

Cross Party Group for Biodiversity (AGM)

Minutes

Date: Tuesday 21st May 2019, 12:00–13:30

Location: Neuadd / Senedd Building, Cardiff Bay

Attendees

Membership of CPG	Organisation	
John Griffiths AM	<i>Chair of CPG</i> , Welsh Labour. Member of CPG.	JG
Llyr Gruffydd AM	Plaid Cymru. Member of CPG.	
Huw Irranca-Davies AM	Welsh Labour. Member of CPG.	HID
Jenny Rathbone AM	Welsh Labour. Member of CPG.	
Nick Ramsay AM	Welsh Conservatives. Member of CPG.	
Alun Davies AM	Welsh Labour. Member of CPG.	
Leanne Wood AM	Plaid Cymru.	
David Rees AM	Welsh Labour	
Adam Price AM	Plaid Cymru	
Eluned Morgan AM	Welsh Labour	
Liz Smith	<i>Secretariat of CPG</i> - Wales Environment Link	
Karen Whitfield	<i>Secretariat of CPG</i> - Wales Environment Link	
Rhys Evans	RSPB	
Billie Jade Thomas	RSPB	
Deio Gruffydd	RSPB	
Carly Jones	RSPB	
Laura Cropper	RSPB	
Arfon Williams	RSPB	AW
Andrew Tuddenham	National Trust	
Rhodri Evans	National Trust	
Natalie Buttriss	Woodland Trust	
Jerry Langford	Woodland Trust	
Llinos Price	Woodland Trust	
Paula Keen	Woodland Trust	
Shea Buckland-Jones	WWF	
Alex Phillips	WWF	
Rachel Sharp	Wildlife Trusts Wales	
James Byrne	Wildlife Trusts Wales	
Sinead Lynch	Bumblebee Conservation	
Claire Dinham	Buglife	
Richard Garner Williams	Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru	
Speakers / Guests		
Tony Davies	Nature Friendly Farming Network (Henfron, Elan Valley)	TD
Polly Davies	Nature Friendly Farming Network (Slade Farm)	PD
Glasnant Morgan	Agroforester (Pwllrhwyaid Farm)	GM

External attendees	Organisation <i>Note: Includes various members of the Nature Friendly Farming Network, although individual members are not specified.</i>
Linda Morgan	Pwll Farm
Teona Dorrien-Smith	Nature Friendly Farming Network
Tony Harrington	Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water
Nigel Robins	Woodland Trust advisor
Gwyn Jones	European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism
Alwyn Edwards	Glastir Woodland Creation agent
Dave Ashford	Welsh Government
Geraint Jones	Farming Connect
Keri Davies	Glwydcaenewydd Farm
Charlotte Priddy	FUW
Glyn Roberts	FUW
Ludivine Petetin	Cardiff University
Malcolm Horne	Severn Trent
Amelia Unity	Artist
Rebecca Williams	CLA Wales
Steven Jacobs	Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G)
Abi Reader	Goldslan Farm
Sarah Wood	Natural Resources Wales
Sarah Hetherington	Natural Resources Wales
Patrick Holden	Sustainable Food Trust
Neil Parker	CIEEM
Katy Orford	Senedd Research Service
Haydn Evans	Soil Association
Matthew Vaughan	Upper Nantylfelin Farm
Rachel Lewis-Davies	NFU
Sorcha Lewis	Troedrhiwdrain, Elan Valley
Geraint Jones	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
Sioned James	Plaid Cymru staff
Vic Warren	CPRW / Nature Friendly Farming NETWORK
Melanie Newton	Rewilding Britain / Summit 2 Sea
Penny Lewns	CIEEM
Diana Clark	CIEEM
Robyn Evans	Newsdirect Wales
Sam Robinson	Landworkers Alliance
Lorna Davies	NFU

Key Points from the Meeting

1) Opening remarks

John Griffiths AM opened the event and explained that we face huge challenges in tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. The Welsh Government has declared a climate emergency and one of the ways that Assembly Members and stakeholders can discuss these issues is via the Cross Party Group for Biodiversity, which he hoped to re-form during this meeting.

The AGM section of the meeting was delayed until after other AMs had arrived.

2) What are public goods? How will these fit into future Welsh Government land management policy?

To start off the event, JG introduced a video showing nature friendly farmers discussing actions they've taken on their own land to improve habitat and work with nature.

Following the video, JG explained that we face an enormous challenge, with over a million species at risk of extinction globally. He said that we need new and fresh approaches and the Environment Minister, Lesley Griffiths, will be making a further statement on the development of ideas for a new land management scheme at this year's Royal Welsh Show. JG hoped that the Cross Party Group for Biodiversity would be one way for people to engage on future policy. He also referred to his colleague, Huw Irranca-Davies AM, who is also very keen on engaging with the new group.

JG said it is important to build on the excellent engagement AMs have had via WEL's Species Champions project. He referred to his own species, the water vole, and Huw's species, the lapwing. He said that the CPG can drive engagement with AMs, NRW and environmental NGOs and also, importantly, farmers. JG outlined that including those who manage our land is particularly important if we are going to be effective in tackling biodiversity loss; looking at those who are setting a good example and already managing their land in ways that produce public goods.

JG introduced Arfon Williams, Land Use Manager for RSPB Cymru, who briefly highlighted WEL's Sustainable Land Management Vision and Public Good briefing, which attendees could take away with them. This work shows the cross-sectoral support for change, with clear interest demonstrated by all the farmers and land managers that were present. AW explained that the Vision and briefing should give attendees an idea of what public goods are and what eNGOs believed was achievable. AW thanked WEL and the Nature Friendly Farming Network for coming together to organise the event, JG for Chairing and everyone for attending.

JG introduced the first speaker, Tony Davies from Henfron farm and Chair of the Nature Friendly Farming Network in Wales.

3) Tony Davies, Henfron Farm – Chair of the Nature Friendly Farming Network

TD explained that he tends to avoid questions about what he produces. In the past, if his father had been asked this question he would have said he farmed sheep. His father trebled his flock to increase the profitability of his business, but lamb farming was expensive, especially due to the need for large amounts of imported feed.

When Tony took over the business he converted to organic and cut the flock by 65%. He found that the value of sales only dropped by 25%. Farming this way was actually more profitable per head of sheep as they needed less labour and didn't need to import feed any more. TD is in the Glastir Organic and Advanced schemes. He produces high quality meat as a by-product of the way he manages his land. He also stores carbon in the peat bogs on his farm, with 300,000 tonnes of carbon locked in. TD outlined that they have also improved the biodiversity of their bogs, with more insects and birds present across the whole farm as a result of this and other management changes.

TD likes to encourage the trees on his land, with 50,000 trees on the farm. He would like to plant more but there are restrictions, with part of his land designated as SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and the rest designated as open mountain habitat. TD also saw opportunities to be paid to manage land to

ensure its ongoing water filtration functionality. He explained that his farm is not compensated for this at the moment, but the people of Birmingham rely on water that falls on their land.

Through management changes, the fields are now regenerating from rye grass to hay meadows, with a big improvement in insect and plant diversity. He said that there is definitely an increase in wildlife due to the changes made. He noted the importance of grazing animals for maintaining some of these habitats. They also produce beef, mutton and lamb as a by-product of managing the land for nature.

TD also referred to the public access benefits of managing land – with a recent charity race taking place on part of his land to raise money for cancer. This can be supported through public goods scheme as well, and is an important community benefit. He continued, outlining that access to nature is important for the health and wellbeing of general public, with a healthier population becoming less of a burden on the NHS. Currently, we spend far more on health than on land management, but TD believes this is worth investing in.

First and foremost, TD describes himself as a businessman, but he feels there is a stigma against green farming. Subsidies encourage farmers to produce more all the time, regardless of profitability. Changing this mind-set is important. TD also raised the issue that, for tenant farmers, there is nothing more demoralising than engaging with an environmental scheme, only to be charged more rent, which eats into the profits of those delivering on the ground.

Concluding his remarks, JG thanked TD and said that his presentation was certainly “*food for thought*”. He introduced the next speaker, Glasnant Morgan from Pwll Farm.

4) Glasnant Morgan, Pwll Farm – Agroforester

GM described himself as a second generation farmer and a “*tree hugger*”, with a love of trees dating back years to his purchase of a special piece of yew tree. He explained that in the 1990s there were financial issues with his father’s farm, but they resolved these by splitting the farm business. Over the years the farm has increased in size and there are lots of ancient trees on the farm, including a famous veteran tree that was featured on Countryfile. Ancient trees are great for insects.

GM said they use pollarding, which is a useful technique for managing trees on their land. They have improved over 100 acres of scrub. GM demonstrated that woodland can be increased by natural regeneration – new planting is not always necessary. However, grey squirrels can do serious damage to trees, particularly new trees, and they have suffered from this on their land. GM has done lots of hedge planting through existing agri-environment schemes – these produce lots of food and shelter for birds.

GM outlined that his son is currently building reclaimed stone walls on the farm. Many people don’t appreciate the work that goes into this, or the work that goes into laying a hedge, but aside from the wildlife benefits these are examples of important rural crafts.

Instead of burning cut-off wood from hedges, as many farms do, GM uses these to make wood piles for hedgehog habitat, so they can hide from predators. The off-cuts also provide fuel for the farm’s biomass boilers, which heat the entire farm.

The farm provides habitat for wood ants, and the woodland areas have bluebells and honeysuckle. They have also planted red oak and 30 different species of holly. GM also has an orchard, and his brother has a linked business pressing the apples from his farm. They also run farm tours and all of the linked

products and varied wildlife has made the farm profitable, demonstrated by their ability to plant parkland trees out of their own pocket.

JG thanked GM and introduced the next speaker, Polly Davies from Slade Farm.

5) Polly Davies, Slade Farm – Nature Friendly Farmer

PD described her extremely diverse farm business. She has 150 cattle, 450 ewes, as well as kids. She has a farm butchery business and delivers meat around the Vale of Glamorgan. She also sells organic veg locally. Slade Farm also has a campsite.

Despite this diversity, Slade Farm is still reliant on government subsidies, including the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the organic scheme and Glastir. PD said she is reliant on the BPS but doesn't agree with it as a subsidy. It doesn't help farmers increase wildlife on their farm. Around half of farms are making a loss or would do so without this subsidy. Farming in the UK is challenging and expensive because of the high price of land and labour. Farmers can only manage their land in environmentally friendly ways if the numbers add up. Drives for efficiency (in terms of using every bit of the land to produce) cause nature to disappear as there is nowhere left for it to live. We need nature to be valued as a commodity that needs to be invested in.

For example, it is less efficient to leave weeds and habitat for wildlife but the natural yield is still substantial. Wildlife is visible throughout Slade Farm, but this has only happened through agri-environment scheme support. PD said it is time to prioritise the natural capital of Wales. Farmers need to be part of the solution, but they are not charities and they can't afford to be part of policy discussions in the same way. For businesses to succeed, natural capital needs to be properly valued. PD affirmed that farmers will grasp the opportunity if the numbers stack up.

JG thanked all the speakers and opened up the discussion to the floor.

6) Q&A Session

Huw Irranca Davies AM asked what farmers want that's significantly different in terms of how things are managed now?

Glasnant Morgan asked for a little understanding from the Welsh Government when running schemes and gave the example of an issue they had when they starting planting work and subsequently entered into Glastir Advanced to continue planting work. They were then accused of being double funded and had to pay the money back with a penalty. This sort of confusion is likely to disincentivise farmers. Farmers are keen to provide solutions but need to be incentivised on things that aren't currently supported by existing schemes, such as ways to manage land to tackle flooding.

Polly Davies suggested one additional idea would be to incentivise farmers to grow their own feed, such as beans and cereals. This would diversify away from grass and mean less feed needs to be imported, saving farmers money and reducing climate impacts. Glastir Advanced only supports spring cereals. She also suggested asking farmers for ideas as they are sometimes isolated from the debate.

TD thought there was a case for better and more efficient monitoring. SSSIs on his land get inspected but not the surrounding fields. Farmers could help with this monitoring themselves.

Patrick Holden, CEO of the Sustainable Food Trust explained the need for both stick and carrot. For example, farmers should be incentivised for improving soil carbon and financially penalised for using

nitrogen fertilisers, which are rapidly degrading our soils. Currently, these fertilisers are the most economic to use so this needs to be changed (rather than banning them).

Sam Robinson from the Land Workers Alliance believed current schemes are a bit naïve and emphasised the need to ensure that such a big change is done in the right way to prevent farms closing. How can we implement this in a way that is positive?

TD answered, stating that change is inevitable and farmers have to be part of the solution and be involved in developing new schemes. PD added that, if people read the new proposals in detail you can see this is being thought about. She felt that the Welsh Government does understand this and is worried about bankrupting farmers. She challenged the view of the farming unions on this and thought that it is possible to work together to develop a new scheme that works for both farmers and nature.

7) AGM

The AGM was delayed until the speakers and discussion had wrapped up, to allow as much AM attendance as possible.

JG asked the gathered AMs to confirm that their wish to re-establish the CPG on Biodiversity. AMs had been informed prior to the meeting that JG hoped to re-form the group, even though it had not met much in the previous 12 months, due to a change in chair. As an objective, the CPG intended to continue with: 'to promote and further the cause of biodiversity in Wales'.

Llyr Gruffydd AM proposed JG as Chair; Nick Ramsay AM, Jenny Rathbone AM, Alun Davies AM and Huw Irranca-Davies AM agreed. JG proposed WEL as the secretariat; all attendees indicated they were happy for WEL to continue acting in this role.

No Vice Chair/s were nominated.