



## **Biodiversity and Re-wilding.**

### **Biodiversity and Green Recovery**

- 1.1. The Woodland Trust very much agrees that there can be no “return to normal” and a post pandemic green recovery is needed to create a new normal. Biodiversity and the natural world must be an integral part of this. The pandemic has demonstrated the dependence of individual well-being of access to quality green space. Quality green space is habitat that supports biodiversity, and is needed everywhere, and especially where people live.
- 1.2. The pandemic is one reflection of the disruption that is likely to continue to be driven by the climate and biodiversity crises. This will impact investments, policies, employment priorities and regulations. Decisions in all areas must set us firmly on the path to net-zero and restoration of the natural environment.
- 1.3. Biodiversity quality is an essential measure of the health of the environment that sustains this and the quality of the green spaces that provide our well-being.
- 1.4. Funding and investment allocations must show that nature is recognized a necessity, not a luxury. Funding for nature, for example, in the creation of green jobs, and in the application of nature based solutions to climate change, should be apparent across all Government departments. New legislation and policy should demonstrate this.
- 1.5. Any infrastructure projects aimed at boosting the economy need to work alongside nature, such as ancient woodland, not against it. Investment needs to help us reduce our impact on nature and climate, not threaten it further.
- 1.6. Native trees and woods are tools to aid this recovery. The comprehensive and substantial benefits they provide for all mean that must invest and employ to

protect and restore existing woods and mature tree cover and significantly increase tree cover in Wales.

- 1.7. Our previous submission to the Committee in June on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the environmental sector in Wales contains further details on what we think should be the priorities going forward.

## **Biodiversity and Rewilding**

- 1.8. The Woodland Trust has a [Position Statement on Rewilding](#). Paragraphs 1.9 to 1.14 below quote directly from this statement:-
- 1.9. We believe that ‘rewilding’ is about the restoration of natural processes, working with nature to enhance the natural environment and the species it supports, but also to provide the goods and services we need as a society.
- 1.10. We support the view that re-establishing natural processes can be an important and powerful way to manage land alongside conventional or traditional forms of land management for food production and maintaining valued landscapes.
- 1.11. Whilst wild areas may be separate from farmed landscapes, there are also opportunities for integrating more wild space within farming systems in ways which support both wildlife and production.
- 1.12. Creating a sense of wildness is possible in most places. However, the degree to which natural processes are able to dominate will be affected by both scale and location. Large remote areas are more likely to have a greater degree of self-determination than small sites in urban area
- 1.13. We believe habitats should be extended, enriched and linked in a way that allows both habitats and species to operate and interact over sufficiently large areas to support dynamic natural processes. In many cases re-establishing natural processes will require intervention. This might include the creation of habitat such as woodland, or on occasions the reintroduction of species that have been lost.
- 1.14. Reintroduction of larger animals, including large herbivores and carnivores, is sometimes identified as important to re-establishing natural processes. This should only be undertaken where sufficient suitable habitat exists to ensure the wellbeing of viable populations of the reintroduced species. Any species reintroduction needs to take full consideration of the legitimate concerns of stakeholders and, in particular, local communities whose livelihoods and wellbeing might be affected.

## **Interpretation in the Welsh context**

- 1.15. We don’t like using the term rewilding because of the baggage around unhelpful notions of naturalness and exclusion of people. These are wholly inappropriate

Welsh landscapes which have been created by centuries of extensive and sustained farming, forestry and industrial interventions. Engagement with those who own, manage and live in this landscape is essential.

- 1.16. Our preference is for the language of natural process approaches and nature based solutions, as used in Welsh Government policy documents including Natural Resource Policy and Future Wales 2040.
- 1.17. The application of these approaches needs to be a targeted and managed process, within Welsh landscapes which are the product of centuries of intensive modification. Our landscapes are created and maintained by managed interventions. This is the approach that we support. We hope that Area Statements will provide a framework for prioritisation and targeting.
- 1.18. Definitions and examples of nature based approaches are provided in a [guide produced by CIEEM](#). These approaches are based on working with, rather than against, the natural processes that affect the landscape. Examples include the restoration of natural river channels and floodplains, the restoration of the natural water table on peat lands, and the use of natural regeneration in forestry and for the creation of new woodland.
- 1.19. Where such processes are specifically intended primarily for biodiversity outcomes we suggest they are appropriate for extensive areas of land ***already in conservation ownership***. We do not envisage rewilding as an approach applied to farm land.
- 1.20. On such nature reserve land it offers an alternative to highly intensive interventions aimed at closely controlling habitat composition and species populations. It means not being so deterministic on the outcomes.
- 1.21. In the Welsh uplands such approaches might particularly apply to afforested peatland or other failed forestry, or open land under conservation designations, where a targeted natural process based approach to native woodland expansion, would lead to woodland colonisation through assisted natural regeneration. Some management intervention is likely to be needed in the form of tree planting targeted to supplement natural regeneration in tree denuded landscapes, and/ or light grazing to control ground vegetation and engineer habitat diversity.
- 1.22. Managed grazing is an essential vegetation and habitat management tool. This is necessary in some woodland settings, and can be essential for natural regeneration, helping create ground conditions suitable for tree seed survival and helping to contain fire risk – an increasing threat on large areas of unenclosed land.
- 1.23. For woodland there is a place for non-intervention to allow natural processes to run their course as well as a case for more management of some woods. More woodland management too often means more uniformity. It comes down to

*“..choosing where it is possible not to intervene but let the outcome be shaped by the prevailing environmental conditions” (Dr Keith Kirby).*

- 1.24. In relation specifically to the current interest in beaver re-introduction, the reference in our position paper applies: species introduction “.. *should only be undertaken where sufficient suitable habitat exists to ensure the wellbeing of viable populations of the reintroduced species.*” We need to ensure high levels of tree cover first.
- 1.25. Key to all landscape management is stakeholder engagement, with the owner of the land being the most essential stakeholder. In Wales, where there are few large estates, landscape is the product of the actions of many landowners. Imposing or incentivising top down solutions without the consent of landowners happened in the in the drive for afforestation and destroyed support for forestry for a generation.

### **Summit to Sea Project**

- 1.26. Coed Cadw has sought to be a supportive partner in the Summit to Sea project, particularly seeking innovation in land management for conservation purposes, including on the one site we own ourselves. The need for innovation is even more apparent now than it was 3 years ago.
- 1.27. Over the wider landscape we hope the project can develop ways of supporting multiple land uses side by side, enhancing farming, green tourism, nature conservation and wood based economies in complimentary ways.
- 1.28. We particularly suggest [additional support for agroforestry](#) as a contribution to this approach, because we believe this helps support farming whilst offering a wide range of complementary benefits. This remains a focus for our own work
- 1.29. We believe stakeholder engagement and community participation is key. Ideally this would commence at early project development stage, but early stage investment is often limited by the lack of development funding. Most funders require substantially developed plans to be put forward before bidders have any resource for boots on the ground to engage substantially with communities and stakeholders.