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By e-mail: angharadrees@woodlandtrust.org.uk

Dear William Powell AM , Chair of the Assembly Petition's Committee,

We are writing with our response to the Minister for Natural Resources, Carl Sargeant AM, letter to the Petitions Committee, dated the 30th of July regarding petition number P-03-537. We thank the committee for the opportunity to respond once again to this correspondence, and in greater detail.

Welsh Government Policies

First of all, Coed Cadw would like to welcome the Minister's acknowledgement in his opening paragraph that the Welsh Government recognises the potential benefits that woods and trees can play in helping alleviating the effects of flooding and that planting schemes in appropriate locations does make a contribution to flood risk management. The tone of the response is encouraging, but we hope that this can now start to be translated into actions on the ground. A lot of good assessment work is being undertaken by NRW which are showing positive opportunities, but there is a need to initiate action. May we ask how the Minister's statement will affect flood defence programmes and the allocation of flood defence expenditure? Would the Minister be prepared to require that a minimum proportion of the flood defence budget is allocated to land management measures? We look forward to being involved in the proposed steering group to be set up by NRW for the developing Natural Approach to Flood Risk Management activity in the Clwyd Catchment. The Trust was disappointed to learn that the Severn Rivers Trust have just been refused a small grant under the *Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate Small-scale Project Funding* to implement the second year of a 5 year multi-farm plan aimed at reducing overland flows in the Nant Alan catchment, which will contribute towards a reduction in flood risk for the flood prone towns of Llanfyllin and Llanfechain in Powys.

We are now also alarmed at indications that the RDP may not be fully funded by WG and that there may be no Glastir Woodland Management grants. Given that this is the main mechanism for funding biodiversity work in woodlands this would be bad news for the conservation of woodland biodiversity and would appear to undermine the WG's Nature Recovery Plan. It also means, of course, that Wales would be able to draw down fewer grants from the EU than we would otherwise have been able to do, to the overall detriment of the Welsh economy.

Regarding the RDP, the Welsh Government needs to address the mechanisms for delivery and ensure that schemes are open and accessible and enable the delivery of the full range of planting options that were built in to the RDP, for example the wording of the articles in the RDP does make provision for the replication of the type of shelterbelt planting as seen at Pontbren. However, the scheme rules for the new Glastir Woodland Creation still do not allow for this, which is why the 8 farmers in the Alan Valley scheme have had to seek funding through other routes. It is welcome news that there is now no minimum width for this scheme, which will encourage farmers to plant shelter belts and riparian woodland, but the scheme is still based on traditional forestry prescriptions that don't allow for flexibility required in planting density and proportion of shrub species. The recent success of the Coed Cymru and the Rivers Trust

Soil and Water Nature Fund Scheme demonstrated the potential scale of delivery of targeted tree planting that is out there if the scheme rules are right, but we are now in a situation where good work started by this scheme cannot be followed up due to lack of available grant. We would invite the committee within their capacity to raise the above questions with the Minister and his civil servants.

Glastir

We note the Minister's point regarding the recent introduction of Environmental schemes; Glastir Restoration, Woodland Creation and Woodland Management as a means of increasing woodland planting in Wales as a contribution towards its woodland creation aspirations and an acknowledgement that Glastir alone will not achieve these objectives. However, we would draw the Committee's attention to the latest planting figures for Wales which really are quite stark. The area of new woodland created during the 2014-15 planting season was just 100ha, down from 900ha in both 2012-13 and 2013-14. (From the latest Forestry Commission statistics here: [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Ch1_Woodland_FS2015.pdf/\\$FILE/Ch1_Woodland_FS2015.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Ch1_Woodland_FS2015.pdf/$FILE/Ch1_Woodland_FS2015.pdf))

What this shows, in our view, is that there is certainly an appetite for tree planting amongst landowners and farmers, but that this does need encouragement, and when, as during the last planting season, so funding is available, interest declines sharply. Funding is important as woodland creation can offer a whole range of benefits to the wider community, including reduction of flood risk, and because tree planting is a key part of Wales' carbon reduction planning. We acknowledge the barriers are complex. The Trust would like to do some more detailed opportunity mapping to try and identify locations where the creation of larger new woodlands would be desirable. We cannot do this alone and will need to co-operation of WG staff and access to data.

We absolutely agree with the Minister's point that all Glastir applications and all publically funded forestry schemes must comply with the UK Forestry Standard but would point out that the UKFS only covers high level principles and that monitoring practical compliance with UKFS requires auditing against the more details UK Woodland Assurance Standard. (UKWAS). It is vital that the WG continues to ensure that NRW manages its own estate in full compliance with the requirements and the spirit of the UKWAS standard.

Urban Trees

We note the Minister's comment on how we, Coed Cadw should actively contact other Welsh Local Authorities to raise awareness of key partnerships in order that they consider initiatives such as the *Greener Grangetown* as part of their planning proposals and designs. We are endeavouring to do this but we really don't have resources to do so on any extensive basis and fundamentally we believe it to be a public sector responsibility. We do work with Local Authorities on a selective basis to promote woods and trees including working with Conwy County Council on the Elwy Riparian project but this was an example of planting of farms rather than urban scene. In addition we would highlight the work that Coed Cadw has done over the years promoting Free Tree Packs for community groups and schools, a significant of which have been planted in urban areas. Last year's planting season; 2014-2015 we distributed a grand total of 32,430 individual trees Wales through our Community Tree Packs within Wales.

Promoting the benefits of trees in towns and cities is another example of our latest work in this field. Through our various promotional materials such as the Urban Woodland Publications we have available and the Free Tree Packs for community groups and schools mentioned above, we have been making a contribution to the promotion of good practice with regards to the urban tree agenda in a limited way over a number of years. We have also taken opportunities to lobby relevant authorities in the past and will be doing again by using our Wales is Better with Trees Policy Document, available imminently.

In addition, we are in discussion with NRW on scoping a major new project Woodland Towns project with several local authorities, but roll out will depend on obtaining substantial funding.

Some of the Committee Members may also be aware that we've been running a campaign [Make Wales Better With Trees](#) since the start of 2015 which will end in December. Tens of thousands of people in Wales' cities, towns and

villages benefit every day from having trees near to where they live. But many also lose out, especially those who live in areas with little tree cover or who have no woodland they can visit nearby. We want everyone to benefit from trees where they live, so we're working to encourage local authorities around Wales to plant more trees near to communities, and to persuade the Welsh Government to support them in doing this. We believe that every city, town and village in Wales should benefit from having trees over at least 20% of their area, matching the leafy suburbs which are seen as the best places to live, which is why we are calling on the Welsh Government to support this by establishing a challenge fund for tree planting to improve the environment where people live.

Therefore, the committee should note that we do a lot of work with Local Authorities up and down Wales within our capacity and will continue to do so, but fundamentally we do see this as Welsh Government's role to be setting priorities for Local Authorities and provide a framework which makes it possible for small NGOs like ourselves to develop approaches that deliver the aspirations of the Future Generations and Environment Acts. We would also like to ask how NRW and the Welsh Government is ensuring SUDS best practice is shared amongst LAs?

Advice and Support for Landowners

We welcome the Minister's commitment to consider supporting officers on the ground as it is a good way of advocating woodland creation and lead to better management of existing wood during the funding decision process. However, there still seems to be a real immediate issue in relation to the funding of officers on the ground. We commend that the core grant funding funds central activities of Coed Cymru, with whom we work closely, which is vitally important, but regret that this pot of money currently does not actually fund actual officers providing advice on the ground. Our understanding is that the Cooperative Measure Article 16 of the new RDP, can provide the mechanism for project officer time to be funded, these will be people working with other NGO's as part of wider catchment partnerships. As mentioned earlier we believe that there is considerable potential out there to delivery an increase in tree planting on farms and here are projects currently being developed that are waiting for access to funding in order to progress. Funding for project officer time will enable to promotion of capital funds for implementation through existing RDP mechanisms, as long as the correct mechanisms are in place for delivery, as mentioned earlier.

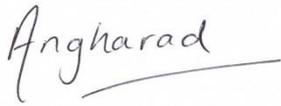
We do acknowledge that there is an important resource in agents and advisers in the private sector, and we frequently refer enquires we receive to private sector agents for follow up. We support the use of private sector agents to prepare woodland plans under Glastir provided that this role is not confined to commercial foresters but includes people who have appropriate expertise on the use of trees in farming, for example for run-off and water quality management and those who have recreation management and ecological expertise.

We would welcome clarification of how Farming Connect will provide woodland advice and how this will be integrated with Glastir woodland requirements? We fear that forestry advice will continue to be treated in a separate silo and focused on plantation management, ensuring the continued artificial separation between farming and forestry, with most farmers receiving no advice on how they can use targeted tree planting to strengthen their farm business including helping with issues of water management. How will advisors with the expert tree knowledge and advice feed that through to landowners – landowners not getting advice from appropriate people will result in poor uptake of scheme ultimately. There is a need for better communication and good relationships between landowners and on the ground agents and officers. Currently, Coed Cymru are involved in Farming Connect in that they are on the Board, but they have no engagement in the development of individual Glastir schemes.

Conclusion

As a way of moving forward this discussion we would appreciate if the Committee could put these questions we've raised in our response to the Minister and his team within your capacity of holding the Welsh Government to account. One again we thank the committee for their continued engagement with this petition and we look forward to see how the petition is moved forward and the outcome of the next discussions

Yr eiddoch yn gywir,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angharad". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Angharad Rees

Swyddog Ymgyrchoedd / Campaigns Officer