



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-759  
Ein cyf/Our ref LG/00818/17

Mike Hedges AM  
Chair - Petitions Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Ty Hywel  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
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8 May 2017

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your letter of 24 April regarding a petition to re-open the Cwmcarn Forest Drive at Easter 2018. The day to day management of the Welsh Government woodland estate is delegated to Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and this includes responsibility for the Forest Drive at Cwmcarn. The Forest Drive was closed in order to ensure the large-scale harvesting operations remain on schedule and any risks to the public's safety are managed properly. This remains to be a high priority for NRW.

Regardless of the *Phytophthora ramorum* felling, engineering surveys of the Drive have indicated that substantial investment is required to keep it open. There are also significant costs associated with restructuring the forest to remove larch trees, replant them with a more diverse and resilient range of species and to reduce the impact on recreation and tourism. The ongoing and future costs (to NRW) of running the scenic drive must all be considered.

NRW has maintained regular contact with the Friends of Cwmcarn Forest Drive and they have given periodic updates at their public meetings over the past 18 Months. Whilst re-opening the Drive is the main focus of the Group, they have also been reassured by the enormous efforts currently going into managing the large scale felling operations whilst protecting the environment and keeping public access open. Additionally, NRW is focusing a lot of attention on restocking the woodland with native species and encouraging the restoration of the ancient woodland through natural regeneration. Over 50 hectares have already been restocked and a further 170,000 trees will be planted this winter.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

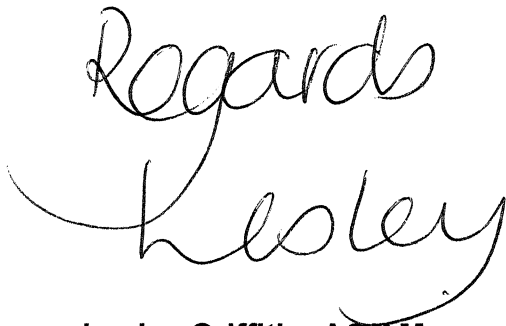
We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I am advised by NRW that the future of the Drive has not been concluded and nothing has been decided, however, they have always been clear in that they cannot commit to re-opening the Drive until the funding to support the work associated with it can be identified.

Caerphilly County Borough Council and NRW are working together to explore how working in a more collaborative and opportunistic way could enable them to maximise the benefits from the existing recreational infrastructure, capital assets and natural resources in the Cwmcarn Valley. By jointly developing a new model of management, they hope to unlock the enormous potential for community regeneration at Cwmcarn whilst maintaining it's intrinsic natural value and existing customer base. A study into the commercial feasibility and management options at Cwmcarn will commence this year. Options for the future of the forest drive will be included in this study. NRW hopes to be in a position to review the findings from the study in early 2018.

I am aware of the value of the Drive to communities and visitors but the ongoing cost implications of its re-establishment mean that NRW have to consider as many options as possible in order to assess the impact of this on their budget. I would expect that NRW will consider equality and diversity issues as they take this forward.

The Petitioners should be encouraged to continue to work with NRW in order to work through the possible options available in order to develop a plan to secure the long term future of the Drive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Regards' on the first line and 'Lesley' on the second line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Lesley Griffiths AC/AM**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig  
Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs