

## **Minister for Climate Change, Evidence Paper for the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee**

The climate emergency is the biggest existential threat to our planet. To begin to tackle the crisis action is needed across government, business and communities. We need to urgently reduce emissions, explore greener technologies and each of us can make a difference.

To decarbonise and help Wales reach its legally binding target of reaching Net Zero by 2050 we will all need to do much more to reduce our carbon emissions over the next 10 years than we have in the last 30. We must follow the scientific advice, do things differently and be bold.

The Senedd was the first Parliament to declare a climate change emergency. This proved how seriously the issues of climate change are taken in Wales and how determined we are as a Government to act.

At the start of this Senedd the First Minister created a new Ministry to focus on climate change. The Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change have been asked to ensure that we put the environment, biodiversity loss and climate change at the heart of everything we do as a government. By bringing together responsibilities for housing, transport, planning, energy and the environment, we will tackle the dangers of climate change, enhance our natural assets to the full and build the green, sustainable future for Wales that we hope to see.

We will also need to adapt to the impacts climate change. We are already seeing the effects of our changing climate and must act now to protect the most vulnerable people and communities in Wales.

Protecting nature and decarbonising will help us all by improving our health, benefiting our economy and preserving Wales' beautiful landscapes and nature for future generations.

In June this year the Senedd declared a nature emergency and called for statutory targets to be set to halt and reverse the decline in biodiversity. This follows recent international research showing the fragility of many of our ecosystems with more than a million species at risk of extinction due to pressures including habitat loss, pollution, invasive non-native species and climate change. This declaration will put Welsh Government action on nature on a par with climate change in terms of urgency and significance.

The Welsh Government's published First Supplementary Budget for 2021-22 reflected the changes to Ministerial portfolios announced on 13 May. A Climate Change portfolio was created for the first time in Welsh Government with a total budget allocation of £2.633billion.

This paper summarises the issues and activity taking place across key areas of the climate change portfolio. It builds on the letter that was sent to the Chair of the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee in July 2021, by including further information on priority work and commitments made in the Programme for Government.

## **Climate Change**

Climate change concerns both the work to reduce our emissions to net zero, and work to deal with the climate risks we already face.

In March 2021, Wales committed to the stretching target of net-zero emissions by 2050. The Senedd set this target in legislation alongside a series of carbon budgets and decadal targets, underpinned by advice from the Climate Change Committee (CCC), our statutory advisors. Carbon Budget 1 was 2016-2020 and required an average reduction of 27%. Carbon Budget 2 is 2021-2025 is for an average 37% reduction. We have committed to publishing our new *Net Zero Wales* Plan on 28 October, ready for COP26 in Glasgow.

The 2030 decadal target is for 63% reduction against the baseline. This reflects the need for the 2020s to be ‘the decade of action’ and for everyone to play their part if we are to meet net zero by 2050. This is reflected in the Plan which captures both the commitments from, and the requirements of, businesses, workers and communities across Wales. The Welsh Government must use every opportunity within its strategy for recovery from the pandemic to embed and drive positive changes with regards to emissions. The forthcoming COP Cymru will be a key stepping stone in this engagement journey.

Within my portfolio, the new UK Emissions Trading Scheme, introduced in January 2021, covers all major power, industry and aviation emitters (some 46% of total Welsh emissions). The Scheme enables carbon ‘allowances’ to be bought and sold at auction and in a carbon market. It is managed by a joint four-nation Authority. It is not yet linked to the EU scheme, although the devolved nations and elements of UK Government have been advocating this approach for some time, alongside the majority of scheme participants. I expect to consult on changes to strengthen the Scheme in the coming months.

The Welsh Government recognises that the public sector must take a leading role in driving down emissions, reflected in our ambition for a net-zero public sector by 2030. We continue to drive progress in this area and have developed a monitoring framework to track progress. The Welsh Government Energy Service offers technical advice alongside loans to public sector and community organisations for renewable and retrofit projects. A wide variety of public organisations have benefitted from our decarbonisation innovation programme, which seeks to identify and nurture new and ground-breaking ideas and concepts to support work on decarbonisation, especially those which take a systems view of the challenge.

Climate Adaptation describes the actions required to adapt to the effects of climate change, such as increased rainfall in winter and warmer, drier summers. The Climate Change Act requires Welsh Ministers to report on the Welsh Government's objectives, actions and future priorities regarding the impacts of climate change and also provides Welsh Ministers with powers with regards to public bodies and their response to climate risk. I expect to make a statement in due course on the delivery of the current Adaptation plan *Prosperity for All: A Climate Conscious Wales*, including on any updates which may be required in light of the latest CCC advice.

The Welsh Government has supported a wide range of innovative projects designed to make progress with respect to decarbonisation and energy efficiency, but is dependent on funding for innovation from UKG / BEIS and Europe.

## Energy

The UK energy system is facing a period of significant change and upheaval as we transfer to renewable sources of power in support of the wider net zero agenda. Energy generation in Wales is evolving in line with these wider changes. The Welsh Government set out a comprehensive statement of its approach to energy policy in *Energy Wales: A Low Carbon Transition* and we have subsequently published more detailed policies.

The devolved planning system is one of our greatest levers in driving changes across Wales over the longer period. Planning Policy Wales, our main policy statement, places fossil fuel extraction at the bottom of its fuel hierarchy, which in turn supports the aspirations to a net-zero energy system.

The Welsh Government is heavily involved in a range of initiatives designed to promote public ownership and reduce emissions from the power sector, which remains the largest emissions sector in Wales as a result of developments which mean Wales is hosting 16% of the UK's gas fired electricity generation.

To deliver on our net zero ambitions Wales will need to develop a more comprehensive policy on decarbonising heat, which is a substantial cross cutting challenge linked to fuel poverty, housing, commercial, industrial and waste policy areas.

Although the UK Government holds the principal financial and regulatory levers the Welsh Government has set targets for renewable energy:

- for renewables to generate an amount equivalent to 70% of Wales' electricity use by 2030;
- for 1 gigawatt of renewable energy capacity to be locally owned by 2030, and
- for all new energy developments to have at least an element of local ownership from 2020.

In 2019, the equivalent of 51% of Wales' electricity use came from renewables. The rate of increase has slowed due to UK Government incentives ending. We have

reached 83% of the locally owned target. Through a Ministerial led deep dive we are exploring the opportunities, barriers and effective actions we can take to scale up renewable energy generation in Wales and how we retain the wealth and ownership in Wales. The Welsh Government has made clear its commitment to reduce the use of fossil fuels. Wales has published policies hostile to petroleum extraction and to coal extraction and use in power generation.

We have worked with the four regions of Wales to develop energy strategies highlighting the scale of change needed to reach net zero, and the economic opportunities this presents. This puts Wales in a strong position to develop the more detailed and integrated plans needed to design a low carbon energy system.

Building on the work of the regional energy strategies, the Welsh Government is piloting Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) in partnership with local authorities. This is a more detailed approach to identify the actions to decarbonise a local energy system. The process aims to inform, shape and enable key aspects of the transition to a low carbon energy system. It is capable of identifying what needs to happen, where and by when. The resulting plans will provide crucial evidence to support:

- energy efficiency retrofit;
- heat;
- transport;
- economic development; and
- inform grid network providers' plans.

We have initiated and funded two LAEP pilots in Conwy and Newport Local Authority areas. We are working with Local Authorities and regional decision makers to shape the roll out of this more detailed planning across Wales during 2021-22.

The public engagement we are beginning to see as a result of this work will be essential in securing the public consent to deliver the scale of change needed across heat, buildings, transport and power.

Hydrogen is a nascent but very promising technical solution to some of our decarbonisation challenges. Our consultation on a Welsh pathway for hydrogen closed in April. The opportunities for hydrogen use in Wales will also be explored through Local Area Energy Planning.

## **Decarbonising Housing**

The built environment and housing play a significant role in carbon emissions and must therefore play a significant role in meeting our net zero ambitions.

We have made good progress in how to build new homes that are low or zero carbon in use and that generate vastly reduced emissions during the build process. As a result we are able to set a high bar for new homes, requiring all new social housing planned from 1 October to be built without the use of fossil fuels to heat the homes and provide hot water (revised WDQR2021). Our ambition is that where social housing leads, market housing will follow.

The challenge of reducing carbon in new builds is significant enough but the challenge of reducing emission from our 1.4m existing homes is far greater. There are no easy answers and one size does not fit all. Which is why we have adopted a 'test and learn' approach. Our focus is on 'fabric ready' interventions – making homes as fuel efficient as possible and getting them ready for future iterations of their decarbonisation journey. Most homes will undergo retrofit interventions in stages reflecting when it is right to do work to an individual home. This approach also recognises the ongoing development of skills, tech and products to decarbonise the wide range of homes we have.

Our Optimised Retrofit Programme is the means of delivering a clear mechanism to take meaningful, test and learn, coordinated steps to decarbonise homes, using a structured, technically robust methodology, whilst remaining as affordable and pragmatic as possible. The approach is being further strengthened as part of our £50m investment this financial year by explicitly focusing on using the retrofitting of social homes as a vehicle for enhanced social, economic and community outcomes.

## **Marine Energy Programme**

Infrastructure investment provides an important and much needed stimulus, creating the conditions for increased and sustainable growth in the medium and longer term.

Since 2019 work has been underway to stimulate renewable tidal power generation in the seas around Wales and help support other forms of marine energy generation. This has the aim of creating jobs and investment in new industries in Wales.

The First Minister convened the Hinkley Point C Stakeholder Reference Group in July 2020 to provide an independent assessment of the implications for Wales of the new nuclear power station currently being developed at Hinkley Point, in Somerset. The Group reported on its work March 2021. This is a wide ranging report which provides us with a valuable source of evidence and advice. We have been considering their findings in detail and I will soon be issuing a Written Statement in response.

## **Trees and timber**

We need to plant 43,000 hectares of new woodland by 2030, and 180,000 hectares by 2050 to meet the 'balanced pathway' set out of the Climate Change Committee.

Last year, just 290 hectares of woodland was planted in Wales and annual woodland creation has not exceeded 2,000 hectares since 1975. Further development of the National Forest, including through community woodlands, is a key part of this.

Delivering our targets will require an alliance of change involving many partners. The vast majority of new woodland will not be planted on Welsh Government land, but by the communities, farmers and other landowners across Wales.

To address the barriers to woodland creation the Deputy Minister for Climate Change undertook a deep dive into tree planting. This identified a series of actions, including a new funding scheme for woodland creation and an industrial strategy to coordinate the timber supply change and construction sectors.

On 30<sup>th</sup> September, the Welsh Government opened a new window of the Glastir Woodland Creation scheme, which will allow land managers to apply for £5.5m funding for woodland creation. We also opened a pilot Woodland Creation Planning scheme as a first step to develop the new funding offer. A woodland finance working group is currently considering models to attract investment in woodland creation, without disrupting existing communities and patterns of landownership.

We will open a consultation later this year on the long-term delivery of the National Forest. We will also begin work to identify areas for 30 new woodlands and 100 Tiny Forests as part of the National Forest programme.

Meeting net zero, particularly in the construction sector, will also mean using much more timber in Wales. 80% of the timber used in the UK is imported and only 4% of the 1.5 million m<sup>3</sup> of harvested Welsh timber is processed to be used as construction graded timber. We have begun work on a timber industrial strategy to identify changes which need to take place across the timber supply chain, from the supply of timber, through its processing to end use and re-use. This includes looking at the role of NRW, who have committed to selling up to 30% of their timber through alternatives to the current model focussed on sale for highest financial value.

## **Nature and biodiversity**

SoNaRR2020 concludes that the loss of biodiversity is accelerating globally at unprecedented rates and Wales needs to build resilient ecological networks and reduce its impact outside of Wales to tackle this.

Our Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) sets out the objectives and key actions needed in Wales to achieve our ambitions for nature recovery both as part of meeting our own Resilient Wales goals and our global commitments to halting the loss of biodiversity.

It sets out Welsh Government's priorities for tackling biodiversity loss, and reflects the need for action to tackle the nature and climate emergencies, build resilient ecological networks across our whole land and seascape to safeguard species and habitats, addressing the root causes of biodiversity loss, and targeting interventions to help species recover where necessary.

We are also required to update our Natural Resources Policy to fulfil our duties under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Our vision for our seas is that they are clean, healthy, safe, productive, and biologically diverse. Wales has important marine habitats, such as seagrass forests and saltmarshes. Our approach is structured around assessment, protection and

management, and restoration. Effective marine planning for, and regulation of, new development is crucial to enabling sustainable marine sector growth, particularly for the development of marine energy projects to contribute to net zero.

Our Nature Networks Fund in partnership with National Lottery Heritage Fund and NRW is focussed on improving the condition, connectivity and resilience of the protected sites network including by supporting the active involvement of communities in caring for them.

Building on the action delivered under the Fund, we are also developing a multi-year Nature Networks Programme with NRW to help create resilient ecological networks, with protected sites at their core. Our intention, subject to the UK Spending Review, is that we will have a multi-annual budget to support the implementation of the programme.

The National Peatland Action Plan aims to restore at least 600-800ha of peatlands per year over the next five years, equating to over 3,000ha of peatlands on a recovery pathway by 2025. Peatland restoration is an important nature based solution to tackling climate change, and will safeguard an estimated 834,000 tonnes of carbon stock.

Our 'Local Places for Nature' programme aims to create 'nature on your doorstep' in urban areas of deprivation, or those with little access to nature. Projects are focussed on modest measures that make an impact locally. Over this term, we will create 2,000 pollinators sites, 1,000 community-growing sites and places for nature in 50 transport hubs.

We are working with NRW to take forward work on land management agreements (LMAs) to see land, particularly privately owned land, better cared for. LMAs provide a mechanism to work directly with landowners to protect valuable habitat both on and outside protected areas. Landowners, particularly farmers, do not tend to apply to grant schemes, so LMAs provide an effective way to work with them directly to support the change needed on their land.

We will support the Action Plan on Pollinators Taskforce by providing a secretariat, establishing subgroups requested by the Taskforce, and delivering the Bee Friendly scheme. We are working with Defra and members of the Bee Health Advisory Forum to develop an implementation plan for the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 and will support the National Bee Unit, part of APHA, to deliver the Bee Health Programme in Wales.

We are working with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) to develop a suite of biodiversity indicators which will allow Ministers and stakeholders to assess progress towards biodiversity outcomes at a national, UK and Global level. This includes the development of indicator 44 on the status of biological diversity in Wales as required by the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

We are committed to creating a new National Park for Wales – the first in more than half a century – centred on the Clwydian range and Dee Valley AONB. The First Minister has emphasised the importance of delivering on this commitment in the current Senedd term. National Parks have a vital role to play in delivering Welsh

Government commitments, particularly on tackling the nature emergency and delivering sustainable tourism.

We will be working Park Authorities to ensure that they are as lean, as transparent and as efficient as possible in order for them to focus on the priorities that matter most. This may involve some governance reform, as well as increasing collaboration.

## **Circular Economy**

We are prioritising the transition to a more circular economy as a key element of our decarbonisation aims, as well for the impact it can have to improve economic and social outcomes. Unsustainable consumption lies at the heart of our climate and nature crises with almost half of all our carbon emissions coming from the products we make and use every day. The pandemic and Brexit have also shown us that we cannot take resources for granted and therefore how we manage resources has never been more important.

Earlier this year, *Beyond Recycling* – a strategy to make the circular economy a reality in Wales was published. This sets out the Welsh Government’s commitment to accelerate our transition to a circular, low carbon economy that works to keep resources in use and reduce emissions. It contains key actions that will be taken forward across Government. Our transformational journey since the start of devolution, to increasing recycling and reducing waste has already established Wales as a world leader in this field and this provides us with both a solid foundation and distinct opportunity. Further increasing recycling and reducing waste remain key, but we also have the opportunity to develop our infrastructure and economy further to extract greater economic value from the materials collected.

We will work with partners to look at how our existing recycling and waste collection infrastructure, which is very different to many parts of the UK, can maximise the generation of high quality resources which can be kept in use for longer and to minimise the amount of waste businesses generate. Some of our traditional recycling facilities are turning into eco-parks where items are sent for remanufacturing, re-use and repair rather than recycling and many social enterprises are finding value in collecting items for repair and re-use such as bicycles and we will therefore work to continue to support and expand this progression through not only the use of the materials, but to also drive the move to reuse and repair.

The people of Wales have been at the heart of our recycling transformation with households the length and breadth of the country playing their part. We have also seen community action from sharing surplus food to coordinating litter picks. We have visually seen changes where we live from the growth of plastic free and zero waste shops and repair cafes and libraries of things supporting people to reduce unnecessary waste and repair and share items. The Programme for Government has set our very clear commitments to build on this by supporting 80 repair and re-use hubs and community recycling. This shows how, as well as our action to change how we use resources, we will work with citizens, communities and businesses to place.



Our businesses are innovating too like using the recycling material we collect to make products we need and we will also take steps to provide support them to get the value from the resources we keep in use. We will do this through for example including supporting sustainable purchasing in public procurement and ensuring that businesses get access to advice and support. In doing so, this will also help to retain value here in the Welsh economy whilst reducing emissions.

Keeping resources in use will also support us to continue to take action on key materials which are often ends up as waste and cause damage to the environment. This includes taking action to phase out unnecessary single use items and halving food waste by 2025. We will be bringing forward measures to encourage more efficient resource use - from introducing a requirement on businesses and non-domestic premises in Wales to separate items for recycling, to game-changing reforms to packaging and drinks containers.

As reflected within the Programme for Government, one of those key measures is Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). EPR seeks to implement the polluter pays principle by ensuring those businesses which place products on to the market bear the costs for the end of life management of those products post-consumer use. This can include recovery of the full net costs for end of life waste collection and recycling. We will apply these EPR reforms to packaging first including a deposit return scheme for drink containers and we will publish the proposed final design of these reforms early in the New Year. We are working in partnership with the other governments across the UK and are also exploring how EPR reforms can potentially be applied to other items such as batteries, electrical and electronic equipment, motor vehicles, textiles and fishing gear.

In addition, we are committed to bringing forward legislation to ban more single use plastics.

### **Clean air**

Poor air quality contributes to poor health, with a pronounced impact on the most vulnerable. Maximising delivery of air quality objectives through behaviour change, for example active travel, is key. The development of a Clean Air Act for Wales will be informed by the responses to the White Paper consultation held earlier this year.

### **Clean water**

Maintaining and enhancing our dynamic water ecosystem is central to tackling the wider strategic challenges we face. We need to ensure our drainage and sewerage systems are sustainable, managed effectively and that they are fit for purpose in terms of meeting changing demands. To address these challenges we need to work in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders.

The Programme for Government makes a commitment to begin designation of Wales' inland waters for recreation and strengthening water quality monitoring.

We are working with a broad range of stakeholders, including Natural Resources Wales, Water Companies and the agricultural sector to ensure where improvements are needed to support cleaner inland waters (including rivers) action is taken.

As part of this policy development we are considering a broad range of issues around the designation of inland bathing waters, including issues of access to water and water safety

We want to make sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) mandatory on almost all new building developments. This will relieve pressure on the sewer and drainage network by redirecting and slowing down the speed at which surface water enters the sewer system. It will help ensure storm overflows are only used as a last resort.

The Programme for Government includes a specific commitment to enhance the SuDS legislative framework to provide additional environmental, biodiversity, well-being and economic benefits to our communities.

We are working with NRW and water companies in Wales to develop Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans. The plans will look at ways to address existing and future pressures on the sewer system, including population growth and climate change, to build a more resilient wastewater and drainage infrastructure.

The plans will help ensure water companies invest strategically and transparently for a wastewater and treatment network that is resilient and affordable in the long and short term. DWMPs will provide the opportunity to adopt a multi-sector catchment approach where the water companies and stakeholders are able to integrate their investment and development plans

Resilient rivers are essential for enhancing Wales' biodiversity, enabling more recreational use and securing wider benefits to society and our economy. We are very concerned that the majority of Wales' SAC rivers fail to meet phosphorus targets

A cross sector approach is required to reduce phosphate levels in our waterways due to the differing patterns and different sources of pollution.

A Management Oversight Group has been established to provide strategic direction and help expedite a number of areas. The Group has representatives from all relevant sectors.

## **Flood protection**

Reducing the risk of flooding to people, properties and infrastructure in our communities is a significant priority. Across Wales, 245,000 properties are at risk of flooding, with a further 400 at risk from coastal erosion. The risks will only be exacerbated by the changing climate. Our [National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion](#) sets out how we will manage the risks over the next 10 years. It focuses not only on reducing present risk, but also preventing issues for future generations through more informed planning decisions, the better management of water and

natural flood management. The storms of February 2020 highlighted the risks we face from our industrial heritage.

Two Programme for Government commitments directly relate to the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management policy and programme. Firstly to fund additional flood protection for more than 45,000 homes and secondly to deliver nature-based flood management in all major river catchments to expand wetland and woodland habitats.

This financial year we will invest over £65 million in flood risk management activities across Wales. Investment in flood and coastal risk management, helps to directly address the impacts of climate change including rising sea levels and increased storm events. To support with achieving the commitment to fund additional protection to 45,000 homes we are developing a pipeline of capital flood and coastal erosion schemes to better protect homes across Wales.

In terms of the commitment to deliver nature-based flood management, pilot projects have been ongoing over the past two financial years to better understand the benefits and barriers to delivering nature based flood risk management solutions. To further deliver on this commitment, all schemes being developed through the capital programme are required to consider nature flood management as one of their options.

Nature based solutions allow for measures to be put in place to reduce the risk of flooding which promote and encourage other environmental, biodiversity and ecological benefits, often providing habitats for species or improving water quality. This is also a low carbon option to reducing flood risk, using solutions such as tree planting, woody dams, peat restoration or the installation of attenuation areas to hold water in peak flows. Given the increasing risk from flash flooding, it will become increasingly important to find better, more sustainable ways to manage run-off, often in places which have not traditionally been at high risk, including alongside agricultural land and in more rural communities, which are increasingly being affected by such events.

Both of our Programme for Government commitments are improving the lives of people in Wales by reducing the risks they face from flooding and coastal erosion. The impacts of floods can have long term impacts on mental and physical health; therefore reducing the risk from flooding has a positive impact on mental health and reduces the associated impact on the health service.

## **Coal Tip Safety**

The safety of our communities is paramount to the Welsh Government and we are continuing to work at pace to address coal tip safety and with a wide range of partners, to mobilise a wide ranging programme of work.

In August, the Met Office published its most up to date analysis indicating that our climate has continued to warm with significant climate impacts now being felt across

the UK. In addition, the latest independent Climate Change Risk Assessment for Wales (CCRA3) recognises the potential for climate impacts to increase the risk of future landslips, landslides and subsidence linked to historic mining activities. Increased rainfall can have a significant impact on disused coal tips. Old drainage systems, especially if they have fallen into disrepair, are unlikely to be able to handle predicted increased volumes of rainfall.

Since the landslide at Tylorstown in February 2020, we have progressed an extensive programme of work on coal tip safety. The First Minister established the Coal Tip Safety Task Force, which includes ourselves, the Coal Authority, local authorities and Natural Resources Wales and with our partners we are delivering on a wide programme of work.

We have commissioned the Coal Authority to regularly inspect all high-risk coal tips and collect data on all disused coal tips in Wales. The third round of inspections of higher-risk rated tips commences in October and will run for 3 months.

Local authorities have been asked to carry out all necessary maintenance works on coal tips, which have been identified in inspection reports.

Working with the Coal Authority and local authorities we have arranged a number of technology trials on different tips to provide live data on any ground movement on high-risk tips to provide an early warning system for communities.

Last year we commissioned the Law Commission to undertake a review of the legislative framework for coal tip safety in Wales. The Commission's consultation closed on 10 September. This made it clear that the existing legislative framework is no longer suitable and does not provide the necessary level of management and oversight required for the more than 2,000 coal tips in Wales.

The Law Commission are currently analysing the responses (74 received) and we are expecting the Commission to provide us with a report early in 2022. The Commission's review will provide vital evidence for the development of new Welsh legislation. The Welsh Governments' Programme for Government makes a commitment to introduce new legislation to provide a new regulatory framework for the management of disused coal tips.

Until new legislation is in place, we will continue to work alongside local authorities, the Coal Authority and other partners to support the monitoring and maintenance work on disused coal tips.

However, there is still more work to do and it's absolutely essential we get a reclamation program underway to address those risks.

Coal tips pre-date devolution, and Wales is disproportionately affected with nearly 40% of all disused coal tips in Wales. The reclamation costs are on a scale far in excess of anything anticipated when devolution began in 1999 and are not reflected in our current funding arrangements.

We have consistently called for the UK Government to provide Wales with the fairness, flexibility and clarity needed to support and protect its communities and businesses, and reiterated that current funding does not reflect the scale of the issues Wales faces.

The catastrophic flooding in Skewen was a wake-up call to us all. Homes were flooded at a rapid speed, and the impact of this has shocked the community.

Public safety remains our top priority. The main outdoor clean-up work is complete and Neath Port Talbot and the Coal Authority are now leading the recovery work. The Coal Authority is supporting further clean-up and cleaning of private drains. Work to stabilise the blow-out, damaged mine shaft and construction of the new mine water management scheme is progressing. The Coal Authority has confirmed they expect these works will be completed by the end of December which will allow the road to be reopened.

The Coal Authority will manage the new system in perpetuity with regular maintenance.

It is only right that our communities who gave so much, live safely and are not financially hit by the negative legacy of coal mining.

We welcome the increased payments from the Coal Authority to residents. However, as a reserved matter we continue to urge the Coal Authority and the UK Government to come to a fair and just conclusion that befits the upsetting situation the residents of Skewen have been placed.

## **Transport**

Around the globe, the transport sector has come under increasing scrutiny as its carbon emissions remain stubbornly high. In Wales transport contributes 17% of greenhouse gas emissions. Welsh Government is determined to put transport emissions on a downward trajectory.

The Wales Transport Strategy, Llwybr Newydd, published earlier this year, sets out that new pathway with a commitment to achieve a challenging target of 45% of journeys by public transport, walking and cycling by 2040. The present mode share of these sustainable modes of transport is just 32%, so this target requires a substantial uplift. Even so, Welsh Government recognises that this target may need to be raised further if the science of climate change demands it, and has committed to keep it under review.

To achieve this mode shift target, walking and cycling must become the normal way of making shorter journeys. Welsh Government has led Britain by establishing an Active Travel Act which requires local authorities to plan fully connected networks of safe and attractive walking and cycling routes. Active travel funding from Welsh Government has been ramped up to support walking and cycling and is set to increase further as active travel infrastructure construction accelerates to put in place the local authority network plans.

These active travel plans are backed by Welsh Government's trail-blazing proposal for 20mph to become the default speed limit throughout residential areas in Wales. The first phase of pilot schemes has laid the way for the forthcoming roll out to local authorities right across Wales. As a result, walking and cycling to school, work, recreation and amenities is set to become safer and more attractive where millions of people live.

In more rural areas, where major roads between settlements can be major obstacles for walking and cycling, Welsh Government will work towards 'Safe Cycling from Village to Town' giving villages safe cycling access to the nearest town and creating hub-and-spoke active travel corridors connecting market towns and other significant local centres to surrounding villages and outlying developments.

For longer journeys, car journeys must be replaced by public transport. This means we need a transformation in our public transport system. Welsh Government is committed to extend the reach of Wales bus services to provide options where people cannot presently travel by bus. We will invest to create a network of bus services that is fully integrated with other modes of public transport and is reliable, affordable, and easy to use. To do this Welsh Government will legislate to ensure bus services are purposely planned and delivered for the best public interest.

We will publish our bus delivery plan and white paper late in 2021. This will set out our plans to transform Wales' bus network, making it more reliable, accessible and affordable.

The bus fleet itself must switch to ultra-low emissions. To propel this transition, Welsh Government has set a stretching deadline of 2028. To decarbonise the railway in Wales, Welsh Government will work with Network Rail and UK Government to roll out rail electrification across Wales.

Three Metro systems are being planned across Wales to create integrated public transport systems, with construction underway for the South Wales Metro. These systems will make public transport an attractive and practicable travel option for many places and many people that presently lack feasible public transport choices.

We are establishing a Global Centre of Rail Excellence - the delivery company has been established and the other elements of the funding and ownership structure are in development. This centre will create jobs and train up a high-skilled workforce.

As well as cutting transport emissions by shifting journeys to sustainable modes of transport, Welsh Government will seek to encourage remote working that cuts out the commute completely. Welsh Government has set a target of 30% of the workforce working remotely on a regular basis. Our Remote Working Strategy will be published in the Autumn. This will set out how we will move towards greater levels of remote working and develop a network of remote working hubs in communities across Wales.

For those journeys that continue to be made by car, acceleration of the transition to electric vehicles is essential in order to meet climate targets. Welsh Government will

shortly launch its EV Charging Plan. This will lay out a plan to put in place charging infrastructure across Wales, including sufficiently strong grid connections, and a set of measures to increase investment and innovation.

However, even with the most rapid feasible transition to electric vehicles, it will be necessary for vehicle use to fall in order to meet climate targets. Welsh Government recognises that this means that it is necessary to do things differently, and in particular to put a stop to projects that increase transport emissions.

Such considerations were part of the reason for cancelling the proposed additional M4 route across the Gwent Levels. The South East Wales Transport Commission was set up to establish a package of public transport and active travel alternatives to the M4. Its recommendations are now being readied for implementation by a delivery unit chaired by Simon Burns. The package of recommendations is equally applicable to some other parts of Wales and Welsh Government will look to promote similar packages of improvements in those areas.

Welsh Government has established an independent panel to carry out a review of other planned road projects, to assess their potential carbon impacts and make recommendations on whether these should continue or should be reconsidered, altered or halted in the context of the Climate Emergency.

## **Digital Infrastructure**

Responsibility for connectivity lies with the UK Government but we continue to step in to provide connectivity. 7,508 premises have now been given access to full fibre in north Wales under our £56 million full fibre roll-out. We continue to provide connectivity solutions through our Local Broadband Fund and ABC scheme.

As a result, 94% of premises across Wales can access a superfast broadband service and 19% of homes in Wales have access to full-fibre connections. The UK Government target is for 85% of premises in the UK to have access to gigabit capable broadband by 2025. 90% of Wales has access to good 4G geographic coverage from at least one of the mobile operators and 60% has coverage from all

four operators. The Shared Rural Network project aims to increase this to 95% good 4G coverage from at least one operator and 80 per cent by all four operators in Wales by 2026.

Since 2006 the Welsh Government has overseen a pan-public sector contract to deliver public sector connectivity to 120 organisations covering around 5,000 locations such as schools, colleges, universities, fire services, police, hospitals, GP surgeries, local authority buildings.

The Welsh Government is the lead consortium partner in a '5G Tech Valleys' mobile technology innovation project focussed on rural connectivity. The project is delivering 5G infrastructure and innovation in parts of Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire running until March 2022. The programme is considered to be a 'pathfinder' to inform potential future mobile network deployment models and a potential opportunity to scale such services.

## **Digital and Data**

The Welsh Government published a Digital Strategy for Wales in March 2021. It sets out our ambition for people in Wales to experience modern, efficient and streamlined public services and at the same time stimulate innovation in our economy and support outcomes today and for future generations. A separate Delivery Plan was developed to support the Strategy. The Strategy's vision is: Digital in Wales: improving the lives of everyone through collaboration, innovation and better public services.

The Centre for Digital Public Services was established as an arms-length body in June 2020 to improve capability in digital public services and support the public sector in taking forward projects. The Centre is delivering a programme of digital awareness training to over senior leaders and elected members across the public sector. It is also developing common service standards and sharing best practice to drive cross-sector collaborative working which meets with the needs and expectations of users.

Through supporting remote working, designing public services effectively, using data smartly and modernising the technology we use we can support our ambition to reduce carbon usage and achieve our net zero targets by 2050, although we will need to continue to consider the net effect of driving up data usage. Digital transformation can help us respond to the climate emergency by reducing the need to travel and ensuring our homes are energy efficient. The emergence of the internet of things also raises huge potential for smart use of data to drive forward improvements in public services, economic innovation and decarbonisation.