.

Recommendation 9. The potential for growth in the commercial forestry sector should be actively supported by Welsh Government. In particular it should:

- Agree with the forestry sector ambitious targets for Wales to become increasingly self-sufficient in timber production and less reliant on imports.
- Consider changing the building regulations to promote the use of timber in construction.

05. Environmental quality

The Woodland for Wales strategy seeks to improve the condition and management of woodlands; improve the health and resilience of woodland ecosystems, and unlock the potential in woodlands and trees to sustain long-term delivery of a wide variety of high quality ecosystem goods and services. However, according to the State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) “around 40% of Wales’ woodlands [80,000 ha] have little or no management which reduces their resilience and ability to provide well-being benefits”.¹¹³ This chapter discusses woodland management, tree health, conifer plantations, ancient woodlands, and the principle of planting “the right trees in the right places”.

Woodland management

104. The SoNaRR report revealed that the overall conservation status of designated woodland habitats in Wales (representing around 5% of all Wales’ woodland) remains unfavourable, but this is improving in response to targeted management actions.

105. Outside of designated sites, respondents including FUW, the National Parks Authorities (NPAs), WEL and RSPB expressed concern at the lack of woodland management in Wales. This is a particular concern for privately owned woodlands, because since the removal of the Glastir Woodland Management scheme, there has been no specific financial support mechanism to secure biodiversity or other environmental outcomes. The NPAs stated:

“...reversing the fortunes of woodland biodiversity and developing our native broadleaved woodlands to deliver their full range of potential benefits will require a step change in the rate of introduction of traditional woodland management into privately owned woodlands.”¹¹⁴

106. However, David Edwards (Tilhill Forestry) suggested that funding for management in coniferous woodlands is not necessary:

“I think grants are good for woodland creation, but in terms of ongoing management—some of my colleagues might shoot me for this, but, generally, forestry is getting by without grants in terms of growing commercial crops that the processors want and delivering all the other multiple benefits that come along with commercial forestry.”¹¹⁵

107. Regarding the 80,000 ha of unmanaged woodlands quoted in the SoNaRR report, and the reason for the lack of management, Martin Bishop (Confor) stated:

“I would urge caution with that figure as we have no reliable means to measure that, it is a very old figure anyway... We do know that most, 95% I think, of commercial softwood is managed so it is the broadleaved resource that is not managed. Much of this is small scale farm woodlands and this small scale is probably the reason for non-management.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³ NRW, *State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR)*, 2016

¹¹⁴ The National Parks Authorities written evidence

¹¹⁵ CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 291

¹¹⁶ Confor follow-up correspondence

108. WEL, RSPB and WTW stated that Woodlands for Wales should be updated to take account of the concept of “sustainable management of natural resources” in line with the new legislative framework established in the Environment Act.

109. In terms of commercial woodlands, WEL would like “adequate minimum standards for ecologically sustainable timber production”,¹¹⁷ through full implementation of the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS),¹¹⁸ and by encouraging take-up of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS)¹¹⁹.

110. Tilhill Forestry’s paper stated that:

“Modern forests managed as a minimum to the UKFS and often to the more exacting UKWAS make a positive contribution to biodiversity and landscapes with limits on the proportion of single species and the promotion of open space, native broadleaves, natural reserves and long term retentions.”¹²⁰

111. However, Frances Winder (Woodland Trust) and Jonathan Cryer (RSPB) stressed that there was little monitoring of compliance with the UKFS, and that it was unenforceable and frequently ignored.¹²¹

112. David Edwards (Tihill Forestry) responded to this by stating that compliance with the UKFS is monitored when there is an intervention in the woodland that requires permission from NRW,¹²² i.e. when planting or felling, whilst the higher standard, the UKWAS, is subject to regular independent auditing. Hamish MacLeod (BSW Timber) added that there is a commercial imperative to manage forests to the UKWAS standard, as Forestry Stewardship Council certification of wood products requires it.¹²³

Tree health

113. WEL set out the extent of the impact of Larch Disease (*Phytophthora ramorum*), and emphasised the need for continued efforts to tackle the disease. WEL also discussed Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). It stated that the planting of infected imported seedlings exacerbated the spread of the disease, and recommended that in future there should be more new woodland creation through natural regeneration, or using home grown stock.

114. Frances Winder (Woodland Trust) told the Committee that NRW’s approach to tackling both diseases could be clearer. Regarding Ash Dieback she said that NRW had not yet tackled the issue of supporting woodland owners in replacing the felled ash trees.¹²⁴ On Larch Disease she expressed concern that “forestry contractors, who never cleaned any of their equipment” had contributed to

¹¹⁷ Wales Environment Link written evidence

¹¹⁸ **UKFS** is the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK. The UKFS (supported by a series of guidelines on biodiversity, climate change, historic environment, landscape, people, soil, and water) outlines the context for forestry in the UK. It sets out the approach of the UK and devolved governments to sustainable forest management, defines standards and requirements, and provides a basis for regulation and monitoring.

¹¹⁹ **UKWAS** is complementary to the UKFS. It provides a common audit standard for independent certification that woodlands in the UK are in sustainable management. UKWAS was first published in 2000 and the third (and current) edition was published in 2012.

¹²⁰ Tilhill Forestry written evidence

¹²¹ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 50

¹²² CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 344

¹²³ CCERA, 14 June 2017, para 352

¹²⁴ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 108

the spread of the disease, and surmised that perhaps NRW had not given the sector sufficient advice.¹²⁵

115. In correspondence with the Committee, Martin Bishop (Confor) criticised the “standard thinking” that forests can be made more resilient to disease by planting a range of species. He pointed out that such practice “removes the forest’s ability to pay for its own management as it is almost impossible to harvest products from a diverse woodland economically”.¹²⁶ Instead he suggested that diversification happens at a wider scale, with a mosaic of different blocks of woodland (each comprising mainly single species and age classes) being linked together. In this way,

“...areas designated for commercial crops would be large enough to harvest economically and native broadleaved areas would be large enough to provide biodiversity.”¹²⁷

Conifer plantations and clear felling

116. While recognising that conifer plantations are the last refuge of some iconic Welsh wildlife such as red squirrels and black grouse, some respondents described the negative impacts these plantations can have on environmental quality. WTW said:

“...coniferous forests have had many significant detrimental adverse impacts upon the quality of the Welsh environment, ecosystems services and biodiversity. Many important habitats have been lost directly, and/or been highly fragmented, by past conversion to forestry plantation. ‘Low grade agricultural land’ is particularly at risk because it is often targeted for afforestation but tends to be the best areas for existing biodiversity or ecosystem service provision e.g. peatland and carbon sequestration.”¹²⁸

117. The Continuous Cover Forestry Group advocated against the clear felling of even-aged plantations in favour of selective felling to create structurally, visually and biologically diverse woodlands. It said this approach need not be more costly than clear fell management. Frances Winder (Woodland Trust) agreed with this point.¹²⁹

118. However, Martin Bishop (Confor) argued that a mix of coniferous and broadleaved trees, and a mix of continuous cover forestry and clear felling is required.

Protecting ancient trees and woodlands

119. The RFS and WSAP expressed concern over the state of Wales’ ancient woodlands. WSAP said:

“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.”¹³⁰

120. Respondents generally supported the goal of restoring Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) by removing non-native, often commercial, tree species. However there is concern at the slow

¹²⁵ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 111

¹²⁶ Confor follow-up correspondence

¹²⁷ Letter from Martin Bishop, Confor, 6 July 2017

¹²⁸ Wildlife Trusts Wales written evidence

¹²⁹ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 50

¹³⁰ Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel written evidence

progress being made. The Woodland Trust said it is vital for the Welsh Government to renew its commitment to this aim because of the “huge” biodiversity gains to be made by restoring ancient woodlands.

121. However, the impact of the PAWS restoration policy is of concern to the commercial forestry sector. Confor and Tilhill Forestry both stated that without the provision of alternative sites for commercial forestry elsewhere, PAWS restoration will have a detrimental impact on both softwood availability and income. As such they are reluctant to restore their sites.

122. Frances Winder (Woodland Trust) disagreed, saying that if woodlands have been managed appropriately, then “the next stage of doing PAWS restoration will make money as you had expected and therefore it isn’t a problem”.¹³¹ In terms of ongoing commercial income; however, she agreed that there “are some issues about that”.¹³²

The right tree in the right place

123. Several respondents (RSPB, NPAs, WEL, WTW, YHA) supported the principle of planting the “right tree in the right place”, as set out in the SoNaRR report.

124. However, Martin Bishop (Confor) is critical of this phrase:

“‘Right tree in the right place’ was a much used phrase that we believe is unhelpful. It is largely a meaningless phrase as it is open to interpretation, just what is the right tree for any place is not defined anywhere... [Different stakeholders] would have differing views about which was the right tree, all would depend on the individuals’ or organisations’ aspirations for the woodland or place.”¹³³

125. The RSPB and the Woodland Trust are working together to come up with some general principles around what is meant by the phrase.

NRW’s position

126. Peter Garson (NRW) suggested that the proportion of unmanaged woodlands should be reduced from 40%, but pointed out that:

“...to bring those woodlands into more active management will take some resource... it needs some advice to owners and also we don’t currently have a grant scheme that funds intervention... so, a lot of these sites are inaccessible, they don’t have tracks, so you need some initial investment to make them viable to manage.”¹³⁴

127. NRW revealed that as of February 2017, approximately 8,850 ha of larch in Wales had been found to be infected and larch was no longer used for restocking on the public woodland estate. NRW noted that the Ash Dieback fungus was now found in 63% of the 10km grid squares across Wales and had become established in the wider environment.

¹³¹ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 103

¹³² CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 103

¹³³ Confor follow-up correspondence

¹³⁴ CCERA, 6 July 2017, paras 161-165

128. Regarding the slow progress restoring PAWS sites, NRW said the lack of funding for woodland management means it is unlikely that commercial woodland owners will choose to replant these sites with native species. NRW was gradually removing non-native species on Welsh Government owned land, but some sites were tens of thousands of hectares.¹³⁵

129. NRW agreed with most respondents who supported the principle of planting the “right tree in the right place”, saying:

“SoNaRR highlighted that planting the right trees in the right place is the single action most likely to derive the greatest benefit in terms of delivering the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR) and making a significant contribution to Wales’ well-being goals... The location and design of planting, including that in urban areas, needs to be carefully considered to maximise these benefits whilst avoiding damage to the structure and functioning of other priority open habitats.”¹³⁶

Welsh Government’s position

130. The Cabinet Secretary said she was not aware of the figure of 40% of woodlands being unmanaged, but that she would consider re-opening the Glastir Woodland Management scheme to help address this issue.

131. She set out the approach in the Welsh Government’s Larch Disease management strategy – controlled felling in areas with high infection, and targeted felling to prevent the disease spreading in areas of no or very light infection. For Ash Dieback, the Welsh Government had established an operational response team made up of key stakeholders to lead its response to the disease. The Cabinet Secretary suggested that Ash may prove more resilient than Larch, so Ash trees should not be felled unless they are dangerous.

132. The Cabinet Secretary stated that both conifer and broadleaved species are needed as part of highly diverse woodlands. In terms of ancient woodlands, the Cabinet Secretary acknowledged that:

“Trees and woodland which have high environmental values (including ancient woodland sites, ancient, veteran and heritage trees) are an irreplaceable resource which can provide a wide range of benefits. They should be managed so their condition steadily improves.”¹³⁷

133. The Cabinet Secretary did not mention what the right trees might be, but the preferred location for new tree planting were described as follows:

“A continued increase in tree cover and woodlands wherever it can contribute positively to ecosystem resilience and wellbeing is needed. New woodland should be created and trees planted to provide greater connectivity between, and increase the size of, woodland habitat and to address other challenges identified in NRW’s [SoNaRR report], in both rural and urban areas.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 152

¹³⁶ Natural Resources Wales written evidence

¹³⁷ Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

¹³⁸ Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

Our view

Woodland management

40% of Welsh woodlands are thought to be unmanaged (mainly privately owned broadleaf woodlands), resulting in a lack of biodiversity and the potential environmental benefits not being realised. We urge the Welsh Government to bring back the Glastir Woodland Management grant scheme, and to set a target to halve the proportion of unmanaged woodlands in Wales.

Regarding commercial woodlands, compliance with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is only monitored when permission is being sought from NRW for planting or felling activities. As such, there are concerns that minimum ecological standards are not being met. We support calls from environmental stakeholders for the Welsh Government to encourage take-up of the higher UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) standard, perhaps through greater promotion of Forestry Stewardship Council certified wood products. Furthermore, should the Glastir Woodland Management scheme be reintroduced, we recommend that this requires compliance with UKWAS.

Conifer plantations and tree health

We share stakeholders' belief that woodlands should be mixed, both in terms of species and age structure; however we feel that this should occur at the landscape rather than the local scale. We call on the Welsh Government and NRW to advocate a mosaic approach to woodland planning and management, comprising linked blocks of trees (and other habitats) serving different purposes. This would benefit forestry operations, biodiversity, ecosystem services provision, and resilience to tree diseases.

We have some concerns over the response of NRW to recent outbreaks of Ash Dieback and Larch Disease. NRW appears to have acted with less coordination and transparency than counterparts in England and Scotland regarding Larch Disease, and stakeholders are concerned that there is still no plan for supporting those who have lost trees to the diseases. The Welsh Government plans to bring stakeholders together to address these issues and we recommend that this results in a more robust strategic policy to minimise susceptibility to future disease outbreaks. We support NRW's requirement for restocking on public land to use home-grown rather than imported saplings, and encourage the extension of this approach to private land.

Restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)

Ancient woodlands are an important contributor to biodiversity and the Welsh landscape and we commend the Welsh Government's desire to restore PAWS. However, whilst there are regulatory barriers to the creation of new coniferous woodland, and no funding available to manage private broadleaved woodland, it is unrealistic to expect PAWS restoration to occur. These regulatory and funding issues must be addressed.

The right trees in the right places

We support the principle of planting the right trees in the right places (as promoted in the State of Natural Resources Report¹³⁹) to maximise the benefits of trees and woodlands, especially in urban

¹³⁹ NRW, *State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR)*, 2016

areas. However, we share the concern of a number of stakeholders that this term is too broad and open to interpretation depending on different points of view. The Woodlands for Wales strategy must draw on available research to specify what the most suitable types of trees, management approaches and planting locations are for achieving each of its aims.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government should reintroduce the Glastir Woodland Management Scheme and ensure that planting meets the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.

Recommendation 11. The Welsh Government must work with stakeholders to ensure its tree health strategy demonstrates the lessons learnt from the outbreaks of Ash Dieback and Larch Disease.

06. Future delivery of Woodlands for Wales

This chapter explores how the Woodlands for Wales strategy could be improved for the future. In particular it looks at the role of the Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel (WSAP),¹⁴⁰ how the strategy contributes towards the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the opportunities arising from Brexit.

Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel

134. The purpose of WSAP is to advise the Welsh Government on the implementation of Woodlands for Wales and the development of woodland policy more generally. It also acts as an arbiter in the case of disputes between the private sector and Welsh Government. Membership of the panel was last updated in March 2017,¹⁴¹ with appointments lasting for a minimum of 2 years.

135. NRW called for WSAP to be “revitalised and more dynamic in its approach”.¹⁴² It suggested WSAP should be better linked to Government stakeholder groups guiding rural and economic development policy and programmes, and more effective in driving action across the whole Welsh forest resource to deliver the outcomes required under the strategy.

136. Jonathan Cryer (RSPB) suggested that WSAP should be opened up to a broader range of stakeholders, specifically environmental and recreation interests.¹⁴³ Frances Winder (Woodland Trust) added that WSAP had focused on detail rather than looking at the broader picture.¹⁴⁴

137. In correspondence with the Committee, Martin Bishop (Confor) said that he was “puzzled” by comments from NRW and others on the role and purpose of WSAP:

“...there seems to be a misunderstanding on the role and purpose of WSAP and presuppose the role of WSAP as being much wider than it actually is. WSAP is an advisory panel to WG, it is not an advisory panel to NRW nor is it expected to comment on forestry or any other matters to a wider audience.”¹⁴⁵

138. He went on to say that the membership is made up of volunteers that meet quarterly, and should the Committee wish to recommend a wider role for WSAP, then it should also recommend that the Welsh Government commit additional funding to enable this.

Contribution towards the Environment Act and the Future Generations Act

139. The Future Generations Act¹⁴⁶ passed into law in April 2015 with the aim of improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Environment Act¹⁴⁷ enables a

¹⁴⁰ The **Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel** (WSAP) advise the Welsh Government on the implementation of Woodlands for Wales.

¹⁴¹ **Membership of the panel was last updated** in March 2017.

¹⁴² Natural Resources Wales written evidence

¹⁴³ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 128

¹⁴⁴ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 129

¹⁴⁵ Confor follow-up correspondence

¹⁴⁶ The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

¹⁴⁷ www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/3/contents/enacted

more proactive, sustainable and joined-up approach to the planning and management of Wales' natural resources. It became law in March 2016.

140. Respondents to the inquiry described the multiple environmental, economic and social benefits of woodland and how it is ideally positioned to deliver the outcomes sought under the two Acts.

141. The Welsh Government is required under the Future Generations Act to work towards achieving all seven of the well-being goals.¹⁴⁸ However, WEL, RSPB and WTW noted that the Woodlands for Wales Action Plan (2015-2020)¹⁴⁹ doesn't include the 'Globally Responsible Wales' goal, despite including the six other well-being goals. RSPB said:

“‘Globally Responsible Wales’ is not included in the Action Plan, yet should be a constant focus alongside other elements of the Strategy requiring carbon sequestration and provision of habitat for internationally important species.”¹⁵⁰

142. WEL, RSPB and WTW also stated that Woodlands for Wales should be integral to the Area Statements required under the Environment Act, and Local Well-being Plans required under the Future Generations Act. This point was supported by Alec Dauncey (Bangor University):

“The development of area statements is going to be the key... they bring all those issues together and have a degree of spatial explicitness that looks at a key area, looks at the interaction with the communities, and the different characteristics or the ability to grow timber or biodiversity values or whatever in a particular area.”¹⁵¹

Opportunities arising from Brexit

143. The representatives of the commercial forestry sector saw Brexit as an opportunity. Tilhill Forestry explained:

“We have a massive market for home grown timber on our doorstep without the need to trade beyond our shores. The fall in sterling which is predicted to continue should be a benefit in making home grown 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.”¹⁵²

144. BSW Timber added:

“[The Welsh Government] must use the opportunity of leaving the EU to completely review its post-CAP land support mechanisms and give forestry the place it deserves.”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ [Well-being goals](#) of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

¹⁴⁹ [Woodlands for Wales Action Plan \(2015-2020\)](#)

¹⁵⁰ RSPB written evidence

¹⁵¹ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 238

¹⁵² Tilhill forestry written evidence

¹⁵³ BSW Timber written evidence

145. There was also strong support amongst the environmental stakeholders for forestry to be included within a post-Brexit integrated sustainable land management policy. For example, the Woodland Trust stated:

“We have the opportunity now to develop a single new sustainable land management policy for Wales and investment of public money in an incentive framework that is locally designed and delivered, outcome focused and secures benefits for people, the environment and nature as well as an economic future for land managers.”¹⁵⁴

146. In terms of how such benefit-focused policy and funding will be delivered post-Brexit, Elizabeth Robinson (Reading University) said:

“...there’s certainly a lot of excitement and ability from the environmental economics community to be able to address these questions.”¹⁵⁵

NRW’s position

147. NRW called for WSAP to be “revitalised and more dynamic in its approach” and that the Panel “could become far more of a driving force”.¹⁵⁶ Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) added that WSAP should link better with others, including the Minister’s roundtable on Brexit, the third sector, and with the Public Services Boards; however they had no authority to get involved with the latter.¹⁵⁷

148. Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) suggested that through developing Well-being Plans, the Public Services Boards should:

“...get a whole bunch of stakeholders around the table to actually agree that we would like new woodland of this type in these types of areas, and I also think that the development of Area Statements will help in that process, too.”¹⁵⁸

149. In written evidence, NRW said that Woodland for Wales should align with the Natural Resources Policy (NRP). The statutory deadline for the Welsh Government to publish the NRP was March 2017; however it had not been published as of July 2017.

150. Peter Garson (NRW) said that CAP was a “major” barrier to woodland creation on farms as payments for agricultural production were proportionately too high.¹⁵⁹ He added that there should be more awareness-raising about the financial benefits of forestry compared to farming.¹⁶⁰ Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) stated that new funding schemes post-CAP should encourage a wider spectrum of woodland types (including open habitats with just 20% tree cover) as well as larger woodlands:

“You know, the new, big forests of Wales, because that’s where the big gains are going to come, particularly in terms of hectarage, and the ability to have good quality forest products coming out.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ Woodland Trust written evidence

¹⁵⁵ CCERA, 24 May 2017, para 179

¹⁵⁶ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 73

¹⁵⁷ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 81

¹⁵⁸ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 26

¹⁵⁹ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 103

¹⁶⁰ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 132

¹⁶¹ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 41

151. Michelle van-Velzen (NRW) also suggested increased use of alternative funding sources, including compensatory funding from developers, private investments, and the Woodland Carbon Code.¹⁶²

Welsh Government's position

152. The Cabinet Secretary said that radical change is necessary to meet the target of 100,000 ha of new woodland creation between 2010 and 2030.¹⁶³ Her predecessor had considered reducing the annual planting target from 5,000 ha to 2,000 ha, but she was committed to keeping the more ambitious target, given the threat of climate change.¹⁶⁴ She said that meeting this target would require more partnership working between the public, private and third sectors, and that the strategy would be refreshed by early 2018 to help achieve this.¹⁶⁵

153. The Cabinet Secretary stated that the purpose of WSAP was to provide her with advice. She thought it was functioning well and had no criticism of it.¹⁶⁶ Regarding the question of whether the membership should be extended to representation from environment and recreation stakeholders, the Cabinet Secretary said she spoke directly with these groups. She confirmed that the panel was reappointed in March for a period of three years. It would focus on innovations in tree planting and funding, linking in with health and tree and woodland cover targets.¹⁶⁷

154. The Cabinet Secretary's paper stated that trees, woodlands and forests are:

“A vital element of our Natural Resources Policy and the key to the delivery of our ground-breaking Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.”¹⁶⁸

155. In oral evidence she confirmed that publication of the Natural Resources Policy has been delayed from March, but that “it’s nearly ready to go”.¹⁶⁹ It had been discussed in the Ministerial meetings on Brexit, and it is envisaged that new legislation will be required.

156. The Cabinet Secretary said that Woodlands for Wales provided a sound basis on which to build as Wales faces the challenges and opportunities of Brexit and developing international markets.

157. Regarding the provision of future funding for environmental benefits, the Welsh Government was working with NRW to develop Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES)¹⁷⁰ that would target funding towards land managers who “deliver positive changes for wildlife, water quality, flood risk reduction, health and wellbeing”.¹⁷¹

¹⁶² CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 44

¹⁶³ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 204

¹⁶⁴ CCERA, 6 July 2017, paras 214 and 285

¹⁶⁵ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 362

¹⁶⁶ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 262

¹⁶⁷ CCERA, 6 July 2017, paras 270-271

¹⁶⁸ Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

¹⁶⁹ CCERA, 6 July 2017, para 199

¹⁷⁰ **Payments for Ecosystem Services** (PES) involve payments to land managers and others to increase the resilience of ecosystems and the provision of public benefits.

¹⁷¹ Evidence paper from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

Our view

Taking the strategy forwards

It is clear from our extensive discussions with stakeholders that, whilst progress is being made under the Woodlands for People theme, the severe lack of woodland creation in Wales in recent years is preventing delivery of many other aspects of the strategy. The Welsh Government must address the barriers to woodland creation as a matter of urgency.

We welcome the Cabinet Secretary's agreement to refresh Woodlands for Wales by early 2018, and her openness to radical thinking, as we feel that the strategy (and delivery of it) must undergo significant improvement. We call on the Welsh Government to put greater focus on the economic benefits of commercial forestry, and to prioritise innovative funding mechanisms to secure public benefits from urban and rural trees and woodlands. The decision to leave the EU presents a new challenge to enhance the sustainability of land management in Wales, and to better integrate forestry with agriculture.¹⁷²

The emerging Natural Resources Policy, and NRW's implementation of it, must align with Woodland for Wales. The revised strategy must also explicitly align with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Public Services Boards and local authorities should also be required to contribute to meeting the objectives of Woodlands for Wales through their Local Well-being Plans and Area Statements.

In light of conflicting views on the purpose of the Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel (WSAP), we believe the Welsh Government should make WSAP's Terms of Reference available to the public. It should expand WSAP's membership to include all principal stakeholders, and set out clearly what WSAP aims to do in order to take the strategy forward. We support the view of NRW that WSAP should be more effective in driving change, and encouraged to work with Public Services Boards.

Innovation in funding post-Brexit

CAP is considered to be a significant barrier to tree planting, both in terms of funding and fuelling the cultural divide between farming and forestry. Brexit provides an opportunity to remove this historical and artificial divide, and to develop a single integrated sustainable land management scheme. The promotion of agroforestry, large woodlands, and a mosaic of different woodland types should form a key part of this.

The revised Woodlands for Wales strategy should be proactive in setting out innovative proposals for post-Brexit funding. In particular, we welcome the Welsh Government and NRW working together on developing Payments for Ecosystem Services. However, we urge this to go beyond the typical focus on carbon and water quality to encompass all ecosystem service benefits, and to cover both rural and urban environments. For instance, Greener Grangetown and the Spirit of Llynfi Woodland are excellent examples of private sector contributions to water regulation and health benefits in urban and semi-urban locations.

By treating woodland as a form of infrastructure, a range of potential funding options are possible. The Welsh Government should therefore look into innovative methods for financing woodland. For

¹⁷² The findings of our inquiry into [The Future of Land Management in Wales \(PDF 2 MB\)](#) are also relevant here.

instance, through public-private ventures, public pension schemes, private investors, loans, compensatory funding from developers, lottery funding and taxation. We also support the NRW proposal to link the regulatory and funding processes to streamline woodland creation.

For the south Wales valleys in particular, we would encourage the Welsh Government to consider the possibility of forming a National Forest Company for Wales to work with farmers and local authorities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 12. The Welsh Government must improve delivery of the Woodlands for Wales strategy, in particular by:

- Addressing the barriers to woodland creation as a matter of urgency.
- Revising the strategy by early 2018, and specifying how it will support and be supported by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, and the Natural Resources Policy.
- Improving the transparency and power of Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel to drive the strategy forwards.

Recommendation 13. As recommended in the Committee's report on the future of land management in Wales, the Welsh Government must ensure that future funding should be based on sustainable outcomes. This approach could be supported by innovative methods such as Payments for Ecosystem Services and pension fund investment in green infrastructure.

Annex A – Written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All written evidence can be viewed in full at: [Consultation Responses](#)

Organisation / Name

Individual x 5

The British Horse Society - County Access and Bridleways Officer for Pembrokeshire

Professor D Skydmore - Wrexham Glyndŵr University

The British Horse Society - Mid Wales Regional Chair

UK Forest Products Association

Forest Stewardship Council

The British Horse Society - Regional Access and Bridleways Officer for Wales

The British Horse Society

Royal Forestry Society

Continuous Cover Forestry Group (CCFG)

Coed Cadw Woodland Trust

Three National Park authorities in Wales

Confor

Forestry and Environmental Consultant

Natural Resources Wales

The Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV)

Equestrian and British Horse Society Member

BSW Timber Group

Wales Environment Link

Snowdonia Society

Flintshire County Council

Countryside Alliance

Wildlife Trusts Wales

CLA Cymru

Bangor University

Tilhill Forestry Limited

Youth Hostels Association England and Wales (YHA)

Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel

National Farmers' Union of Wales (NFU Cymru)

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB Cymru)

Farmers' Union of Wales

[Letter from Martin Bishop](#) (Confor), 6 July 2017

Annex B – Oral evidence and Committee visits

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at: [Transcripts](#)

24 May 2017

Witness	Organisation
Jonathan Cryer	Land Use Policy Officer, RSPB Wales
Frances Winder	Conservation Policy Lead, Woodland Trust Wales
Dr Alec Dauncey	Teaching Associate, School of Environment, Natural Resources and Geography, Bangor University
Professor Elizabeth Robinson	Professor of Environmental Economics, Reading University

14 June 2017

Witness	Organisation
Martin Bishop	National Manager for Wales, Confor
David Edwards	District Manager, Tilhill Forestry
Hamish Macleod	Director of Public Affairs, BSW Timber

6 July 2017

Witness	Organisation
Michelle van-Velzen	Sustainable Land Management Team Leader, Natural Resources Wales
Peter Garson	Head of Commercial Operations, Natural Resources Wales
Lesley Griffiths AM	Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government
Chris Lea	Deputy Director of Land, Nature and Forestry, Welsh Government
Bill MacDonald	Head of Forest Resources Policy Branch, Welsh Government

Attendees – Stakeholder Seminar – Maesteg

Organisation	Representative
Llais y Goedwig	Sasha Ufnowska, Capacity Building Officer in south Wales
Ramblers Cymru	Rebecca Brough, Policy and Advocacy Manager Wales
British Horse Society	Mark Weston, Director of Access
Countryside Alliance	Rachel Evans, Director for Wales
British Association of Shooting and Conservation	Ian Danby, Head of Biodiversity Projects
BikePark Wales	Daniel Gomm, Centre Manager – BikePark Wales
Trail Rides Wales	Marianne Walford
Legal Forest Riders	Jonathan Barrett
Trail Riders Fellowship Limited	Robin Hickin, National Representative for Wales
Bridgend Countryside Volunteering Network	Mark Blackmore, Rural Development Co-ordinator Reach Rural Development Rob Jones, BCBC Countryside Management Officer
Woodland Trust	Sam Packer, Campaigns Officer - Wales
Communities First Bridgend	Fay Calloway, Cluster Manager Jeremy Dimond, Healthy Living Project Officer
Bridgend Local Access Forum and Youth Hostelling Association	Rowland Pittard
The Treadlightly Trust	Duncan Green, Chairman
Llynfi Valley Woodland Group	John and Vivienne Herd
Llynfi Valley Woodland Group	Noel Thomas