



## Introduction

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### *About Confor*

Confor ([www.confor.org.uk](http://www.confor.org.uk)) is the not-for-profit organisation for the UK's sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses. Its member companies reflect the diversity and capabilities of the forest industry, representing the whole forestry and wood supply chain.

This response is submitted by Confor on behalf of its members by Anthony Geddes as the National Manager for Wales.

### *About the consultation*

*The Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee has been set up by the Senedd to look at policy and legislation, and to hold the Welsh Government to account in specific areas. These areas include climate change policy, the environment, energy, planning, transport, and connectivity.*

*The Committee will be setting its priorities for the Sixth Senedd (2021-2026) early in the autumn term. In order to help inform the Committee's decisions we are gathering views on what you think our main priorities should be.*

## Response

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### *What do you think the Committee's strategic priorities should be over the next eighteen months?*

The formation of the portfolio of the Climate Change Minister (CCM) for Wales does something not seen before in Welsh or UK politics. It unites responsibility for several portfolios that are interdependent on one another for delivering beneficial outcomes. This creates an equal opportunity for the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee (CCEIC) operate at a high level across Wales and to seek evidence of the demise of siloed working and delivery.

Due to the size and complexity of this portfolio the CCEIC will be essential for ensuring that there is scrutiny into the delivery of positive outcomes not just a series of strategies that are impossible for the industries of Wales to deliver. The recent work by the DCCM on the 'Trees and Timber Deep Dive' provides good examples of practical action by government to unblock barriers to tree planting. The proof should be expected in a significant rise in tree planting figures through 2021 into 2022.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Achieving Wales's climate change targets is not just about government legislation. It will require the people of Wales to change the way they live, work, and relax. It is critical that the government helps people to understand those changes and communicate the steps that we will all need to take to halt climate change.

As an external committee the CCEIC will play an important role in assessing the quality and nature of the support and communications the CCM & DCMM develop to aid these changes both through the public and private sector.

Living with the outcomes of climate change such as more frequent flooding and heavy rainfall events will be challenging for communities in Wales. Our natural environment and resources can be used to mitigate or reduce the impact of climate change. Green infrastructure must be considered as part of any infrastructure or mitigation programs developed to support communities in Wales.

## ENERGY

The simple facts are that as a nation we need to reduce our energy consumption whilst building resilience into our energy grids and infrastructure. The performance of our homes and buildings especially in rural communities has significant impact on energy consumption but also fuel poverty. There are questions over the long-term benefits of using wood fuel, biomass, and woody fibre for energy generation especially when viewed from a carbon hierarchy and circular economy perspective.

The CCEIC must ensure that the steps taken by the Welsh Government to develop a green grid does not devalue the use of timber and virgin fibre in other higher benefit outcomes and more significantly does not push those close to or in fuel poverty into over the edge.

## NET ZERO

Some segments of Welsh industry are naturally carbon neutral or even carbon positive. Forestry and the timber industry are one of these but there are further ways to deliver emissions savings or reduction.

The support for further investment into cleaner more modern equipment but also innovation funding to deliver new equipment and technology will be a key part of this. Faster more efficient ways of planting trees will help us achieve our net zero goals sooner.

There are also opportunities to identify or push other sectors to improve their performance. New build housing and retrofit are prime examples of this where the use of more timber and developing new products like wood fibre insulation will pay significant dividends.

There is also the question whether we can exceed our targets on net zero and decarbonisation. A recent paper in Nature highlighted that newly planted commercial forest could achieve cumulative GHG mitigation of up 269% more mitigation than delivered by newly planted conservation forests.

The benefit of tree planting is that we can blend species to deliver multiple outcomes. Scrutiny must be given to grant funded tree planting to ensure that it delivers the outcomes intended and offers value for money against those desired outcomes.

## TREE PLANTING

Tree planting must be a major focus area for the CCIEC. Historic low planting figures set against a target of 2,000 h.a per annum are unfortunately no measure of success. The recent recognition of this by the CCM & DCCM is a very welcome step. Actions have been identified to change this including, clear direction to the regulator (NRW), secured long term support and seeking to secure routes for responsible future investment by people and businesses in Wales.

In addition to this, the need to simplify an overly complex regulatory system remains a more significant hurdle to overcome. We must not seek to put nature at risk but the assessment process must add value and acknowledge that there are good reasons to delivery afforestation.

We need the CCEIC to support a step change in thinking, by holding the regulatory and funding arms of Welsh Government to account. It is essential to foster an attitude or outlook that says ‘how can we achieve our aim’ not ‘what are the reasons not to deliver on this’.

## NATURE & BIODIVERSITY

The Climate Change Emergency is equalled only by the seriousness of nature and biodiversity emergency. The crossover between the future Sustainable Farming Scheme and new policy development required to support and encourage all people in Wales, either privately or through their businesses, to support nature & Biodiversity will be a genuine test for the spirit of collaborative working within Welsh Government. The performance of the National Forest project in delivering the public benefits/outcomes and communicating and encouraging public interaction will be critical.

Additional woodland and hedge creation on farms is a great example of this bolstering connectivity and habitat for many of our less common and endangered species. We have a major under-appreciated resource as identified in the recent SoNaR report. The assessment of managed woodland highlighted that this was the only subject area where habitat was either not significantly declining or was improving. Woodland created and managed for productive timber also benefits nature & Biodiversity but is undervalued from a policy and legislative perspective

## CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Wales has a real opportunity to implement the principles of the Circular Economy (CE) within its future policy ethos. The CE is highly visible in action within the timber industry, where there is no waste, only biproducts which are upcycled as many times as possible to make higher value-added goods or materials.

Operation and understanding of the CE in Wales appears low outside of a few key industries. Review of the learning outcomes that the Welsh Government take from successful industries and apply to other sectors will be critical to judge success and overall performance on the uptake of CE.

## ENVIRONMENT

We are already living with the effects of climate change with increase flooding, drought, air, and water pollution as well as negative impacts on biodiversity and habitat. There is a significant role for our natural environment in mitigating this through promotion of natural defences. Whether this is additional tree planting on farm for drought resilience, urban hedging to combat air pollution or large-scale afforestation and land management to protect communities from flooding.

It is critical that the CCM & DCMM create a holistic set of policies that incorporate environmental management but at a level that is realistic and actionable. This means understanding that if a farmer or land manager is to operate a sustainable business, the SFS must not exclude them from other beneficial projects or income streams.

As an example, the current Glastir system does not allow variation of future management options. This has led to many afforestation schemes being withdrawn and a significant shortfall in expenditure of afforestation budgets as a result.

## HOUSING

Sustainable housing is at the centre of our green recovery. Emission from the building trade remain a significant problem. A significant reform of building regulations and standards is required as well as taking a pro timber approach construction and retro fit building.

This work is required urgently if Wales is to become a country with a fit for purpose housing stock. There is significant inequality throughout Wales when it comes to good quality social or private housing and only through addressing this will we start to see energy consumption reduce and lower income households able to access a better quality of life.