

Climate Change, Environment & Rural Affairs Committee

Introduction

Tilhill Forestry Ltd [here](#) is the largest Forest Management company in the UK and manages approximately 20 000ha of commercial woodland in Wales for a range of clients ranging from institutions, individual investors and landowners including farmers. Although woodland creation in Wales has fallen well below Government aspirations Tilhill has been involved in planting the largest proportion of new planting of any organisation this century. Dating back to 1948 only the former Forestry Commission has planted more new woodland in Wales.

1. Responding to Climate Change

Commercial forestry managed for timber production while delivering a myriad of other benefits remains a key tool in the box of available options for coping with climate change and helping reduce our carbon footprint. WG continue with the aspiration identified in The Read Report [here](#) of planting 100 000 hectares over 20 years to enable Wales meet carbon reduction targets and this remains welcomed but woefully short of being delivered.

Well managed woodlands are a sustainable natural resource that can sequester carbon from the atmosphere and “lock it up” in utilisable timber as an alternative to steel and concrete which rely on finite raw materials and high energy costs of production. GB is the third largest importer of timber in the world and the more Wales can do to contribute to supplying home grown timber to substitute for imports the more our contribution to reducing our carbon footprint from transporting timber around the world.

Fast growing conifers, thinned regularly, remain the most efficient woodland type in delivering carbon benefits and coping with climate change. Conifers with relatively short rotation lengths of 30-35 years compared to broadleaves of 120+ are better able to adapt to changes in climate from one rotation to the next. Also, they produce a range of timber products from marginal upland agricultural land whereas broadleaves only produce a limited range of products and then only from good quality agricultural land.

Unfortunately Wales has lost 18000 hectares [here](#) of commercial forestry since the millennium and the benefits to coping with climate change that forest area could have contributed have been lost

2. Woodlands for People

The basis of any cohesive community are decent jobs. If people are gainfully employed they are more likely to be healthy with incomes to support local facilities. The forestry and timber processing sector offers a full range of employment opportunities from semi-skilled to highly skilled labour, technical and senior managers. Importantly this range of employment opportunities are delivered mainly within our rural communities where jobs are so important. As an example, the BSW Sawmill in Newbridge on Wye is the largest private sector employer in Powys.

3. A Competitive and Integrated Forest Sector

The forest industry in Wales provides the raw material for a thriving processing sector producing timber and timber products that are capable of being both sustainable and renewable. The problem is that we are in danger of not growing sufficient in the future to maintain current levels of production. The downturn in production is forecast from around 2030

[Welsh Softwood Timber Supplies](#) onwards and needs to be addressed now. The reason for the drop-in production is that as we harvest current crops planted since the 1960s we are not replacing them at the same rate with productive species. There is even concern on the WGWE that restocking levels with any species are not keeping pace with felling and there is an ever increasing “land bank” contrary to Woodlands for Wales and likely at some point to bring into question certification of WGWE to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) [UKWAS](#).

The loss of productive area, often for good environmental reasons, of species and age diversity, windfarms, managing riparian zones, creating open space and habitat restoration is leading to a decline in productive woodland. This loss of productive area is recognised within Woodlands for Wales [here](#) which at the strategic level looks to balance the loss with more woodland creation to maintain the productive capacity of Welsh forests. It is a major failing of Woodlands for Wales that the required compensatory planting has not taken place. Only 140 hectares [here](#) of new woodland planted last year is insufficient compensation and of insignificance in contributing to the aspiration of 100 000 hectares of new woodland over 20 years.

4. Environmental Quality

Modern forests managed as a minimum to the UK Forest Standard (UKFS) [UKFS](#) and often to the more exacting UKWAS make a positive contribution to biodiversity and landscapes with limits on the proportion of single species and the promotion of open space, native broadleaves, natural reserves and long term retentions. Unmanaged woodlands of which there are estimated to be more than 90 000 hectares in Wales, often contrary to popular belief, can contribute considerably less to combating climate change than managed modern commercial woodlands as they are often of single broadleaved species, slow growing, even aged, produce little or no timber and are over grazed which prevents regeneration. Managed woodlands must adhere to UKFS guidelines [here](#) which include taking account of the landscape impact of tree felling. Water management is also strictly controlled with heritage and wildlife protected.

5. Leaving the European Union

Leaving the European Union has potential to be good for forestry [Confor](#) even if there is a general downturn in the UK economy. We have a massive market for home grown timber on our doorstep without the need to trade beyond our shores. The fall in sterling which is predicted to continue should be a benefit in making home grown more competitive. It is assumed subsidies will be reduced for farmers which should make more marginal land available to plant and at lower land prices. However, we doubt we will see a reduction in “environmental standards” and regulation will remain as a significant barrier to new planting in the uplands