

FWP 24

Ymateb gan : Cyngor Sir y Fflint
Evidence from : Flintshire County Council

I refer to your request for consultation on the above Forestry and Woodland Policy in Wales. I have considered the request and have provided the following comments.

1 Flintshire Perspective

1.1 Trees are a valued feature of Flintshire's urban and rural settings. They make an enormous contribution to the character and beauty of our landscape whilst maintaining an environment which is rich in biodiversity. Flintshire County Council values its trees and woodlands and recognises both the human and environmental rewards of having a healthy and sustainable tree and woodland resource.

1.2 Flintshire County Council recognises the importance of trees, the benefits they afford and the increasingly important role they play in mitigating the effects of climate change, flooding, ameliorating and reducing the effects of pollution. Flintshire County Council, through its Trees and Woodland Strategy, provides a reference point for the management and maintenance of trees within the county, both public and privately owned.

1.3 Flintshire County Council's Trees and Woodland Strategy guides the future planning programme for Flintshire's tree population, ensuring a consistent approach is taken to tree management whilst ensuring a best practice approach for those who are actively engaged with the management of our trees.

1.4 Flintshire County Council also recognises that as a body responsible for trees we have a direct responsibility for ensuring our trees are managed appropriately and do not create a danger to either the public or property. Our strategy and management programmes set out our approach to tree care and management.

2 Responding to Climate Change

2.1 We agree trees are important to offsetting the causes of climate change and that sustainable management of the woodland resource has a capacity to counterpoise climate change and alleviate the environmental challenges of a changing climate.

2.2 In addition, we agree trees growing in parks and gardens, adjacent to highways and within the urban environment also contribute to reducing the rate of climate change and ameliorate any harmful effects by sequestering carbon, reducing pollution, increasing humidity and moderating extremes of temperature. Therefore, retaining the county's tree and woodland cover and sustainably managing what tree cover we have is an important factor in any strategy.

2.3 We believe that the Woodlands for Wales document should be resilient and flexible thus providing a mechanism for protecting trees, woodland, soil, water and biodiversity and productive enough to promote enterprise.

2.4 In addition, crossing policy boundaries and influencing other land-management activities is imperative. At present Welsh forestry policies are poor at compelling other industries, such as Agriculture, Tourism, Water etc. to adapt. Rather the principals of sustainable woodland management and/or woodland creation is being used to counterbalance bad practice.

2.5 When interpreted correctly, the finer points of sustainable woodland management have the capacity to enhance best practice in other land based industries. These positive outcomes can be seen within the Pont Bren Initiative. The initiative highlights the benefits of managing the lands, using shelterbelts and groups of trees to offset and reduce agricultural running cost, flooding issues and labour/time, whilst enhancing biodiversity, landscaping values and reducing the farms input towards climate change.

3 Woodlands for People

3.1 Although Britain doesn't have a strong affinity with community woodlands, recently Wales has seen more community engagement with initiatives like Cyd Coed and Llais y Coedwig. However, by far the greatest provision for public access and community engagement is via the local authority woodlands, especially our peri-urban woodlands and also Welsh Government woodlands.

3.2 At Flintshire County Council, we welcome in excess of 250,000 visits per year in Wepre Park alone. In addition we have other woodlands of similar standing on the outskirts of other major Flintshire towns, such as Buckley, Holywell, Greenfield and Mold, and the public are encouraged to use these woodlands for recreation, sporting, education and health related activities.

3.3 However in recent years, due to the introduction of BWW and Glastir grant schemes, external funding from central government for managing public woodlands

for multipurpose objectives has diminished. This scenario is not acceptable and something has to change to maintain access provision.

3.4 Regarding Welsh Government woodlands, we would encourage the Welsh Government to retain the ownership of these woodlands and continue with their management and open access agreements.

3.5 Aspects of public consultation. Formal consultation with the local authorities on aspects of woodland management, felling and restocking and the creation of new woodlands, Natural Resources Wales must improve. Since the demise of Forestry Commission Wales the public consultation process on aspects of woodland management and creation have eroded significantly and consultation with local authorities and the public is almost non-existent. Statutory consultation with statutory bodies should be the domain of Natural Resources Wales and not be a delegated responsibility given to the applicant to undertake.

4 A Competitive and Integrated Forestry Sector

4.1 As the body responsible for fashioning and maintaining a competitive and integrated forestry sector, Natural Resources Wales (Forestry Commission) has been criticised by the timber industry for its poor handling of the Welsh timber market. These criticisms stem from low levels of commercial judgement, poor communications and transparency and a perception to be looking after its own interests to the detriment of other woodland owners, both private and public.

4.2 Recent accounts highlight the lack of transparency and how NRW is manipulating the market to its advantage. These actions will not nurture and develop a competitive and innovative timber market or processing sector. It is evident that the Welsh timber industry is falling behind other UK and European countries. Crucially the industry is stagnating and is a considerable way off achieving its potential in relation to jobs, products and ultimately its contribution to the Welsh GDP.

4.3 If things are to change then the Welsh Government needs to re-evaluate its position within the timber industry, creating a level playing field where the public and private woodland owners can successfully access market opportunities.

4.4 In addition we lack a clear vision and distinct branding with which to market the timber industry and drive it forward.

5 Environmental Quality

5.1 Woodlands in Wales are sparse, fragmented and isolated by their nature, especially our ancient woodlands. As with other parts of the UK, Wales has unique threatened communities of wildlife which are in need of sensitive woodland management. However, we do not have the necessary governance to protect these woodlands and woodland communities.

5.2 Woodland management is at the discretion of the owner. Thus, it is the prerogative of the woodland owner to engage with NRW on aspects of woodland management, disclose ecological information and to comply with industry best practice. Too often, many of our woodlands are subject to mismanagement, neglect and over exploitation.

5.3 We believe the dilemma facing woodland policy in Wales is that by creating a competitive and innovative industry in Wales do we risk the over exploitation of our ancient woodland resource? Or do we continue with the grant aid programmes whereby woodland owners are encouraged to manage their woodlands within a strict criteria of principled woodland management parameters?

6 Conclusion

6.1 We trust this information is helpful to the consultation process and look forward to your response. As previously stated, trees are a valued feature of Flintshire's urban and rural settings. They make an enormous contribution to the character and beauty of our landscape whilst maintaining an environment which is rich in biodiversity. Flintshire County Council values its trees and woodlands and recognises both the human and environmental rewards of having a healthy and sustainable tree and woodland resource.

In addition to the above we will be interested to know how the strategy is contributing to the delivery of duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016;

how the strategy will be considered in the context of emerging policies, plans and statements (e.g. National Natural Resources Policy, Biodiversity Plans and Area Statements); and, the challenges and opportunities that arise from leaving the European Union.