

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chwchedd Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
PR57
Ymateb gan CLA Cymru / Evidence from CLA Cymru



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CLA Cymru: The Voice of the Rural Economy in Wales

One-third of the Welsh population lives in rural areas and our rural economy supports 459,000 people. The Country Land and Business Association in Wales (CLA Cymru) represents many farms, but also farm businesses which have developed additional business activities. Such activities may be referred to as diversification, but they remain mutually dependent with the foundation farm business. It means that we represent a very broad range of economic players in the rural economy. In addition to our expertise in agricultural issues, we also have knowledge and experience relating to the breadth of issues affecting rural businesses, including concerns with planning, investment and economic development, skills provision, connectivity, physical infrastructure and housing. In Wales, CLA Cymru's membership reaches nearly 3,000 rural businesses.

Minister's and Deputy Minister's priorities for the next 12-18 months

CLA Cymru welcomes the response from the Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change regarding Welsh Government's priorities going forward. We strongly support the key areas of focus where landowners and rural businesses have a key role to play—specifically climate change, renewable energy, net zero commitments, tree planting, biodiversity and nature emergencies, digital infrastructure and housing.

Agriculture (Wales) Bill

The key legislation for meeting many of these commitments will be the Agriculture (Wales) Bill. Our organisation has already identified the Bill as pivotal for long term rural economic development through our submission to the Economy, Trade and Rural affairs committee. However, due to the cross-cutting nature of the Bill and its relevance to both rural affairs and many of the priorities

identified above, we argue this Committee also has a role in scrutinising its legislative journey through the Senedd.

Sustainable Farming Scheme

The development of the replacement for the Basic Payment Scheme and Rural Development Programme in Wales should be a key focus of the Committee in the short and medium term. The development and successful implementation of the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) will be the key policy mechanism for meeting many of the commitments and aims set out by Welsh Government. There needs to be extensive stakeholder engagement, testing and trialling before full roll out and a clear and fair transition from the current policy to the new SFS. Existing environmental delivery in addition to the incentivisation of new environmental benefits needs to be at its heart.

Tree planting

Improving the rate of tree planting within Wales by Welsh Government should also be a key priority of the Committee. Wales is well behind its own target of new planting of 2,000 hectares a year. The report on Woodland creation published earlier this year produced via the Wales Land Management Forum sub-group on forestry should be the key reference document for both the Committee and Welsh Government. The CLA and other key organisations all contributed and signed off the report which can be found at the following link.

https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-07/woodland-creation-wales-report_0.pdf

Rural Connectivity

Rural connectivity is vital for the long-term economic sustainability of the Welsh rural sector. We want the Committee to ensure Welsh Government is focussing upon the following key issues:

- Clarity of responsibility between governments and between Welsh Government departments and clarity for customers about what they need to do, options and their responsibilities;
- Investment via regional funding and growth deals should be invested in vital connectivity infrastructure to create economic growth;
- Long term fair deal for landowners who support vital infrastructure.

Housing

The availability and affordability of housing in rural areas has continued to decline, which has consequently effected employment opportunities, availability of skilled labour, business growth and the sustainability of rural services and amenities.

It is paramount that there is adequate supply of housing within these rural areas for the economy to thrive, and there needs to be a sufficient supply in the right place and of the right nature. It's well known that landowners have played a pivotal role in providing housing to help sustain their communities for future generations and wish to continue to do so however, it is felt that among our members and the wider collective of rural occupiers, they are discouraged by the existing tax regime and complexity of the planning system. The CLA published a planning report earlier this year and we argue the key recommendations need to be acted on by Welsh Government. The report can be found at the link below and we are providing more detail through the Local Government and Housing Committee submission due on the 17th September.

https://www.cla.org.uk/documents/90/A_planning_system_designed_for_the_rural_economy_in_Wales_-_March_2021_0.pdf

We look forward to continuing to work with the Committee going forward and would welcome the opportunity to provide oral evidence in the future.