

ROCP 42, Rewilding Britain

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Adolygiad o flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor ar gyfer y Chwchedd Senedd | Review of the Committee's priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan Rewilding Britain | Evidence from Rewilding Britain

Your views

1. What are your views on the Committee's three strategic priorities: Climate Change; Sustainable Communities; and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment?

The three strategic priorities of the Senedd's Environment Committee (2021-26) provide relevant focus in relation to its role in holding the Welsh Government to account in its response to the nature and climate crisis whilst progressing and sustaining this within communities and amongst the general populace of Wales. Focusing on addressing Climate Change, combined with delivery of Wales's net zero carbon budget 2 targets, provides appropriate terms of reference for the committee to also scrutinise the (a) Senedd's 2019 Climate Emergency declaration and (b) subsequent 2021 Nature Emergency declaration alongside the committee's stated 'Priorities for the Sixth Senedd'. The climate change focus also allows the committee to work closely with Dr Jane Davidson's Net Zero Task Force work built around delivery of the (c) 2022 Net Zero Strategic Plan.

Focusing upon creating Sustainable Communities, is a highly appropriate approach within which to set out and contribute to achieving Wales's nature, climate and sustainability goals. It is a fitting backdrop for Wales, its people and long term needs. For change to take root and flourish, the focus upon communities, each and every one of us, is where meaningful and long term behaviour change can take place. Whilst carbon reduction gains can undeniably be acquired within the corporate space (voluntary and regulatory), lasting, meaningful and comprehensive change is more likely if all of us in Wales play an active part in that change. Built into the fabric of our communities, we can become the designers, the drivers and benefactors of Wales's new zero carbon and nature positive economy.

Focusing upon the Natural Environment is key and must underpin how Wales' Government addresses the two other priorities. The challenge for Wales is to build sustainable ecosystems that live and thrive alongside our wider societal needs; creating 'Sustainable Communities'. In terms of achieving this equilibrium in Wales, like many countries, we are overshooting our "planetary boundaries" (Kate Raworth - Doughnut Economics 2017), whilst at the same time falling below our "social floor", whereby minimum social expectations aren't enjoyed by all.

2. To what extent are the Committee's three strategic priorities still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?

The areas of focus set out by the committee at the beginning of the Senedd term have not been fully achieved as yet. The strategic priorities remain relevant, the challenge as yet is far from being over. Solutions to the climate and nature emergencies are being trialled and the Carbon Taskforce work is ongoing. Beyond this, the Welsh Government faces a challenge more complex than quantifiable goals in safeguarding Wales's foundational economic requirements alongside enhanced and sustainable ecosystems. Despite great strides, this work is largely in its infancy.

Continuity, in terms of strategic priority and oversight, needs to be the watchword for the foreseeable future if we are to ensure that scrutiny of the Senedd, in the context of limiting the impacts of climate change, is clear, understood and supported by the people of Wales as a whole.

3. What are your view on the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work for Years 3 to 5 of the Sixth Senedd (set out in its report, [Priorities for the Sixth Senedd?](#))

Scrutiny of the Net Zero Wales strategy should aim to tie all stated aims, from the beginning of the Senedd term, together. In exploring the strategy and its delivery, the committee should look at evidence around the carbon reduction benefits cited by Rewilding Britain through nature restoration on the land and in marine and freshwater environments.

Review of 10-year National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in Wales should be followed up with calls for natural processes providing ecosystem services to be re-established in relation to upland water retention. This will have the dual benefit of enhancing wildlife, diversifying food production as well as contributing to flood alleviation in lowland areas of Wales.

Rewilding Britain would be happy to provide evidence to the committee.

A Review of 'Prosperity for all: a Climate Change Conscious Wales' should be carried out with the people-benefitting terms of reference utilised by the committee in the first three years of the current Senedd term; i.e to ensure a 'just transition to a green economy'. To build upon this litmus test in approach, the committee should now explore means of ensuring that communities become the custodians and benefactors of the green economy; local job creation. There is growing evidence that this can be achieved through nature restored landscapes, providing an increase in food diversity, sustainable tourism and rural employment. Rewilding Britain would be happy to provide evidence on this for the committee in the next stage of its work.

Financial support for the agriculture sector "from an environmental and sustainability perspective" is to be welcomed. Restoring ecosystem services and building diversity of available food through nature restoration, is a viable way to make communities and farming truly sustainable. Rewilding Britain would be keen to support the work of the committee over the next two years, bringing evidence to the table demonstrating the role of nature recovery to bolster not hinder the farming sector, rural economies more widely and the resilience of communities and the Welsh language. Rewilding Britain is currently undertaking a piece of work on the latter, with other Welsh speaking NGO leaders operating in the Welsh heartlands.

4. To what extent are the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?

Calls for a Nature Positive Bill have been taken seriously by the Senedd this year (2023). Shaping an Act that meets the demands of the Welsh Government's Nature Emergency Declaration, and monitoring its application across Wales thereafter, is undoubtedly a piece of legislation of major importance. This Act presents an opportunity to bring many of the committee's priorities, set out three years ago, together in one place. As a well thought out and implemented piece of legislation, Wales's new Nature Positive Wales Act should present an opportunity to do some deep thinking on how we can, at last, achieve the desired equilibrium between societal and planetary needs in a real, meaningful way. At Rewilding Britain, we believe we can play a positive role, contributing to the committee's evidence base while it scrutinises and explores solutions to these pressing needs.

5. Are there any other matters related to the Committee's priorities/work programme/ways of working that you would like to comment on?

We would also encourage the committee to further consider the benefits of a natural regeneration led approach to all woodland and tree planting wherever practical across Wales. This approach can create more natural landscapes and species mixes, which can be far more beneficial for wildlife. It is also cheaper and more sustainable as it doesn't require the importing of trees (which in itself can bring with it pests and diseases) and doesn't require plastic tree guards. Support from the committee for this approach could help steer woodland expansion in Wales to a more sustainable future.

We believe that the Committee should play a role in holding the current Senedd to account regarding its commitment to deliver 30x30. This could take the form of a yearly report. This would be achieved across a "spectrum" of rewilding where the natural processes are the primary product, however secondary products such as food production, timber and social benefits are encouraged. With specific objectives and milestones that Julie James talked about last year along these lines, the committee could be holding Ministers to account on biodiversity: <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-biodiversity-deep-dive>.

6. Other information

Behaviour Change. For the first part of the current Senedd term, the Environment Committee cited that work was to be commissioned into behaviour change approaches to climate change. An opportunity therefore presents itself over the final 2 years of the Senedd term, and beyond, to shape legislation whereby this is embedded; i.e a more hands on strategic approach where incentives are provided that bring direct benefits to the people of Wales, i.e. new jobs, services, cost savings and rewarding behaviour change through tokenisation schemes via the built ready-and-waiting Celyn scheme that Welsh Government paid to have built. A community centred and led approach to nature restoration should be the focus here, as opposed to an offset approach that has sometimes been carried out by corporate interests within areas of Wales involving large scale tree plantations planted against the wishes of existing communities. With a community approach in the design and ownership of Wales' new Green Economy, with nature restoration as its foundation, greater traction can be gained. During the remaining 2 years of the current Senedd term, Rewilding Britain, through its project network data, would be happy to provide the committee with evidence as to how people have already become engaged and employed at exemplar rewilding sites.

The Sustainable Communities section of the Committee's 5-year priority list sets

out a broad vision of what that community should look like in terms of our expectations and the opportunities/provisions that will be available.. Access to sustainable food (local and organic) was a major part of this vision. Nature recovered landscapes provide greater diversity across the seasons, in terms of meat, with case studies being available from Rewilding Britain. Whilst a Sustainable Food Bill did not progress through the Senedd in 2023, debates on this matter in the Senedd chamber suggest that the legislative requirement for this area will return to debates at the Senedd in the near future; albeit in a different form. If that is to come about during the latter part of the committee's current five-year work programme, Rewilding Britain would like to be engaged in that process, providing case studies and presentations to the committee.

The Woodlands for Wales Action Plan and the First Ministers National Woodland for Wales scheme provides great opportunities for scrutiny and further development. Now is the time to link the progress made to date with nature corridors; be they woodland or other ecosystems. Rewilding Britain, working with Welsh Government and Environmental NGO stakeholders, would like to advocate for a biodiversity action plan, to be overlaid across the National Woodland for Wales map. This would highlight the gaps that currently hold back the resilience of key species and thereby provide a route map to help refine current funding packages and developmental support. Such an all-Wales approach will excel the fortunes of Wales's mammal, bird, insect, reptile and aquatic life. A practical roadmap to meet the demands of the Welsh Government declared nature emergency.
