

P-04-683 Trees in Towns – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee,
16.06.17 / 30.06.17

Trees in Cities Review and Evidence (Petitions Committee 1.11.16 – Woodland trust / Coed Cadw)

In response to the petitions committee call for evidence we have identified some key points.

The committee wanted to know *what evidence there was for tree coverage changes across Wales in the past 5 years*. According to NRW data, there has been 12,700ha woodland creation in the period from 2011–2016, of which 10,000ha is restocking. This is below the WG ambition set in 2010 of 5,000ha increase per annum in order to meet the ambition of 100,000ha increase by 2030. This ambition was then reduced in 2015 to a 10,000ha objective by 2020. In the past two years the planting and restocking levels in Wales have reached their lowest rates in 30 years, data for 2016–17 shows only 400ha replanting across Wales, none of which was on the publicly owned estate managed by NRW.

In answer to the *query about the role of urban trees – and greening urban environment* urban tree coverage is going backwards, 159 of 220 towns across Wales have seen a decrease in tree cover between 2009 and 2013; with the average cover falling from 17.0% to 16.3% this period.

Wrexham council have collaborated with the Woodland Trust to deliver a *'Tree and woodland strategy 2016–2026'* which details a 10-year management plan to achieve a minimum 20% canopy cover. They have built this strategy on the back of the compelling benefits of trees in cities to deliver a variety of health, economic, environmental and wellbeing objectives.

We ask the Welsh Government to stand by the following asks of the petition:

- To aim for every city, town and village in Wales to benefit from at least 20% tree canopy cover, matching the leafy suburbs of the best places to live.
- To support this by establishing a challenge fund for tree planting to improve the environment where people live
- This should particularly support the planting of native trees, that can provide a habitat and nectar source for pollinators, and also fruit trees, that will provide a sustainable source of food.
- Provide meaningful support for the planting of more native trees in our towns and cities, and in particular that this issue will be addressed when Natural Resources Wales produce Area Statements, as they are required to do under the Environment Act.

Notes

The benefits of trees in the urban environment are well understood in terms of carbon capture, managing urban heat islands and health benefits such as reducing asthma in children. The benefits of controlling water flow are of particular significance, the Pitt Review identified that 2/3rds all flooding in 2007 events was caused surface water runoff. Evidence suggests increasing tree cover across an urban area by 5% can reduce surface water runoff by 2% – and that by comparison to asphalt, trees provide an 80% increase in water infiltration rates.

Forestry Commission – National Statistics on woodland area, planting and publicly funded restocking <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-7aqknx>

National Assembly for Wales Research Service, May 2017 – Woodlands in Wales: a Quick Guide – www.assembly.wales/.../Woodlands%20in%20Wales/17-008-Web-English2.pdf

NHS Forest – Health and Wellbeing evidence of trees in towns and cities:
<http://www.nhsforest.org/evidence>

NRW review – Tree cover in Towns and Cities, 2014:
<https://naturalresources.wales/media/4123/tree-cover-in-wales-towns-and-cities-2014-study.pdf>

Wrexham – Tree and Woodland Strategy 2016–2026:
http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/pdfs/env_services/trees/tree_and_woodland_strategy.pdf

Woodland Trust – Trees in Towns report, 2012:
<file://wtfs01/folderredirection/spa/Downloads/trees-in-our-towns.pdf>

Dear Kathryn,

Thanks for this response, please could you pass on the following response to the Cabinet Secretary along with our previous letter to the Petitions Committee:

‘We welcome the fact that the Cabinet Secretary has highlighted how the tree cover in towns and cities has declined from 2009 to 2013, failing under the direction of Welsh Government rhetoric to improve the public realm, environment and manage greenhouse gas emissions.

Considering the evidence has been accepted, Coed Cadw / The Woodland Trust would like to suggest that the Cabinet Secretary considers increasing tree canopy coverage in Wales’ towns and cities a priority for the Area Statement process that will be contributed to by Natural Resources Wales.’

Best Wishes,

Sam Packer