



Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-741  
Ein cyf/Our ref LG/00038/17

Mike Hedges AM  
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Dear Mike

Thank you for your letter of 3 January 2017, regarding petition P-05-741 Natural Resources Wales (Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru) needs tighter restriction.

The Welsh Government's policy on biodiversity is set out in our Nature Recovery Plan, and reflects the legal framework set by the Wellbeing for Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Our ambition is to reverse the decline in biodiversity, and build ecosystem resilience, by 2020. The Nature Recovery Plan includes the following objectives:

- Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management
- Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation

The Well-being of Future Generations Act offers an opportunity to bring biodiversity into the central decision making process for public bodies – influencing biodiversity action and resourcing. The Environment (Wales) Act introduced an enhanced biodiversity and ecosystem resilience duty for public authorities in Wales, to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. This provides a strengthened lever to drive biodiversity action within public authorities, as well as assist them in meeting their well-being objectives.

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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.

Partnership working and collaboration will be key to delivering the Nature Recovery Plan's objectives. Defining the roles and responsibilities of all involved in the delivery of biodiversity action in Wales, by strengthening the role of local nature partnerships, will be vital in helping Natural Resources Wales (NRW) develop Area Statements as required under the Environment (Wales) Act.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are the most important sites for Wales' natural heritage. They help conserve and protect the best of our wildlife, geological and physiographical heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

SSSIs include coastline, freshwater, upland and lowland sites and range from small fens or sand dunes to woodlands and mountain. They contain important types of land, plants and wildlife. Geological sites range from quarries to rocky outcrops and sea-cliffs.

NRW is responsible for selecting and notifying SSSIs in Wales. Sections 28 to 33 of Part 2 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act detail the law regarding SSSIs.

Under Sections 28 (1) and 28 (5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, where Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is of the opinion that any area of land is of special interest by reason of its flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features, it has a duty to notify that fact and thereafter, within nine months, either give notice withdrawing the notification or confirming the notification (with or without modifications).

NRW choose sites carefully after detailed survey and evaluation against published criteria which are available on the website of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

When notifying a new SSSI, NRW contacts every owner and occupier to discuss why they are proposing the designation and what it would mean to the owner or occupier. This is then followed by a formal consultation process. The owner or occupier then has three months to make any objections to the SSSI notification.

All SSSI notification and denotification of sites are submitted to an Executive Director of NRW for approval. Sites with no outstanding objections following the consultation period will be approved for confirmation by an Executive Director.

For sites with unresolved objections after the consultation period, the NRW Board has delegated down to the Protected Area Committee (PAC), a subcommittee of the full NRW Board, the confirmation of SSSIs. These meetings are open to anyone who has a pecuniary interest in the site(s) under consideration.

Details of the PAC are available on the NRW web site <https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/our-chair-board-and-executive-team/our-board-committees/our-board-committees/?lang=en>

When considering any proposal to confirm the notification of an SSSI, the PAC will have due regard to socio-economic issues as laid down in Section 37 of the Countryside Act 1968. In particular the PAC must have due regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry and to the economic and social interests of rural areas. If there are any such issues (potentially or actually) in a particular case, the PAC should have this matter in their mind when taking their decision concerning the confirmation of the notification of any SSSI.

NRW has published guidance to SSSI owners and this is also available on their website:  
<https://naturalresources.wales/conservation-biodiversity-and-wildlife/find-protected-areas-of-land-and-seas/guidance-to-site-of-special-scientific-interest-sssi-land-owners-and-occupiers/?lang=en>



**Lesley Griffiths AC/AM**

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

