

We all need trees

1. Background and introduction

- a. Coed Cadw Woodland Trust the UK's largest woodland conservation charity, working for a UK rich in native woods and trees, for people and wildlife. In Wales alone we have over 14,000 members and 85,000 supporters. We manage over 100 sites in Wales covering 2,697 hectares (6,664 acres). Wales is one of the least wooded countries in Europe, with woodland making up just 14% of the landscape and less than half of this is native.
- b. Everyone benefits from trees, woods and forests – even if they never see or touch a tree, or walk in a wood. They help supply us with the essentials of life, such as clean air, water, building materials and fuel. Trees offer other riches too: our lives would be far poorer without their place in our landscapes, literature, language and livelihoods.
- c. The end of the CAP provides an opportunity to rethink and improve our environmental future. Previously, separate agriculture and forestry policy have undermined each other in key ways. We have the opportunity now to develop a single new sustainable land management policy for Wales and investment of public money in an incentive framework that is locally designed and delivered, outcome focused and secures benefits for people, the environment and nature as well as an economic future for land managers.

2. Wales is better with trees – key salient points

- a. Coed Cadw Woodland Trust's vision document, Wales is Better with Trees¹, highlights the many benefits that woodland and trees offer to Wales,

¹ Published January 2016 and available online at:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2016/01/wales-is-better-with-trees/>

environmentally, socially and economically. We support, in broad terms, the Woodlands for Wales Strategy, in particular:

- i. Timber is a key renewable resource, and one that can lock up carbon for years, thus assisting the sustainable development and climate change agendas. Timber can be sustainably produced on a commercial scale provided best practice is applied. This is best defined by the voluntary and independently audited UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS). We strongly commend WG and NRW for their commitment to manage the public forest estate in accordance with this standard.
- ii. Woodland provides huge services, including protection of water resources, recreational and health benefit and biodiversity. Factoring in these benefits means a typical urban woodland is worth £130,000 per hectare and a lowland broadleaved woodland £150,000 per hectare. Whilst timber value is substantial, the Office for National Statistics calculates the recreational value of woods to be 10 times higher². We would like to see these values acknowledged in public accounts and policy making.
- iii. We strongly support the WG ambition to plant 100,000 ha of new woodland over a 20 year period, implying 5,000 ha pa. But over the last two planting seasons for which we have figures, the rate achieved has been just 100 ha³. A post-Brexit sustainable land use policy that clarifies where planting should be targeted could make all the difference here and also address the need for more diverse and sustainable timber production .
- iv. The WG's interpretation of the EU Basic Payment rules for farmers has penalised Welsh farmers for having trees on their land, despite Welsh Government policies which encourage land managers to plant more trees. The rules required every farmer in Wales to accurately map clusters of trees over 100m², and subtract this from the eligible land area. This was not the case in England or Scotland. The new system needs to be different.
- v. The rapid rise of pests and diseases affecting woodlands and landscapes across the UK threatens biodiversity and timber production

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/ukenvironmentalaccounts/2015-07-09#tab-Woodland-ecosystem-asset-and-services-accounts>

³ [https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Ch1_Woodland_FS2016.pdf/\\$FILE/Ch1_Woodland_FS2016.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Ch1_Woodland_FS2016.pdf/$FILE/Ch1_Woodland_FS2016.pdf)

and is an issue that requires an urgent and sustained response in Wales, co-ordinated with actions in the other UK countries. We would like to see a plan to ensure that the Welsh countryside is not permanently impoverished by the widespread loss of ash trees.

- vi. Ancient woodland is the richest and most valuable habitat for wildlife we have, covering less than 5 per cent of our land area. It is irreplaceable and cannot be recreated. But despite the protections within planning policy real threats continue, even as a result of developments by the Welsh Government itself. At the end of December 2016 there were 115 ancient woodland under threat in Wales on our records. 80 of these arise from building land allocations in local plans, 24 relate to utility developments and 5 to road schemes (including the M4 relief road). We would like to see the consistent and vigorous enforcement of guidance in Planning Policy Wales.
- vii. It is vital that the WG renews its commitment in the Woodlands for Wales Strategy, broadly, to gradually restore all Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (those that have been replanted with non-native species such as Norway spruce) on its own estate, and to encourage private landowners to do the same. Not to do this would be to support the destruction of a hugely valuable and irreplaceable natural asset. Our evidence shows that commitments to restore Planted Ancient Woodland Sites, including those on the public forest estate, are not being fully acted upon despite the huge biodiversity gains from careful and sensitive restoration. We are however very encouraged by the recent comprehensive commitment by NRW to work with us to fully restore Wales' largest ancient woodland, Wentwood Forest.
- viii. There is currently no statutory protection for Wales' ancient, heritage and veteran trees, a vital and much valued element of our heritage and of international significance. The WG has established a Task and Finish Group to look at providing this; it is vital that the group's recommendations are implemented.
- ix. The trees which have the greatest positive impact on people are probably those in our towns and cities. Compelling international evidence demonstrates the massive health and well-being benefits afforded by tree-filled green space. Yet tree cover in our towns and cities varies from 34% in Trimsaran to just 6% in Rhyl.

- x. In January 2016 a petition⁴ bearing 2,258 signatures was presented to the Assembly, supporting the principle that every town and city in Wales should benefit from a minimum 20 per cent tree canopy cover and calling on the Welsh Government to create a challenge fund to support tree planting to improve the environment where people live, asking for particular support for native species and fruit trees. In presenting this, we drew attention to Forest Research's Wrexham iTree Report ⁵ which demonstrates how the town's trees save the local economy more than £1.3m every year through reduced sewerage charges and in health service savings.
- xi. The WG's excellent Plant! Initiative already funds a tree for every child born or adopted in Wales. Coed Cadw is part of this project, and we believe more could be done to build the connection between children and woods and trees. The Foundation Year of the National Curriculum could be used to ensure that every child can plant a tree themselves. We are particularly keen for schools to work with us to mark the centenary of the First World War with trees, including at our FFW Centenary Wood, Coed Ffos Las in Carmarthenshire.
- xii. Wales needs a public forest estate that is a world-leading exemplar of sustainable development. Covering nearly six per cent of the land, this is a vitally important asset that provides huge benefits for the population. We commend the WG's commitment to keeping it as a public asset. We would like to see decisions made transparently in the public interest, balancing economic, social and environmental objectives and to see the forests diversified to increase resilience, taking advantage of the devastation caused by *P. Ramorum*.
- xiii. The current work of the WG Future Landscapes Wales Working Group provides a particular opportunity to ensure that the management of WG public forest estate achieves, in an exemplary way the vision and aspirations for Wales' National Parks and AONBs. This could include a move towards low impact management within protected landscapes and even a ban on clear-felling within these areas, in all but exceptional circumstances.

⁴ More about this here: <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blogs/woodland-trust/2016/01/give-us-more-trees-in-our-towns/>

⁵ More about this here: <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/bee9-9t8dzh>

3. Responding to climate change

- a. Well-managed woodland, forests and trees have a key role both in mitigating climate change, see paragraph 2a) iii above, and adapting to it.

4. Adapting to climate change

- a. The Land Use and Climate Change group also recognised that creating additional woodland in the right places can be a very effective way to creating landscapes more resilient to extreme weather. Our report ‘Holding back the waters’⁶ describes how trees can provide a sustainable and low maintenance solution to lessening the risk of flooding. Trees also maintain water quality and reduce pollution from particulates and fertilisers. The report proposes that the WG plant at least 10 million trees in targeted areas to help reduce flood risk to thousands of homes across the country.
- b. One example of what this could mean in practice is the Pontbren Scheme in Powys. The key report ‘The Pontbren Project’⁷, launched by John Griffiths AM in 2013, outlines how ten adjoining farmers have worked together to plant over 120,000 trees and shrubs, create or restore over ten miles of hedges, and create numerous ponds. The success of the Pontbren Scheme provides a model for farmers and policy makers to that could be incorporated into a new sustainable land management scheme to better deliver essential environmental services as part of productive livestock farming.
- c. Ancient woodland is a richly complex ecosystem, with trees, plants, animals, invertebrates, fungi and soil micro-organisms all reacting with other in ways too complex for us to yet fully understand. By restoring Planted Ancient Woodland Sites more areas can once again become rich and varied habitats, re-instating more resilient ecosystems and providing habitat connectivity, and we can move away from more susceptible monoculture plantations in our most important locations.

5. The Well-being of Future Generations

- a. The ground-breaking Well-being of Future Generations Act outlined seven well-being goals that seek to describe a common vision for the Wales we

⁶ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2014/01/holding-back-the-waters/>

⁷ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2013/02/the-pontbren-project/>

want. It offers an opportunity to ensure woodland and forestry play their full role in helping secure these outcomes.

- b. The [State of Natural Resources Report](#) (SoNaRR) underlines the role of woods and trees in delivering most of the well-being goals highlighted in the Welfare of Future Generations Act⁸:
- i. A resilient Wales – trees and woods can play a crucial role protecting ecosystems and sustaining wildlife and water as well as providing renewable raw materials. All sectors need to engage in the challenge to produce multi-purpose outputs rather than seek exclusivity for their own particular interests.
 - ii. A prosperous Wales – well managed trees and woods contribute substantially not just in terms of the timber and firewood they yield, but also in enhancing resilience and productivity on farms, support water supply and fisheries, enhance biodiversity and provide the attractive landscapes and opportunities for tourism and recreation.
 - iii. A healthier Wales – trees and woods do not just provide opportunities for healthy exercise, but also literally clean the air by removing harmful pollutants, shield against noise and water pollution and can help limit flooding.
 - iv. An equal Wales – tree planting in areas where most people live helps build community action and aids economic regeneration by ensuring everyone is able to enjoy a more pleasant, leafier environment.
 - v. A Wales of cohesive communities – involving communities in tree planting and the use and management of their local woodlands has been shown to improve community cohesion and reduce anti-social behaviour.
 - vi. A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language – the distinctive cultural landscapes of ffridd, coedcae, hedgerows and ancient trees and woodland have played a significant role in the development of distinct cultural practices and locally specific art and literature.
 - vii. A globally responsible Wales – The Welsh Government's ambitious of creating 100,000 ha of new woodland was first conceived as a means

⁸ On the 9th page of the [Summary](#), though the pages are not numbered.

of reducing net CO2 emissions from the land-use sector, as well creating more resilient landscapes. It should also reduce dependency on imported timber and environmental damage by poorly regulated forestry overseas.

6. Delivering woodland creation

- a. To deliver its tree planting ambition, it is vital that the WG include meaningful incentives to landowners to plant the right trees in the right place in any post-Brexit sustainable land use policy. It is clear that the response from landowners would be much more positive if the system no longer provided disincentives as it does currently.
- b. More work is needed to more clearly identify land types and locations that are suitable for different sorts of woodland planting, with more focus on enabling beneficial change. We absolutely accept that the grant system should not support tree planting of a type and in a location which would cause environmental damage. Most locations could benefit from small areas of native planting, and there are large areas of low biodiversity landscape where we believe that suitably diverse and well-designed commercial planting could create both economic value and a landscape of generally higher biodiversity than currently exists.

7. Conclusion

- a. The need for action to protect woodlands and trees and to create and plant more has never been greater. Climate change, resource depletion and intensification are driving unsustainable pressures on soil, water resources and biodiversity, while tree disease and the constant pressure of development threaten our woodland resource. We need to act now to ensure that Wales makes the fullest possible use of woodland and trees to tackle these major environmental problems.