

Cross Party Group for Biodiversity

Wednesday 29th November 2016, 12.15pm – 13.15pm

Conference Room 21, Ty Hywel, Cardiff

MINUTES

Attendees

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|------|
| Arfon Williams (Speaker) | RSPB | (AW) |
| Alun Davies (Speaker) | Fferm Ifan | (AD) |
| Guto Davies (Speaker) | Fferm Ifan | (GD) |
| Llŷr Gruffydd AM (Chair) | Plaid Cymru | (LG) |
| John Griffiths AM | Welsh Labour | |
| Mike Hedges AM | Welsh Labour | |
| David Melding AM | Welsh Conservatives | (DM) |
| Mark Isherwood AM | Welsh Conservatives | |
| Huw Irranca-Davies AM | Welsh Labour | |
| Vikki Howells AM | Welsh Labour | |
| Sian Gwenllian AM | Plaid Cymru | |
| Roger Thomas | Wales Environment Link (Chair) | (RT) |
| Gill Bell | Marine Conservation Society | (GB) |
| Peter Ogden | Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales | (PO) |
| Russel Hobson | Butterfly Conservation Wales | |
| Nigel Ajax-Lewis | Wildlife Trusts Wales | |
| Scott Fryer | Wildlife Trusts Wales | |
| Clare Dinham | Buglife | |
| Jon Cryer | RSPB | |
| Laura Cropper | RSPB | |
| Sharon Thompson | RSPB | |
| Natasha Yorke-Edgell | RSPB | |
| Annie Smith | RSPB | |
| Ian Hartrey | RSPB | |
| Rowland Pittard | Youth Hostels Association (YHA) | |
| Karen Whitfield | Wales Environment Link | |
| Lydia Beaman | Wales Environment Link | |
| Liz Smith | Wales Environment Link | |
| Dai Harris | Head of Nature Policy and Land Use Branch, Welsh Government | |
| Dr Kevin Austin | Head of Agri Strategy, Welsh Government | |
| Katy Orford | Research Service, National Assembly for Wales | |
| Matt Harris | Ecologist, Cardiff Council | |
| Margaret Iles | Ecologist, Caerphilly Council | |

Key Points from the Meeting

1 – Group inauguration and Annual General Meeting

- LG stated that this was the first meeting of the Fifth Assembly's Cross Party Group, which means they therefore needed to nominate a Chair.
- DM nominated LG as Chair. MH seconded this. LG thanked them for their support and was elected as Chair of the Cross Party Group.

- Secretariat is provided by Wales Environment Link.

2 – ‘What Should a Sustainable Land Management Policy for Wales look like?’ – Arfon Williams, RSPB Cymru

AW explained the need for change in agricultural policy because despite decades of support the CAP has failed to build resilient agriculture, prevent environmental damage, or the loss of nature.

The State of Nature 2016 report has revealed that over half (56%) of UK species assessed have declined since 1970 and 1 in 9 farmland species in the UK are threatened with extinction – this is 1 in 14 in Wales. AW highlighted a few species that are dependent on managed habitats that are championed by Welsh Assembly Members, such as the black oil beetle, the dormouse, water vole, and salmon.

New policies are needed that are in line with Wales’ commitment to sustainable development, and reflect the distinctiveness of Welsh farming. The following vision was provided: *“Our vision is for sustainable land management that produces quality food and other commodities, protects the environment and maintains a countryside rich in nature.”*

AW stated that we need a fair financial settlement for Wales. Wales currently gets 14% of CAP payments to the UK, which if under the Barnett formula would be reduced to 4%, which would have a dramatic impact.

AW highlighted the high environmental standards that have derived from the EU, including the Nature Directives and Water Framework Directive. Future settlements need high baseline standards within Wales and across the UK and this must be a priority for Welsh Government if we are to secure sustainable land management that benefits all the people of Wales.

Welsh Government must be able to set land management support in the context of its own legislation, and provide a place based approach through the National Natural Resource Policy and Area Statements.

Future policy must support sustainable land management which maintains and enhances the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide – it has to deliver for nature and people and contribute towards the well-being goals. It also has to be value for money, so we need a fit for purpose policy that rewards farmers for what they do.

As we move to asking more from farmers, in terms of carrying out the environmental services, we will need to support and protect, payments will need to reflect the work they do. And rather than seeing the land as ‘Less Favoured’ we must remember the high value of this land for nature.

There must also be an end to externalisation of costs, rather than the ongoing environmental degradation and we must get existing markets functioning better.

It’s also likely we’ll need to financially support the less economically viable farms, for example, those that provide habitats for nature, sequester carbon – we must pay for these services. AW showed a map of Wales depicting the National Parks, AONBs, NRW Unified Peat layers and Protected Areas, stating that these areas could provide opportunities for future schemes. AW highlighted the potential of securing nature areas and the social goods that derive from these sites.

AW explained the need for a reasonable transition period towards new arrangements and how important this will be for the most economically vulnerable farmers, such as those in our

extensive livestock sector. This sector often farms marginal areas but are of high nature, natural resource and landscape value. Often referred to as HNV these farms are essential for maintaining wildlife habitats that also provide wider environmental goods and services, as well as the wider recreational and tourism values.

AW concluded that we need a new land management policy that is good for the environment, good for nature, benefits society and is fair to farmers.

3 – Ffarm Ifan project: Farmer-led Sustainable Land Management in action

Alun Davies and Guto Davies are from Ffarm Ifan in Ysbyty Ifan near Betws y Coed. AD explains his farm is part of a partnership cooperation consisting of 11 family farms situated on a distinct mountainous area with a large proportion of peatland. AD showed a video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxT-q58kw0Q>), shown at the Paris Conference of Parties, of school children rapping about the importance of peat restoration. Peatland is an integral part of everyday life on AD and GD's farms.

Set up in 2008, the 11 farms have 1 block of land (Frudiedd and Migneint) in the Afon Gonwy catchment. They hope that through collaboration and the continuity of a family farm, they are able to plan for business into the future. They want to plan 40 years ahead, rather than 10 years. They meet on a weekly basis and are in the process of submitting an application to the Welsh Government's Sustainable Management Scheme. They collaborate on supplying lamb, and seek a premium for their high welfare, high nature value grass-fed lamb products which provides funding for their local community, including schools, hospitals and local clubs. They focus on working for the community, environment, business and economy, and for the future of their business, especially for the young family members involved.

The Partnership also involves member partners, including, CEH, SENRGY-SIP, National Trust, RSPB, SNPA, Dwr Cymru, Coed Cymru, NRW, Multiland, and the Welsh Government. They work with NRW on the SSSI's and with Multiland they have a fake sheep that moves around and helps with animal welfare issues by providing data on different sections of the land, such as temperature etc. They are farmer-led and work from the bottom-up, working together to plant trees and reduce river erosion, as well as providing feedback on the results. They do follow CAP rules and AD is certified organic. Both are involved in Glastir Advanced. However, despite the fact that they respond to incentives, they do need policy in place to support the work that they do. They feel they could both do more, or do things differently given the right incentives.

AD explained their distinct location and that they could sequester more carbon, but questioned who would pay for that. They are looking into new business models, where payments for outcomes could support all types of goods and services such as the goods that they provide for, including carbon, clean water, flood management, biodiversity, food and tourism.

They are looking to develop a new PES business model, for which they hope to create more of a market where they can be paid for the outcomes. This hasn't been done before in Wales, but examples such as the floods in Llanrwst, show that this work would be highly valuable. They hope they're inventing innovative ideas through their SMS application, and whilst accepting that some things will work and some will fail, are keen to be piloting projects and taking important small steps. They feel the appetite is there for marketing different products and for them collaboration is very important.

4 – Discussion and Questions

1. DM highlighted that he is a member of the Climate Change, Environment & Rural Affairs Committee. He welcomed the presentations and pointed out that Norway offsets a lot of

its carbon by making payments to Guyana, South America [through their Climate & Forest Partnership]. He highlighted that some people have concerns about increasing numbers of livestock being a problem for the environment; as a carnivore, he said he'd like to be able to justify the need for livestock, particularly for upland farms who find them more important.

2. AD responded by pointing out that ruminants [mammals able to digest plant-based food] are particularly useful for managing peat. He also stated that Fferm Ifan has about one sheep per three acres of land in the summer. He noted that breeding ewes are essential for maintaining uplands farmland.
3. AD added that ruminants should be identified not only as helpful for processing the land, but to also keep in mind their value as the end product as meat. He said it is important they are grass-fed, but not 'obsessed' by ticking boxes on supermarket criteria.
4. DM questioned whether they should look at how sheep are bred and raised in non-livestock areas (such as Fferm Ifan), and suggested they ought to be seen as more valuable to the land. AD responded that CAP encourages flock to move downhill (rather than upland). He continued stating that he did not think CAP is economically sustainable and agreed that cattle are valuable for managing larger plots of land.
5. AW concurred, highlighting the need to consider the multi-functionality of landscapes. He noted that upland areas need to be managed with the right type of tools, including grazing cattle which are better in more coarse habitats. He noted that loss of cattle is important to both farmers and conservationists, who are concerned about managing wildlife.
6. PO described the presentations as 'eye opening', stating that Brexit seemed to be bringing long-standing, and underlying problems [of unsustainable land management] to the forefront. He questioned if Fferm Ifan's model was 'transferable' and what would be needed from Welsh Government to make that happen.
7. AD noted that the Welsh Government's Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) gave farmers the chance to replicate this. He noted Fferm Ifan currently has a bid going through the process. He said they were lucky to have a young community running it, as they can plan up to 40-50 years ahead. He emphasised the need to get the size of the pilot right; he noted that many other farmers wanted to join Fferm Ifan but they were cautious in expansion plans.
8. Continuing, AD stated that the SMS was put in place with EU funding. He welcomed commitments to continue to 2019/2020, but said this was not enough time. He would like to see a commitment from Welsh Government to continue this.
9. RT noted that the Pontbren scheme has 'endless visits' from politicians, but not much happening to expand or replicate it. AD agreed that Pontbren is very innovative and has benefits from research funding, but has 'visit fatigue' with little being taken further. He said Fferm Ifan is not dissimilar, although there is more upland in Pontbren with more natural resources producing non-food goods. GD added that their SMS bid includes a budget for PES (Payments for Ecosystem Services) contract to see if they can source to the private sector.
10. GB highlighted the Water Framework Directive and asked if it's being monitored and how they could see improvements in water quality. AD replied that the 'problem' was that the baseline is quite high, but they are looking at incentives to try and increase water quality, including looking at water filtration.

5 – Final Comments

LG thanked the speakers and suggested that the challenges was now to look at how to replicate this model across Wales. He noted that Brexit resulting in the need to recast this whole policy areas gives an opportunity to support these kinds of efforts and move more decisively. He hoped that PES was properly implemented on the ground and pointed to the political will being necessary to drive it forward.

Going forward, he saw the CPG as adding to the discussion and keeping up momentum on the issue. He thanked attendees for coming and welcomed suggestions or ideas for future discussion to come to his office or WEL's office, through Karen Whitfield.