



**Cyfoeth
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Cymru
**Natural
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Mike Hedges
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National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee
Cardiff Bay
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Dear Mr Hedges

**Coed Cadw (Woodland Trust): Petition P-04-683 Trees in Towns
Submission by Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru/Natural Resources Wales**

The purpose of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is to pursue sustainable management of natural resources.

Trees are an essential element of our urban ecosystems, forming a key part of the Green Infrastructure that delivers a wide range of services to help sustain life, promote well-being, support economic benefits and mitigate against our changing climate.

With reference to Petition 'P-04-683 Trees in Towns', Natural Resources Wales would support the proposals in principle, and in response to your question Natural Resources Wales does provide limited funding for tree planting, in and around towns through directly working with partners including local authorities via the PLANT scheme. This scheme, run by NRW on behalf of Welsh Government, supports the planting of a tree for every child born in Wales. Whilst many of the trees planted under this scheme are in rural areas the scheme allows for tree planting in urban areas. We also have wide experience of the use of trees through practical projects such as the urban drainage scheme "Greener Grangetown" and would be very happy to provide this further specific evidence.

The value of trees can make a real difference to people in towns and cities across Wales – providing vital services, for example.

- They can remove harmful air pollution, reducing incidents of asthma and heart disease;
- Reduce flood risk by slowing surface water run-off after heavy downpours;

- And absorb and store carbon dioxide, helping to counteract climate change.
- They also provide food and habitat for wildlife such as birds and bees.

Accessible natural greenspace and trees in our towns and cities deliver so many ecosystem service and well-being benefits. We know how much tree canopy cover there is in Wales' urban areas. We have surveyed canopy cover across Wales' towns and cities. The survey commissioned by Natural Resources Wales, is the first of its kind in the world and used aerial photography from 2006 and 2009 to identify and map the canopy spread of trees across all of Wales' towns and cities. It shows how many trees we have, where they are and where they are being lost over time. This will help inform how to manage urban trees in a better way for the future. In summary we have found that:

- Trees covered about 17% of land in Wales' urban areas in 2009, which is average when compared to other towns and cities across the world. In 2013 this figure was down to 16%.
- Tree cover varies widely across Wales – from only 6% in Rhyl to 30% in Treharris.
- Disappointingly the study also identified that in a quarter of towns in Wales the tree canopy cover declined between 2006 and 2013 – with more than 7,000 large amenity trees lost altogether.

Trees are essential to life and provide natural services to improve the quality of life of people in our towns and cities.

The study shows that if we can manage and plan where and which species of trees we plant in our towns and cities – and look after the trees we already have – then they can help improve well-being in our communities and make them more resilient and sustainable. To continue to deliver the range of benefits outlined in the petition (and many others too), it will be necessary to halt and reverse the decline. The character of our settlements suggests that we have great scope for significant increases in canopy cover. We are sharing these findings with local authority planners and decision makers through the Public Service Boards.

The range of benefits provided by urban trees is much wider than just those set out in the petition. Our report, "Tree Cover in Wales' Towns and Cities: Understanding canopy cover to better plan and manage our urban trees" clearly illustrates this much wider range. (<http://naturalresources.wales/media/679615/eng-urban-tree-summary-2016.pdf>). In our recent "State of Natural Resources Report: An assessment of the sustainable management of natural resources" (<https://naturalresources.wales/media/679572/sonarr-summary-september-2016.pdf>) we similarly recognise the important part trees, and green infrastructure generally, has to play in building environmental resilience across Wales.

We have also worked with Forest Research to undertake some i-Tree Eco surveys to demonstrate the monetary value of trees. Using our Greenspace Toolkit we are mapping natural greenspace in urban areas. Urban trees in Wrexham CBC, Bridgend CBC and the Tawe catchment deliver £3.9m in benefits. They:

- Remove 258 tonnes of pollution – saving the NHS £1.55 million each year (by reducing asthma and heart disease)
- Intercept 654 million litres of rainfall – saving £0.95 million each year in sewerage charges
- Capture 6,409 tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere – worth £1.42 million every year
- Store 222,000 tonnes of carbon – worth £50 million

Alongside the study of tree canopies in urban areas, Natural Resources Wales, Forest Research and Wrexham County Borough Council also piloted the first study in Wales to find the true value of the County Borough's urban trees.

The i-Tree Eco study found that in total, Wrexham's trees save the local economy more than £1.2 million every year by:

- Intercepting 27 million litres of rainfall from entering the drainage system, equivalent of saving £460,000 in sewerage charges.
- Absorbing 1,329 tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- Improving people's health by removing 60 tonnes of air pollution which in turn saves the health services £700,000.

We understand that local authorities have to assess a wide range of issues when considering the planting of trees in their urban areas. We believe the studies we have undertaken and supported can help them make these assessments. Many of the benefits are provided whether the urban trees are native or not and it is important to select the right tree species for the right place.

To optimise the opportunities from tree planting, more funding mechanism would be required but this can include planning tree planting into new development plans from the outset by understanding the added value provided through the creation of urban green space for example through the reduction in surface water flooding. The long term success will be as much down to future tree management and protection requiring an increase in wider public awareness of the value and benefits of trees and their management.

As part of a wider green infrastructure approach to the sustainable management of natural resources in urban areas, local tree strategies, developed by local authorities

with local stakeholders, can inform the targeting, planning, design, planting and protecting, managing and monitoring to urban trees.

We hope this provides sufficient information for the Petitions Committee to reach a conclusion.

Regards



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