



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

[Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a
Materion Gwledig](#)

[The Climate Change, Environment and Rural
Affairs Committee](#)

06/07/2017

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd. Lle y mae cyfranwyr wedi darparu cywiriadau i'w tystiolaeth, nodir y rheini yn y trawsgrifiad.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included. Where contributors have supplied corrections to their evidence, these are noted in the transcript.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Gareth Bennett Bywgraffiad Biography	UKIP Cymru UKIP Wales
Jayne Bryant Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Sian Gwenllian Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Mike Hedges Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Huw Irranca-Davies Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
David Melding Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Jenny Rathbone Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Simon Thomas Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Peter Garson	Pennaeth Gweithrediadau Masnachol, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Head of Commercial Operations, Natural Resources Wales
Lesley Griffiths Bywgraffiad Biography	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig) Assembly Member, Labour (The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs)

Chris Lea Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr Tir, Natur a Choedwigaeth,
Llywodraeth Cymru
Deputy Director of Land, Nature and Forestry, Welsh
Government

Bill MacDonald Pennaeth y Gangen Polisi Adnoddau Coedwigaeth,
Llywodraeth Cymru
Head of Forest Resources Policy Branch, Welsh
Government

Michelle van-Velzen Arweinydd y Tîm Rheoli Tir yn Gynaliadwy, Cyfoeth
Naturiol Cymru
Sustainable Land Management Team Leader, Natural
Resources Wales

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Louise Andrewartha Dirprwy Clerc
Deputy Clerk

Elfyn Henderson Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil
Research Service

Marc Wyn Jones Clerc
Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 10:14.

The meeting began at 10:14.

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datganiadau o Fuddiant
Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

[1] **Mike Hedges:** No apologies or substitutions. Okay.

10:15

**Ymchwiliad i Bolisi Coedwigaeth a Choetiroedd yng Nghymru—Sesiwn
Tystiolaeth Lafar gyda Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Inquiry into Forestry and Woodland Policy in Wales—Oral Evidence
Session with Natural Resources Wales**

[2] **Mike Hedges:** We move straight into our first item, which is the inquiry into forests and woodlands in Wales with Natural Resources Wales. Can I welcome the panel members? If they could give their name and title and then the committee members will ask some questions. Is that okay?

[3] **Ms van-Velzen:** I'm Michelle van-Velzen. I work for Natural Resources Wales—sustainable land management team leader, covering forestry as a specialism.

[4] **Mr Garson:** I'm Peter Garson. I'm head of commercial operations in Natural Resources Wales.

[5] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you both. Can I perhaps say something I forgot to say at the beginning? Questions and answers can be either in English or Welsh, and there's a translation service available if people wish to speak in Welsh, so they can be translated.

[6] The first question is me on how the current Welsh Government consultation on the sustainable management of natural resources links with the forthcoming natural resources policy.

[7] **Ms van-Velzen:** Well, we haven't yet seen sight of the national natural resources policy, because it's not released yet, but we've been involved in its development. I think there are some really important things in the new 'Taking forward Wales' sustainable management of natural resources' consultation. We're still formulating our initial responses to that. So, for example, repurposing some of the duties under the Forestry Act 1967 to be much broader and about sustainable management of natural resources is very welcome. There are some very detailed proposals for forestry in that consultation, which would be very helpful to make some of the improvements we're trying to do around forest management planning, and being able to apply for permits, through that long-term planning for forests. It's very welcome, but not necessarily needed in legislation, although that would be very good as an underpinning mechanism. I think one of our initial thoughts is that there are actually some more opportunities around what that

potential legislation could do, particularly around broadening out the relationship with land use, land-use policy and land-use strategy, and particularly around, potentially, land-use change. So, we're focusing particularly on the potential gaps and some of the quick wins and opportunities that that legislation could pick up.

[8] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you very much. If I could move on to regulation. Huw.

[9] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Thank you, Mike. Could I ask you, first of all—? A lot of the evidence we've heard in some of the rapporteur visits we've had has highlighted the difference in approach, or what we've been told is a difference in approach, to regulation between Wales and Scotland. Dave Edwards from Tilhill Forestry, when he was before the committee, talked about the overly rigorous enforcement of regulations and said it was the biggest obstacle to new woodland creation in Wales:

[10] 'there's much more of a will in Scotland',

[11] he said,

[12] 'to enable planting, whereas in Wales it's much more about reasons not to plant.'

[13] Is he right?

[14] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think there are some differences. There are some important differences, particularly in the regulations—the environmental impact assessment regulations—particularly the updates made and the opportunity made in the May 2017 amendments. So, for example, the non-sensitive areas in Scotland are the threshold—the size threshold has moved to 50 hectares, whereas in Wales, ours has remained the same for new woodland creation—

[15] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** And they were very disappointed—the commercial sector, particularly, has been very disappointed. So, why? Do you understand their concerns, or is that right—not to make the increase?

[16] **Ms van-Velzen:** Our consultation response to Welsh Government, who had made the amendments and the proposals, was that we should, indeed, have some sort of increase in threshold. For example, we recommended that

we should potentially take the way that England has gone, in terms of trying to identify low-risk areas and then increase the size threshold to something according to that. So, for example, in England it's 20 hectares.

[17] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** So, will you be looking at that again?

[18] **Ms van-Velzen:** Well, it's actually a Welsh Government responsibility for those amendments—

[19] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Yes, okay, but you—

[20] **Ms van-Velzen:** We've made some recommendations around that.

[21] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Fair enough. But would you accept their basic premise that, because of issues like that—the hectarage issue and the size and so on—actually, the EIA process in Wales can be far more expensive than it is in Scotland, and it is a barrier to growing the forestry estate?

[22] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think there are certainly some improvements that we can make. I don't think we should pretend that—. Trying to regulate for land-use change is actually quite a complex and difficult thing to do. It's extremely site specific, and you have to work with the local stakeholders to get it right. I think that we do need to try and work more closely with everybody involved to seize the opportunities when they arise, and perhaps give people some more tools to think about. I think when we're talking about trying to safeguard the environment, particularly around protected habitats and species, or perhaps preserving the integrity of the special character of some historic landscape areas, it's a very nuanced decision to make. No lines on maps can actually give you the answer.

[23] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** I absolutely understand that, and clearly you're taking a very sensitive and, if you like, intelligent, granular approach to it. How do you square that with the challenges we have on woodland creation? I don't need to tell you the figures of how far behind the level of ambition we currently have we are, let alone what we'd like to do in the future. The regulatory process—if it is a barrier, how do you square that detailed, sensitive approach to 'we need to get on with this'?

[24] **Ms van-Velzen:** We do, but we also need to balance that with protecting and safeguarding the environment, don't we?

[25] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** So point the direction through for me. What's this new toolkit of ways to improve the regulatory system that you're going to offer to woodland creators?

[26] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think one of the opportunities is presented around the public services boards' well-being plans. They will help create some expectations of what people would like in places. It will get a whole bunch of stakeholders around the table to actually agree that we would like new woodland of this type in these types of areas, and I also think that the development of area statements will help in that process, too. So, that's part of the package of measures, but I do think that we need, perhaps, a better approach to trying to co-create some of the larger woodland creation management plans—having a better forum, a better process.

[27] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Some of the larger ones.

[28] **Ms van-Velzen:** Yes, because I think that, for example, the Glastir woodland creation scheme—all woodland creation proposals, whether they're 0.25 of a hectare or whether they're 400 hectares, go through the same verification process to EIA standards. Perhaps if we looked at low risk and concentrated on the high-risk, larger proposals, then maybe we'd get a bit further.

[29] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** And is that intelligent approach to a lighter touch for those low-risk areas under way? What timescales do we have if it is under way?

[30] **Ms van-Velzen:** We need to work with Welsh Government on that, probably into the next round of rural development funding and support payments, because it's within the Glastir rules that that is set that all schemes will go through that process.

[31] **Mike Hedges:** We're moving on to funding and Glastir now. Sian.

[32] **Sian Gwenllian:** Jest cyn i ni fynd i fanna, rwy'n meddwl fy mod i'n pigo i fyny ychydig bach o ddiffyg eglurder yn y maes yma rhwng beth mae Llywodraeth Cymru yn ei wneud a beth mae Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru yn ei wneud. A ydw i'n gywir? A oes

Sian Gwenllian: Just before we move on to that, I think that I'm picking up a little lack of clarity in this area between what the Welsh Government is doing and what Natural Resources Wales is doing. Am I right in that? Is there a lack of clarity?

yna ddiffyg eglurder?

[33] **Mr Garson:** Well, the roles are defined in terms of how the Glastir scheme operates—

[34] **Sian Gwenllian:** I mean generally now, not just on Glastir.

[35] **Mr Garson:** I think there may be a lack of understanding in some areas. Some responsibilities changed just before Natural Resources Wales was created. Grant aid responsibilities went to the Welsh Government and I think people weren't entirely clear what changed when NRW was set up as opposed to what had changed previously. There is quite close working between NRW and the Welsh Government in terms of the policy teams and I think it is becoming clearer for people, but it has been difficult, I think, for people to understand in the early stages of NRW.

[36] **Sian Gwenllian:** So there are some issues of lack of clarification that need sorting out.

[37] **Mr Garson:** I think most of the clarification has been done, but it may be that not all stakeholders are fully aware of that. Certainly some of the evidence put to this committee suggests there may still be a little bit of lack of understanding about where that is, so maybe there's more to do to communicate that.

[38] **Sian Gwenllian:** Okay. Thank you.

[39] Gwnaf droi at y cwestiynau ynglŷn â'r cyllid. Yn amlwg, rydym ni angen creu mwy o goetiroedd yng Nghymru—mae hynny'n hollol amlwg—ac un ffordd o wneud hynny ydy cyfeirio arian tuag at ffermydd. Mae yna feirniadaeth wedi bod bod y cynlluniau o dan Glastir yn llawer rhy gymhleth. A ydych chi'n credu eu bod nhw'n gymhleth, ac a ydy'n nhw'n effeithiol fel maen nhw ar hyn o bryd?

I will turn to the questions in relation to the funding. Obviously, we do need greater woodland creation in Wales—that is entirely obvious—and one way of doing so is to direct funding to farms. There has been criticism that the schemes under Glastir were far too complex. Do you believe that they are complex, and are they effective as they are currently?

[40] **Mr Garson:** They aren't particularly attractive to applicants. They tend

to be quite prescriptive, and they don't give that much scope for applicants to design a woodland that meets their needs. For example, there isn't a grant aid available for open space within a woodland, which is a quite important part if you're designing a woodland; it's not just the trees. So, I think that that prescriptive approach does make it less attractive to applicants, and the grant rates are not as attractive as they might be.

[41] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think there's far greater scope, particularly now that we're designing a new rural development scheme, perhaps to reflect the different types—the whole spectrum of woodland types that could be created, and the different ways that they can be created: the whole spectrum from, say, the rewilding scenario with natural regeneration of trees, maybe some planting and very sparse cover—maybe just 20 per cent of the land area—alongside some funding for the open areas and the open habitats that you may want to support in those areas. But also perhaps, maybe, some support for the other end of the spectrum, which would be UK forestry standard-compliant woodland, maybe at the larger scale. You know, the new, big forests of Wales, because that's where the big gains are going to come, particularly in terms of hectareage, and the ability to have good quality forest products coming out. It would realise that substitution potential for the carbon-rich materials. So, trying to reflect that whole spectrum of woodlands in the grant scheme and support would probably yield greater results.

[42] **Sian Gwenllian:** Ac a oes angen **Sian Gwenllian:** And is there a need mwy o gyllid hefyd? for greater funding also?

[43] Does the financial package itself need to be bigger?

[44] **Ms van-Velzen:** I guess so, but there are lots of other ways of trying to fund woodland creation, too, which I think we have to seize on, and perhaps see how the rural development funding—the public support—can complement it. So, for example, on the Welsh Government woodland estate, with the energy development programme we have a compensatory planting fund built from the options money and from the developers. So, we're able to use that money to create new woodland elsewhere. If that money's put together with other sources of funding, perhaps leveraging in woodland carbon code-type funding and private investment, that's another way of making the money go further.

[45] **Sian Gwenllian:** So, there are opportunities coming our way, hopefully, with creating a new policy.

[46] **Ms van-Velzen:** Absolutely, as long as it can link into much broader policies than just ‘Woodlands for Wales’, and making ‘Woodlands for Wales’ work harder with other Welsh Government policies, such as the developing land use strategy, and so forth.

[47] **Sian Gwenllian:** Okay. Turning to the map—

[48] —map cyfleodd creu coetir —the Glastir woodland opportunities
Glastir—pa mor effeithiol ydy hwnnw map—how effective is that map
ar hyn o bryd? currently?

[49] **Ms van-Velzen:** The woodland opportunities map as it is at the moment, which is a Welsh Government product, is designed to support the scoring mechanism for where the grant scheme for Glastir woodland creation may be oversubscribed. So, therefore, if it’s oversubscribed, you would score more points in certain areas where the opportunity to create public benefit is higher. The way that it works is that it’s a mixture of information: environmental data that you may want to use within your woodland creation plans, but also constraints, so things where you may not be able to plant woodlands—priority open habitats, for example, important for birds, or open spaces. But then, also, it’s a mixture of opportunity mapping—so, where the research and the science are showing us that woodlands would make a really stunning contribution to flood risk management or open access. And so, because it’s a mixture of that information, it’s not necessarily that useful for the customer at the other end, trying to have an interface into that scheme. I think that there’s more to do between Welsh Government and us to provide more spatial information that’s much more user-friendly.

10:30

[50] **Sian Gwenllian:** So, how can it be improved?

[51] **Ms van-Velzen:** But of course, that costs and, you know, with limited budgets and so forth, it’s difficult to make those improvements overnight, but we have made significant improvements to that, and working with partners. And I think that part of the problem is the ability of others to be able to give us some data, and the spatial data are only going to be useful to a certain extent; it’s not necessarily—. You can’t necessarily use it. The resolution isn’t necessarily good enough to use, say, at field level. It’s a strategic tool.

[52] **Mike Hedges:** Simon.

[53] **Simon Thomas:** Os caf i ddilyn lan ar y pwynt penodol yma, wrth ateb Sian Gwenllian, roeddech chi'n awgrymu bod y map creu cyfleoedd yn fwy o arf i Lywodraeth bennu ceisiadau yn hytrach nag arf sydd yn helpu pobl i gynllunio lle i greu coetiroedd. A ydy hynny'n deg, i gasglu hynny?

Simon Thomas: If I could just follow up on that specific point, in answering Sian Gwenllian, you suggested that the opportunities map was more of a tool for the Government to set applications rather than a tool that helps people to plan places for woodland creation. Is that a fair conclusion?

[54] **Ms van-Velzen:** It's very much a mix of the two, and I don't think necessarily the way that it's served up to people is as user-friendly as it might be.

[55] **Simon Thomas:** But that would explain why, as a committee, we've received people telling us that that hasn't been a useful tool to allow them to plan for woodland expansion.

[56] **Ms van-Velzen:** Yes. It's something that we recognise most certainly between NRW and Welsh Government; we need to make improvements to that.

[57] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. Diolch.

[58] **Sian Gwenllian:** And you've started with the geo-portal, Lle. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

[59] **Ms van-Velzen:** So, that is the way that the opportunity maps are served up at the moment.

[60] **Sian Gwenllian:** Right. But are there improvements happening in that sphere as well?

[61] **Ms van-Velzen:** Yes, there are, but, as I said, there are some limitations as to how much can be done.

[62] **Sian Gwenllian:** And is there any kind of timetable on that for any kind of—?

[63] **Ms van-Velzen:** Not as such, no. It's an ongoing piece of work that we're trying to make incremental changes to.

[64] **Sian Gwenllian:** Do you feel that that will actually change the situation, or does it need to be a sort of start from the beginning?

[65] **Ms van-Velzen:** I don't think it needs to start from the beginning; I think that Lle is actually a very good way of—. It's a very good entry point, and it's good to have it in the one place. But I do think that we need different user views, so that it's very, very clear to a planner who's trying to create a woodland plan exactly what they can use the data for and perhaps link in to the contacts—you know, have better metadata sat behind it, so that you've got a direct link to the person who you can ask for interpretation and support.

[66] **Sian Gwenllian:** One criticism has been that it's sort of—. You need to provide a lot of reasons for planting trees, rather than reasons not to plant. That's one of the—.

[67] **Mr Garson:** I think Michelle was saying earlier on that, in the future, we may have clearer strategies about what we want to achieve, and at the moment, we've got information there and perhaps that information isn't yet informed by a strategic aspiration.

[68] **Sian Gwenllian:** Where we going. Okay. I get that.

[69] **Mr Garson:** That may come over time.

[70] **Sian Gwenllian:** I understand. Thank you.

[71] **Mike Hedges:** Diolch. David, do you want to talk about the woodland strategy advisory panel?

[72] **David Melding:** I do indeed, thank you, Chair. This seems to be another area of confusion about its purpose, and I think, in fairness, this has been acknowledged by NRW in calling for a revitalised and more dynamic approach, which I think is code for a fairly comprehensive rethink about what this advisory panel is there for. You've got some what you would have thought were key players who should be included, these environmental and recreational interests especially, but then Confor are saying, 'No, no, it's not

a strategic advisory panel at all; it's a Government to the commercial sector liaison body.' You know, if you call something a 'woodland strategy advisory panel', it clearly implies that it's taking a pretty ambitious overview of things and giving the views of key stakeholders in a comprehensive fashion. So, can you tell us what your understanding is at the moment and what it should become, then, and what should be its purpose?

[73] **Ms van-Velzen:** Okay, so, in our written response, we said that we recognised the real value of having that body of experts sat around the table. I think that, in a lot of ways, it does a great deal of good work. It's the Welsh Government's woodland strategy advisory panel. We have two members who have been selected to sit on that panel. I think that the work—. We thought it could become far more of a driving force, and particularly that it would be more effective if the committee was recognised perhaps around other Welsh Government fora—so, for example, the Minister's round table on Brexit—and then it would become more strategic. I think it hasn't always been able to reach the other parts of policy and policy delivery.

[74] **David Melding:** Let's just understand this fully. So, basically, the current dynamics there are set by the Minister and her civil servants. You're pretty much one of the stakeholders on that group. Is that part of the problem—that you're the arm's-length agency that should really be giving us energy in this sector, and by the sound of it, we don't even know what the purpose of this advisory panel is?

[75] **Ms van-Velzen:** There are clear terms of reference for the panel. It has a clear remit to deliver the aspirations of the woodland strategy, and it owns an action plan around that, and it also owns a set of indicators. I think that the action plan at the moment is picking off smaller actions, manageable actions, and hasn't necessarily been able to lever in work, particularly by the third sector and other contributors to deliver it, whereas it could and probably should be focusing much more on the big-ticket issues.

[76] **David Melding:** I think you are diplomatically saying that you agree that the environmental and recreational groups that are not on it should be, and that it's not a narrow liaison body between Government and the commercial sector.

[77] **Ms van-Velzen:** I mean, don't get me wrong, the woodland strategy advisory panel has done some really good work in a task-and-finish capacity, for example, providing consultation responses to the early

consultation on Brexit and the new rural development fund. I think that perhaps it's not necessarily recognised as much as it should be.

[78] **David Melding:** And in that more expansive role that you were indicating it is capable of performing, how's it done with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which is obviously the key legislative vehicle in this whole area for strategy and target setting over an inter-generational period? You couldn't think of a better example than forestry and woodland for needing that approach. So, how's it done in the stages so far of using the future generations Act, would you say?

[79] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think the panel is very well versed, actually, on the future generations Act.

[80] **David Melding:** Well, I hope they are, but are they actually using it?

[81] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think that, yes, they are using it, and they'd like to have more of a role around public services boards. If they were able to provide evidence packs, perhaps, to those public services boards, and their voice was heard more clearly, there may well be more impact, but I don't think that they actually have—they haven't been given that permission, almost, to do so. They don't have that kind of lever.

[82] **David Melding:** Thank you.

[83] **Mike Hedges:** Commercial forestry, Jenny.

[84] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes. Everybody seems to be waiting on somebody else to take some actions and, in the meanwhile, there's not a lot happening. First of all, just looking at commercial forestry, I just wonder why it is that we've failed to meet our own planting targets by a factor of 10. You know, we're planting 3.5 million hectares, rather than 35. I mean, that's massive. It's such an important strategic objective, I can't understand why we don't have a clearer strategy. I wondered if you could just underline why our performance to date has been so disappointing.

[85] **Mr Garson:** I think it's a combination of things. There are the concerns raised around regulation that were discussed earlier, but there are obviously resource constraints as well. We do have a mechanism for woodland creation through Glastir, but the budget allocations within that would not be sufficient in themselves to meet the targets. There are some quite strong

signals from the private sector that there is a willingness from investors and woodland owners to invest in woodland creation, but they are seeing more opportunities in Scotland, where the incentives, perhaps, are a little bit more generous but land values are lower. There are quite a lot of constraining factors in Wales that have held back the delivery of that objective.

[86] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, why haven't you taken an axe to the regulations to ensure that we are competitive with Scotland?

[87] **Mr Garson:** As Michelle said earlier on, there are lots of good reasons for the regulations. I think that we have got to streamline how they operate, and we have got to help applicants get through regulations. I don't think the regulations are fundamentally wrong in what they are trying to do. It's about how we align the regulatory processes with the grant-aid process. At the moment, it can be difficult for people to align their applications, get them through regulation and then have their grant application approved in time, and then implement their planting scheme. It just seems quite difficult, from an applicant's point of view. There are a number of things that we can do on that, and there is an initiative to try and identify the blockages to woodland creation and some projects around—

[88] **Jenny Rathbone:** How quickly is that going to report, and act?

[89] **Ms van-Velzen:** So, for example, in Scotland and England, the grants and the regulation and the information and advice is much closer. It's done from one place. So, you've got a relationship for customers here between Rural Payments Wales, Welsh Government and ourselves as verifiers. That's our role. So, for Glastir woodland creation, we have actually now—rather than having to go to four departments in our organisation—just one place; one team is the contact point, covering all of our different roles. So, that's for environmental impact assessments, the environmental information, and the data and advice that you would need. I have to explain that we've improved our processing time, down from an average of 51 days, say, three years ago, to today where it is now 35 days on average to process that through one place.

[90] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, but we still—. Either the message hasn't got out, or we still haven't actually implemented this. The commercial sector is saying clearly that, because the regulations require investors to put up between £150,000 and £300,000, with little guarantee that their investment will actually come to fruition, they've lost interest in Wales because they

think Wales is closed for business, and they're off to Scotland.

[91] **Ms van-Velzen:** Very little woodland creation is done without some form of public incentive. So, in Wales, woodland creation going from April 2016 to April 2018, woodland in the pipeline is around 1,800 hectares, which is more than the figures that have been quoted in the press lately and also in our evidence of previous performance of around 200 hectares a year. The scheme has been oversubscribed for the first time in quite a long time. I think that the woodland types that are supported in Wales are around carbon, native biodiversity and enhanced mixed woodland. We haven't got that spectrum of woodland types supported, whereas Scotland do.

[92] **Jenny Rathbone:** But, don't we need both? I appreciate that, on broadleaf, there is a good story to tell, but on softwood, it's abysmal. Meanwhile, the commercial sector say that, within 10 years, there will be no wood to work with that is native.

[93] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think that what I was trying to explain was that, in Scotland, there are incentives for that commercial softwood within the grant scheme, whereas there isn't here in Wales.

[94] **Jenny Rathbone:** But, we seem to have become totally grant dependent. Commercial forestry is something that is going to create a profit. Obviously, it is a long-term profit. Nevertheless, it's a profit. What is your strategy for ensuring that we've got enough investment to meet our longer term commercial needs, given that there is increasing demand for wood-built construction of buildings? Powys is the first local authority to go for a wood-first policy, but hopefully, they are not going to be the last. But, if we don't have Welsh-sourced wood to work with, it clearly makes it more expensive. You're the head of commercial operations, Peter. What are we actually doing to grasp this nettle, given the long lead-in time required to sort this problem out?

10:45

[95] **Mr Garson:** NRW's direct involvement with forestry is around the management of the public forest estate. So, we do have long-term plans for the forests that we manage directly. We are replanting a mixture of different types of woodlands on those estates and we will have long-term, sustained levels of production on the public forest estate. However, they will be at a lower level than we've had in the last 20 or 30 years, where production had

built up to a plateau. As we restructure those forests, we're rebalancing the forests and the proportion of land that is dedicated to production as the prime objective will be lower than originally. So, we won't be reducing to nothing, but it will be lower than the current level of production. So, there is an importance there in terms of new planting and it is important. At the moment, NRW doesn't directly get involved with large-scale new planting, new woodland creation, and the strategy is to try and encourage woodland creation on other land.

[96] **Jenny Rathbone:** But it's not happening at the moment, because the statistics tell us.

[97] **Mr Garson:** Not fast enough. Not fast enough.

[98] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, this is extremely worrying. NRW is a major commercial player in the wood sector in Wales, and one of the concerns is that you're not using the profits from the sales of wood to reinvest, to restock. But you're instead using it on flood mitigation, topping up the pension—other things. Why is that?

[99] **Mr Garson:** Well, that's the perception. In reality, there is a net cost of managing the public forest estate. If you add up all the costs and revenues, there's a net cost, so there isn't actually an overall profit for managing the estate. There's a net cost. We have had some improvements in the timber market in the last few years, and that's been very helpful, and we are using that to increase the amount of replanting that we do because we've been felling an increased area due to tree disease. But there isn't a profit overall that is available to put into flood risk or other areas. We've got some rules around where we can spend income and the income from timber production has to remain within a broad set of forestry activities.

[100] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. So—

[101] **Mike Hedges:** Can I let Huw in and then Simon? I'll come back to you, then. Huw.

[102] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Yes. To build on what Jenny was saying, it seems that we're nowhere near the framework of grant funding and so on that would allow the expansion that we want to see of the right sort of good forestry, with biodiversity within it and so on, and commercial woodland. It's unlikely that suddenly the magic money tree will be shaken and we'll find

lots of money flowing into grant funding for forestry of that scale that we want. So, I just put to you: should we be looking at other measures that can incentivise it where we keep the high and we improve the regulatory standards? But should we be revisiting things such as the fiscal incentives around this, the things we got rid of in the—? Not to go back to the pre-1998 one, but, when those fiscal incentives were removed, it nosedived. Should we be looking at, once again, lobbying the UK Government to say, 'If you're serious about woodland creation, both commercial and broadleaved, you need to look at the fiscal strategy that actually boosts that with the right regulatory structure', so it's not all relying on grant funding?

[103] **Mr Garson:** I think we'd have to learn from what worked and what didn't work so well on those. The other thing we need to remember is that those fiscal incentives were effective in the 1970s and 1980s because tax rates were higher, so they were attractive to people. Obviously, taxation has changed dramatically. I think it's a difficult thing to change those levers, and they were quite crude levers at the time. So, given today's policy objectives, we'd have to have a thought about how we incentivise the right type of woodland creation. I think we need to look at the barriers to woodland creation, and one of the major ones is the common agricultural policy and the way in which that's created a very high value on agricultural land. So, I guess the—. If we're looking at the fiscal environment, it would be more in the Brexit, post-Brexit type situation where there may be more opportunities for woodland creation.

[104] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think particular—

[105] **David Melding:** How is France one of the most successful countries at reforestation, then, if this is a real big problem? I mean, obviously, land values will be different, but I mean—. And Spain, also, has seen an astonishing—by our standards, anyway—increase, and they've had to grapple with the CAP, presumably, as well.

[106] **Mr Garson:** Well, Britain is fantastically successful on reforestation. It's probably the only country in the world that finished the twentieth century with three times more woodland than it started with, and it's internationally respected for that in forestry. Woodland creation in France and Spain is partly due to rural depopulation. They've got a lot of land abandonment in areas, so we're getting woodlands created, and there will be situations in marginal areas in Wales where successional natural regeneration gives rise to woodland cover, but it is woodland cover of a certain type and it's not

necessarily going to answer the industry's concerns, but it will have definitely a role to play in terms of producing a more treed landscape.

[107] **Jenny Rathbone:** How—

[108] **Mike Hedges:** I've got Simon, and then I'll come back to you.

[109] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay.

[110] **Simon Thomas:** No, I just—. Because I want to tackle the commercial side at this stage. You just said to the committee that you don't make a profit on your woodland, and you've been going since the 1930s or whenever it was. It's not surprising, then, if you're not making—. 'Net cost', you said: if you're not making a profit on it, then how on earth are we expecting any commercial company to be making profits in Wales?

[111] **Mr Garson:** Our timber production activities do cover their costs, so, if you add up the timber income and the restocking costs and the maintenance of infrastructure on the estate, that is generating a return. But that return isn't sufficient to cover, say, the provision, the costs of recreation on the public forest estate. We invite a lot of public access and recognition for policy reasons, and that has a cost.

[112] **Simon Thomas:** So, whichever way you look at it, then, your experience would suggest to me that if we're approaching woodland with the aim of fulfilling all the aims of the future generations Act—and that includes commercial woodland, but it also includes access and everything else—at some stage along this there has to be public money going into this.

[113] **Mr Garson:** Well, we have—

[114] **Simon Thomas:** To provide the sort of woodlands in Wales that people like and enjoy and we've walked around, you need public money and quid pro quo seems to suggest we're a bit strange if we expect this to all happen naturally, just as a commercial venture.

[115] **Mr Garson:** Well, I think you definitely need public money to establish a forest, and by 'establish', I mean go through the first rotation so that you've got a crop—the forest in the productive state—and with the infrastructure to harvest timber. There are other things that we can do to generate income off land. We've got a significant renewable energy

programme, for example, and, by the time that renewable energy programme matures, that will probably close the funding gap between our income and expenditure on the land as a whole. So, I think we mustn't assume that timber's the only way of generating income off land. We can take other opportunities. There are some commercial recreation opportunities on the land, and it's about how we build those things together in a way that provides an overall package.

[116] **Simon Thomas:** I'm just trying to—. I appreciate that from Natural Resources Wales's point of view, but I'm just trying to understand why we haven't seen commercial expansion in Wales in the way it has happened in Scotland. One issue raised with the committee has been about regulation, except that, when you look at it, the regulation seems to be the same—it's perhaps the interpretation that might be a bit different—but this is the other issue. Is it simply that the financial incentives are enough in Scotland to get people over that confidence hurdle?

[117] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think they also have a clearer land-use strategy at the moment. I know that's something that's been spoken about in policy development terms in Welsh Government. I think that if that land-use strategy can be more cognisant of the value of forestry and timber across all those spectrums of different woodland types—the value and benefit that they can provide—that will help a great deal. That's not necessarily about changing land use. It might be about how a more commercial woodland could help sustain the farm business, but it also might be about where land changes ownership, being more creative around those or seizing those opportunities when those arise, because that's where the larger schemes come from. The predominant woodland creation that's happened in the last five years or so has been small, it's been field edges, field margins, small in-field shelter belts, and not those large woodland, maybe forestry, type opportunities of a larger scale.

[118] **Mike Hedges:** Okay. We return to Jenny.

[119] **Jenny Rathbone:** Just to come back on this—because it's clear from what you're saying that, obviously, at the moment, we're using the commercial sales of wood owned by NRW to subsidise the recreational and forest access benefits that are managed by NRW. It's a perfectly valid thing to do, but it does beg the question, therefore: what is NRW's role in ensuring that if NRW isn't resourced to continue to build our commercial resources—? What are you doing to ensure that the commercial sector, the pension

funds—you know, the public at large—are being encouraged to invest in commercial woodland, which we need for our future survival?

[120] **Mr Garson:** Our prime role in this is as a regulator now, but we obviously have an enabling role as well. We do have initiatives that we're participating in with Welsh Government. I mentioned earlier on the initiative around addressing blockages in woodland creation, which is trying to find collaborative solutions to clear the barriers.

[121] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. So, do you think it requires a complete rethink of the woodland opportunities map to highlight areas of restraint around, you know, flood mitigation, or poisoning of waters, or things like that, but then assume that all the other areas not marked on the map are areas that are open for commercial development?

[122] **Ms van-Velzen:** It's not quite as simple as having a better map. I think it's more about developing a process where people can have that conversation, particularly around the larger, higher risk of having an environmental impact scheme. So, one of the things that Welsh Government and the Glastir money has done lately is provide the opportunity for those main players to sit down under the co-operative forest planning scheme, come together and have those conversations. So, for example, Confor and the Woodland Trust have a proposal in there to look at what can be done. There's another proposal around working with common land and the national parks and so forth. That's about bringing people together to look at what can realistically be created and where and how, which will help inform some of those potentially larger schemes to come forward.

[123] **Jenny Rathbone:** Would you accept that there are large swathes of mid Wales and elsewhere that could be used for commercial forestry development?

[124] **Ms van-Velzen:** There are, but that has to be balanced against some of the environmental safeguarding that has to happen too, because large proportions of upland Wales are designated landscapes, for example, and I think that's one of the opportunities of this new legislation that comes through, that, if it's looked at in the round—

[125] **Jenny Rathbone:** Sorry, which new legislation?

[126] **Ms van-Velzen:** Sorry, the current consultation that you have on

‘Taking Forward Wales’ Sustainable Management of Natural Resources’.

[127] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. So, you’re hoping that the outcome of that consultation will lead to a much more simplified process so that commercial operators can see where the opportunities are.

[128] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think simplification is one part of it, but it’s also about joining up those different policy drivers and those different processes.

[129] **Mike Hedges:** Your colleague wants to say something.

[130] **Mr Garson:** Yes. I think there’s something other to bear in mind as well: the majority of potentially plantable land in Wales is agricultural land and the great majority of that is farmed by owner-occupiers, and there isn’t a great tradition in Wales of farming and forestry sitting together comfortably. They’re often perceived as adversaries, and not many farmers are interested in forestry as an alternative to farming. They may be interested in tree planting as an ancillary thing to enhance the farm and perhaps creating diversification opportunities, but very few of them would be looking to commercial forestry as an alternative to farming. So, it’s a hard sell. People tend to stick with what they know and where their expertise is, and—

[131] **Jenny Rathbone:** Well, the change is coming down the road for sure.

[132] **Mr Garson:** It is. There have been economic appraisals of the relative profitability of forestry versus farming, and some awareness-raising around what opportunities there are might be very helpful, particularly, obviously, with incentives potentially changing quite dramatically.

11:00

[133] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay.

[134] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you very much. We’re going to have to move on. Jayne.

[135] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you, Chair. There have been a number of concerns around the lack of young people involved in forestry training and skills courses. I notice from your written evidence that NRW take an enabling role in skills and development. Perhaps you could expand a little bit more on what that actually means.

[136] **Ms van-Velzen:** Okay. So, one way that we're involved is by trying to influence what Farming and Forestry Connect can deliver through its knowledge programmes, its use of demonstration sites and so forth. They are able to reach—and they are funded to reach by Welsh Government—many different types of landowners and managers. And so we work closely with them on the development of their programmes and delivery, but we also work very closely with the Institute of Chartered Foresters, which, if people are members of that institute, have continuing professional development at the heart of everything they do. We work with them on offering field trips that are relevant to the policy challenges in Wales, and that brings a great deal of the younger generation into an environment where they can continue to develop their skills and knowledge.

[137] **Jayne Bryant:** So, do you think it is a problem or—. I think in your evidence you said it was more of a perception, but would you say that it's a real challenge getting young people involved in the opportunities?

[138] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think people seeing it as an attractive vocation is potentially an issue.

[139] **Mr Garson:** It's a big problem for forestry contractors to find people willing to come into the industry. It's physically hard work; there are easier ways of making a living. However, there are things that can help. We've had a first batch of apprentices through doing a trees and timber apprenticeship scheme, and that's been quite heavily subscribed—you know, we had far more applicants than we were able to take on. So, I think we have to find pathways for people to come into the industry.

[140] **Jayne Bryant:** So, are you looking to measure that, obviously, and evaluate that in terms of, perhaps, the potential to expand on that in the future with these courses or are there any plans to do that at the moment?

[141] **Mr Garson:** Well, I think the whole apprenticeships levy may drive more organisations to offer apprenticeship opportunities. So, our first batch of apprentices was a learning opportunity for us, but I think that would be something that could be done far more in the future.

[142] **Jayne Bryant:** We also had some evidence about reviving the former forest education programme of the Forestry Commission Wales. Are there any plans to look into things like that—or any comments on that?

[143] **Mr Garson:** Well, we have reduced our involvement in the direct delivery of forest education, but we have continued to help to develop capacity to deliver it. So, you may be referring to the Forest Schools programme, for example. So, we still support the development of Forest Schools by training people to become Forest Schools leaders, but we're not resourced to be able to provide direct delivery in the way that might have been commonplace 10 or 15 years ago. But we've retained that sort of capacity-building role.

[144] **Jayne Bryant:** Okay. I'd just like to move on then quickly to community involvement. We had a great meeting—. The committee went out to Maesteg recently with lots of very interested groups, and we did hear some conflicting views regarding the support and guidance for community woodland groups. Do you think more could be done to guide the community woodland groups and, if you do, what and how?

[145] **Mr Garson:** Yes, I think guidance does help, so I think it is helpful to improve the guidance and to give some case studies that give a bit of inspiration. There is some work going on with Llais y Goedwig and NRW to try to develop a better set of guidance, but it isn't just about the process. I think a lot of this is about the dialogue that develops between the local community or group wanting to take a project forward and the foresters managing that area of land. I think the Maesteg project at Llynfi does demonstrate that, if you put that time into developing a dialogue, you can get some really great results, actually.

[146] **Jayne Bryant:** I think I was very impressed, particularly with the Spirit of Llynfi project, myself and I think it's a great example of what a new woodland can do to provide good practice and real change in an area. I was just wondering how you can support similar models in the future, getting that communication out and the good practice to areas, and even to some groups perhaps that wouldn't be on the same scale as the Spirit of Llynfi, but some smaller community groups that would be interested in some aspects of what you're doing. How can you get that message out to them?

[147] **Mr Garson:** There's been quite a lot of analysis of opportunities to create woodlands near communities, and the site at Maesteg is one of a number of priority woodland locations that was identified through a spatial exercise through the Heads of the Valleys and Valleys Regional Park initiatives. So, there are other sites that we think have got similar potential. It

is quite an expensive process to create a woodland, particularly on a brownfield site. You've got soil conditions that need substantial modification, drainage infrastructure, and you also need to put the staff time into developing the design of the forest in dialogue with the local community so that they're getting something that they value and will use. But, also, there have been a number of other bodies that have played a very supportive role at the Spirit of Llynfi, in particular bringing in things like the health agenda there to try to make sure that that's an asset to improve community health. It is something that can be replicated, and I think having an example of a project like that can give some inspiration, but it will require a significant resource in time, money and partnerships to replicate that level of success.

[148] **Mike Hedges:** Gareth, on environmental quality.

[149] **Gareth Bennett:** Yes. Thank you, Chair. What do you see as the barriers currently preventing woodland habitats on protected sites from being in favourable condition, and how can these barriers be overcome?

[150] **Mr Garson:** Well, it takes time. I think that's the first thing I'd say. To get habitats into favourable conservation status means you've really got to not only remove the threats there, but they've actually then got to develop the characteristics of the habitat into a good condition. So, if we're measuring success in terms of how long it takes to get to favourable conservation status, which has a very defined definition, time will be one factor. Obviously, we can get sites into the favourable management regime, where they are moving in the right direction sooner than that, but it does require some sustained input of resources. So, if you take an area that might be infested with rhododendron, there's an initial intervention and then there's follow-up treatment there. If, then, the rhododendron is eradicated, you then gradually get the establishment of the structure that you would expect to see in that habitat. Once those structural elements are in place, then you've reached favourable conservation status. So, it might take decades. We shouldn't necessarily be disheartened by that. We should be measuring the favourable management and whether we are putting in the interventions that we need to get us to the point where we are in favourable conservation status.

[151] **Gareth Bennett:** There was a bit of conflicting opinion regarding progress on restoring plantations on ancient woodland sites, so I don't know whether you had any opinions on that.

[152] **Ms van-Velzen:** I think one of the barriers to that is, as Peter said, particularly on the Welsh Government woodland estate, we have a lot of sites that are part of much bigger sites—you know, tens of thousands of hectares—and the woodland forms one part of that. It's predominantly removing coniferous canopy and trying to get a more natural woodland there, which does take time, as Peter said. But I think one of the barriers, particularly in woodland in other ownership, is around the lack of Glastir woodland management. We haven't had a management scheme to try and help people who own plantations and ancient woodland sites elsewhere to get access to their woodlands, to build the infrastructure they might need, to deal with some of the grazing pressures, for fencing and so on, and link them in with the advice and perhaps the tools that they need to be able to make those interventions to improve the status. So, I think that that is one—. There's no obligation on people to have to replant with native species if there's no incentive to help them do that and if economically it makes more sense to replant with the more commercial species.

[153] **Mike Hedges:** Okay.

[154] **Ms van-Velzen:** Unless it's on a protected site, in which case there are other mechanisms to lever change.

[155] **Mike Hedges:** Woodlands management area—.

[156] **David Melding:** We've covered most of that.

[157] **Mike Hedges:** I thought we had, yes.

[158] **David Melding:** But, you do identify in your evidence that 40 per cent of Wales's woodland has little or no management. Should all woodland be managed to some degree? Is that the ideal? Because, we don't have vast areas of virgin forest—you know, stretched across Siberia or whatever—so should we be aiming for an approach that ensures there's at least a basic level of management for all our woodlands?

[159] **Ms van-Velzen:** Not necessarily. Again, it's horses for courses. There's a spectrum—

[160] **David Melding:** Well, 40 per cent is too high, presumably, which is why it's in your evidence, so give us an alternative benchmark.

[161] **Mr Garson:** I think, as Michelle was saying, management can vary in its intensity, so we could have very light interventions in an area where the objectives don't require intensive management. There is a potential resource in woodlands that have little or no management at the moment that could play a greater role, but to bring those woodlands into more active management will take some resource, and I think that is a range of things, really. Some of it is around advice and making sure that—

[162] **David Melding:** I'm still not getting any sense if 40 per cent is a problem or inevitable.

[163] **Mr Garson:** It's a missed opportunity. I think that we should be able to get more out of those woodlands in a variety of ways if they were more actively managed, but it needs some advice to owners, and also we don't currently have a grant scheme that funds intervention—

[164] **David Melding:** Yes, that's a key area, obviously.

[165] **Mr Garson:** So, a lot of these sites are inaccessible; they don't have tracks, so you need some initial investment to make them viable to manage.

[166] **David Melding:** Thank you.

[167] **Mike Hedges:** We've got two minutes left, and I know at least two people want to ask questions on trees in and near urban areas. Do you want to go first, Jayne? Jenny—sorry. I've got you both down.

[168] **Jenny Rathbone:** I'm particularly concerned about a figure that new housing developments on average only have 1 per cent tree cover, and I just wondered what your regulatory role is to ensure that planning committees are setting very clear guidelines to housing developers that they must plant trees as part of the planning grant.

[169] **Ms van-Velzen:** I'm not sure we're able to actually stipulate that they do so—plant new woodland. I guess that could be in the palette of things that could be recommended. There is certainly scope for protecting existing trees within a development, and I think we take every opportunity to do that. One area—

[170] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, when existing trees are knocked down in order to make way for housing, you have powers to insist that they replace them, or

you rely on councils to—

[171] **Ms van-Velzen:** No. Within Woodlands for Wales, there is a desire in the policy—an ambition—to have compensatory new planting for trees that are lost, but there is actually no policy or legislation around that, unless it's to do with ancient woodland.

[172] **Jenny Rathbone:** Well, you can be certain that house builders won't do it unless they're required to do it. What's your role in ensuring that—

[173] **Ms van-Velzen:** Well, that's one of the recommendations we're making in terms of that 'Taking Wales Forward' consultation that Welsh Government have out at the moment—that we take the opportunity within that to seek permanent woodland removal policy where it's desirable to remove woodland, but then also think about the circular aspect of that to create new woodland and lever in funds to replace it somewhere else.

[174] **Jenny Rathbone:** But do you think there's a need for an overhaul of the planning legislation to ensure that new developments are sustainable in the sense that trees play, obviously, a very important role in providing natural shade and protection?

[175] **Mr Garson:** We have undertaken a canopy cover survey to assess woodland cover in urban areas across Wales. We think that would be very helpful to inform local authorities. I think, through public service boards, we'll be able to highlight the roles of trees in urban areas and the opportunities there would be to incorporate more trees into urban design. But, we don't have a strict regulatory role, because most of those developments—you referred to housing developments—would go through the planning system; they don't come to us as forestry regulations. So, it's more around encouraging and informing. So, the canopy cover study is very helpful.

11:15

[176] **Ms van-Velzen:** Most recently, we've worked particularly with Wrexham, Bridgend and the Towy area catchments to produce a toolkit called i-Tree Eco with the local authorities to help them develop their local tree management strategies, and we've identified locations where it would be highly beneficial. There's a great example in Greener Grangetown where trees have been part of that collaborative work with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water.

[177] **Jenny Rathbone:** But we need Greener Grangetown to be adopted all over the place, but you're not being listened to by planning authorities at the moment.

[178] **Mr Garson:** Some.

[179] **Jenny Rathbone:** Some. Good in parts. Okay.

[180] **Mike Hedges:** We've come to the end of time. If I can ask one last question on this. As people will get to know, most of my examples start off within Swansea East, and in Swansea East, we've had quite a fairly large-scale development, and what actually happens is: trees are chopped down, bushes are removed and then we have decking and concrete, and then we have extra water run-off that can lead to flooding, and often does, or it leads to the river getting higher so remedial action has to be taken by another part of your organisation on river flooding. Have you suggested to anybody that a one-for-one tree replacement, so when trees are taken down—following on from what Jenny was asking—as part of a development, when they complete the development they put trees back up?

[181] **Ms van-Velzen:** Yes. [*Laughter.*] That principle is something we recommend, yes.

[182] **Mike Hedges:** Who do you recommend it to?

[183] **Ms van-Velzen:** Well, within our advisory roles, to local planning authorities.

[184] **Mike Hedges:** And they don't listen.

[185] **Ms van-Velzen:** Not always, and it doesn't necessarily—. There isn't necessarily the legislative basis to do so. I think that's one of the opportunities that can be seized on.

[186] **Mike Hedges:** It can be a planning condition, though, if planning authorities want to make it, or it could be a section 106. So, planning committees—another former councillor there is nodding—have huge powers under section 106 and when they give the planning permission to say, 'And you must do—'.

[187] **Mr Garson:** There's quite a lot of technical guidance around sustainable drainage. So, trees aren't the only way of mitigating flood risk in a development, but they are an important component.

[188] **Mike Hedges:** I'll just thank you for coming, and end this with a comment: taking trees out doesn't help flooding. Thank you very much. Thank you for coming along. And I've got to tell you that you will have a transcript of what's said here at the meeting, which you can check before it's published. Thank you very much.

[189] **Ms van-Velzen:** Thank you.

[190] **Mr Garson:** Diolch yn fawr.

[191] **Mike Hedges:** Shall we have a break until half past?

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11:18 a 11:30.
The meeting adjourned between 11:18 and 11:30.*

**Ymchwiliad i Bolisi Coedwigaeth a Choetiroedd yng Nghymru:
Sesiwn Tystiolaeth Lafar gyda Llywodraeth Cymru
Inquiry into Forestry and Woodland Policy in Wales:
Oral Evidence Session with Welsh Government**

[192] **Mike Hedges:** Can I welcome you to this committee meeting? Can you and your officials give your names for the record?

[193] **The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs (Lesley Griffiths):** Lesley Griffiths, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs.

[194] **Mr Lea:** Chris Lea, deputy director for land, nature and forestry division, Welsh Government.

[195] **Mr MacDonald:** Bill MacDonald, team leader for the forest resources policy team.

[196] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you very much. If I can perhaps ask the first question. What's your response to calls from stakeholders, including Natural Resources Wales, for the 'Woodlands for Wales' strategy to be refreshed, and

do you intend to refresh this strategy?

[197] **Lesley Griffiths:** I suppose the short answer is 'yes'. I think it is very likely that I will refresh it. Following the publication of the natural resources policy, it's my intention to look—. Whether it will be later this year, or early next year, I haven't yet decided.

[198] **Mike Hedges:** Okay, thank you. Let's hope we can keep on going with the 'yeses'. [*Laughter.*] How does the Welsh Government's current consultation on the sustainability and management of natural resources link with the forthcoming natural resources policy, and when will the natural resources policy be published?

[199] **Lesley Griffiths:** Okay. Colleagues will be aware that I delayed the publication of NRP. It should have been published by the end of March. We had a significant number of responses, probably far more than we anticipated, and, of course, we also have had Brexit. So, I decided to delay it. I want to get it right. However, it's more or less there; it's nearly ready to go. My officials are doing the sort of final round, if you like, with stakeholders. I had my ministerial Brexit stakeholder event on Monday, where we had a discussion around this. So, I would say it's nearly ready to go.

[200] How does the sustainable management of natural resources consultation fit in? I suppose it was always envisaged that, even though we've got the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, we could need more legislation. So, my plans around the sustainable management of natural resources was to get the views of stakeholders, harness their thoughts around green growth et cetera, but obviously, with Brexit—you don't want to say it's the only show in town, but, unfortunately, it's changed the landscape of so much of my portfolio. So, the two will obviously link together.

[201] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you very much. Huw on regulations.

[202] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Thank you, Chair. Cabinet Secretary, you mentioned there the sustainable management of natural resources consultation going on at the moment, which has a lot within it. Before I get to the issue of regulation that you want to focus on, can I just ask you: do you anticipate that what comes out of that may close the gap between your ambitions for woodland creation and where we actually are at the moment? And it's not only a Wales issue, it's a UK-wide issue. But there is that gap.

Are you hoping that ideas come forward in that—that that shapes a different direction that closes that gap between ambition and reality?

[203] **Lesley Griffiths:** You're right, there is a big gap between ambition and reality. And, of course, you've got to have ambitious targets, but I've always been a Minister who's absolutely thought, 'You've got to have realistic targets', otherwise you're just setting yourself up to fail straight away. However, you need that challenge, and we need to give that challenge to the sector and officials and the stakeholders.

[204] It's interesting, before I came here, I met with several groups of women in agriculture, for want of a better phrase. And I was saying, I suppose because I've been focusing on committee today, and other things around forestry, that I think we've got to look for opportunities post Brexit, and one of them is trees. I think trees will play a much bigger part post Brexit. And these women were saying to me, 'We don't want to come to you with problems, we want to come with solutions.' So, I had a little discussion with them around the culture, if you like, of some farmers who don't feel that they want to plant trees, and why that is—and I'm saying 'some', not all, obviously, because we've got some fantastic example of tree planting. So, it would be good if we could have some solutions around forestry. And, certainly, people recognise that, if we are going to reach our very ambitious target by 2030, we're going to have to be radically different.

[205] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay. I'm sure other colleagues will want to come back on that future use of public funds, and whatever, post Brexit, which we hinted at in our previous report. Can I turn to the issue of regulation—one of those possible barriers? We have had evidence, not least from the commercial sector, that they regard the regulatory structures in Wales as more onerous than, particularly, exist in Scotland. Are you refreshing that, are you looking at that, do you take those concerns seriously, or are they simply whingeing from the commercial sector?

[206] **Lesley Griffiths:** I do take them seriously. You're always going to get tension between regulation and regulator. This is how serious I take them: two weeks ago, there was myself, a member of the commercial sector, a representative from NRW, and one of my officials in a room, because I said, 'You know, you keep telling me that we're not planting enough trees, it's their fault; you keep telling me it's their fault. Or, when we are planting trees, we're not planting them in the right places.' So, I said, 'Right, you tell me together where we should be planting them et cetera, et cetera.' So, that's

how seriously I'm taking it. I am trying to find a way forward, because we know we need to plant more trees. So, there are clearly barriers—whether those barriers are perceived, or whether they're real, it doesn't matter, because, if it's perception, then we need to deal with it. I think NRW and the commercial sector need to work much more closely together on this, and that was one of the reasons for getting everybody in the room. I then left—I let them carry on after I left. And there is the promise that that will continue.

[207] I don't think it's any more onerous in Wales than anywhere else, but, again, I'm happy to look at it. I don't know if Chris has any views on—.

[208] **Mr Lea:** Just to add, we're also looking at this now, before the end of the year, to see how we can look at innovation in the use of regulation within the forestry sector, on the back of the environmental impact assessment. And also, we're looking at lessons learnt from the EIA scheme we operate for biodiversity as well. Because, obviously, there is an EIA for agriculture and in biodiversity, so we're looking at lessons learnt from the two. So, there's a project going on on that, which we'll report back to our Cabinet Secretary, early in 2018.

[209] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Well, that's really helpful, because that would suggest that you think there may indeed be areas for improvement in the EIA process generally. But in terms of this inquiry, in terms of woodland as well, the fact that you're looking at a review of what's going on, and ways you can do it smarter, suggest that you have an idea you can do it smarter.

[210] **Mr Lea:** Well, I mean, I think it's important that we always look to improve. I mean, we've got some examples of one of the largest areas of woodland that's been planted in Wales—I think it was something in the region of 400 or 500 acres of land; a massive area of land that has been planted—and that went through fine, we didn't have any problems. But we recognise we do need to look at what's best fit, what is the best possible regulation that we can have, in terms of enabling, and we're looking at lessons learnt from that.

[211] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay.

[212] **Mike Hedges:** Sian.

[213] **Sian Gwenllian:** Diolch. Rydw i **Sian Gwenllian:** Thank you. I want to eisiau sôn am—rydych chi wedi mention—well, you've touched on

cyffwrdd â hyn yn barod—y this already—the possibilities that
 posibiliadau y gall ffermwyr gyfrannu farmers could contribute towards the
 tuag at y nod yma o gael mwy o aim of having more trees. And, at
 goed. Ac, ar hyn o bryd, mae yna present, there is money available
 arian ar gael drwy rai o'r cynlluniau through some of the Glastir schemes,
 Glastir, ond—mae yna 'ond', onid but—there is always a 'but', isn't
 oes, bob tro rydym ni'n sôn am there, every time we talk about
 Glastir, mae yna ryw 'ond' yn dod i Glastir there's always a 'but' in the
 mewn i'r cwestiwn rywsut? Beth ydy'r equation somehow? What are the
 gwersi sydd wedi cael eu dysgu o'r lessons that have been learned from
 cynlluniau Glastir presennol? the Glastir schemes at present?

[214] **Lesley Griffiths:** Diolch. I know when my predecessor, Carl Sargeant—he didn't get rid of that very ambitious target that I referred to earlier, but he did sort of change it to looking at 2,000 hectares being delivered a year, as opposed to 5,000, which was what the first target equated to. And I think I'm right—and officials will tell me if I'm wrong—I think it was 1,000 would come from Glastir—

[215] **Mr MacDonald:** Yes, that's right, Minister.

[216] **Lesley Griffiths:** And that hasn't happened. And I think, perhaps—

[217] **Sian Gwenllian:** Why?

[218] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, why—that's a very good question: why? I think it was never going to meet—. I don't think Glastir on its own was ever going to be enough to meet that challenge of 1,000. So, what we're doing at the moment is looking at if there is a different way of using the funding to encourage tree growing. So, I'll go back to the women who I was talking to this morning, and one of the issues is that it's such a long-term commitment. They were saying, 'You don't get any payback', and, obviously, for some farms, that immediate payback is very important. Because I did say I would look at maybe—. The Glastir woodland scheme had been looked at, but we haven't opened a window around that—would it be worth doing that? So, we need to look at why it hasn't worked to see if there is any other way that we can make it work within Glastir.

[219] I know officials are meeting next week to look at future funding schemes post Brexit, and this is why I say I think there are a lot of opportunities post Brexit for trees to play a very different part. So, it could be

that we don't have to wait until post Brexit—if we get some good ideas that come forward now, we could look at doing that.

[220] We also need to look at innovative ways that farmers can get a regular income from woodland. So, a couple of weeks ago—I think it was two weeks today, or three weeks today—Chris and I were in Llanrwst. In fact, you might know the farm. We visited a very large farm where 85,000 trees had been planted since March, and the farmer was very prepared to be innovative and wait for that long-term investment. But we haven't had too many coming forward, I think it's safe to say, around that.

[221] **Mr Lea:** No. I think that what we have to remember is that we haven't had a mass of schemes waiting to fund. One thing that the Minister, the Cab Sec, has done is actually look at changing Farming Connect a bit so that the advisory network to support farmers actually covers foresters better than it used to, so that, rather than it being just purely farming matters, it's got more of a depth to covering some of the skills and the forestry stuff. I think there's a bit more we can do there as well to help create that culture. Also, more farmers are coming forward and we're looking at this as well in terms of looking at smaller areas of land. So, we're trying to look at the whole farm and then try and get better advice that encourages farmers not just to produce commodities, but to actually look at small areas of land, which will help.

[222] **Lesley Griffiths:** One barrier that farmers have mentioned to me is they feel that, once you plant woodland, people think it's got to be woodland for ever, and they want that flexibility for it not to be woodland for ever. If they want to use it for something else and they wouldn't be able to do it, I think that could be a barrier.

[223] **Simon Thomas:** Just on that point, if I may, because that's precisely where current CAP is going wrong, isn't it? And some of the other issues around CAP, around canopy, around tree coverage, and your clear spaces are thwarting a more integrated approach. I just wanted to ask on that—acknowledging those problems, which I think you do by nodding your head—is that giving a cultural difficulty, in that farmers, therefore, because of the difficulties with the single farm payment and CAP and other payments, don't engage in woodland because they have this concept that it's a very bureaucratic and nightmarish approach, really, and therefore it's only the—? You've given a very good example, but they are extreme examples—or 'rare' is a better word.

[224] **Lesley Griffiths:** I tried very hard not to use the word ‘culture’ when I was answering earlier, but I think, yes, you’re right, and I don’t think anyone would disagree that there is a culture amongst some farmers that they don’t want to do it for the variety of reasons that you’ve just said. So, that’s why I’m saying about opportunity post Brexit, really, as we’re looking at how we give farmers financial support, how we change it, and that’s why I say I think trees will play a much bigger part.

[225] **Sian Gwenllian:** A ydych chi wedi dechrau? Mae’r trafodaethau ar ba fath o bolisiau, pa fath o gynlluniau, sydd yn mynd i fod yn bosibl o dan y gyfundrefn newydd, a ydy hynny wedi dechrau, achos mae’n bwysig ei fod o’n dechrau yn ddigon buan, onid ydy? A ydych chi hefyd angen arian? Rydw i’n meddwl eich bod chi wedi dweud yn eich tystiolaeth: **Sian Gwenllian:** Have you started? The discussions in terms of what kind of policies and schemes are going to be possible under the new system, have they started, because it’s important that they start soon enough, isn’t it? Do you also need funding? I think that you said in your evidence:

[226] ‘Mae anelu at blannu mwy o goed yng Nghymru yn debygol o olygu y bydd angen mwy o arian arnon ni’. **‘Raising the level of ambition in respect of tree planting in Wales is likely to require additional funding’.**

[227] A ydy hwnnw’n beth realistig, i feddwl bod yna arian ar gael i’r maes yna? **Is that a realistic thing, to think that there will be funding available in this area?**

[228] **Lesley Griffiths:** Going back on to discussions, I mentioned that officials are meeting next week. We’ve already started as a department—those Brexit discussions started probably on 24 June. So, we’re doing a lot of scenario setting—right across the portfolio, not just in relation to forestry—about our future policies. We had a really good session a week last Monday, myself and all the senior team, about all the different aspects of this. So, those discussions, I can assure Members, have started, and, as I said, if there is something that comes up next week that we think we can implement earlier to get more trees planted, I’m very happy to look at it.

11:45

[229] In relation to more funding, obviously, funding is about—. You know, there's no point pretending that there's lots of funding around; we're all aware there isn't. I don't think it's the biggest barrier to planting more trees. I think probably land use and the cost of land are two of them. However—. And we can't do it on our own. Welsh Government can't do it on our own. We need everybody working together, but, certainly, post Brexit, I think we can make sure there is more funding available from whatever. At the moment, we haven't got anything at all. It's a black hole, as you know. So, on the basis that there will always be financial support for farmers, we can certainly look at that. As I said, I've committed all the rural development programme funding up until 2020, however there are windows that I can still open, so we could look at that.

[230] **Mr Lea:** Just to add, the other thing the Cabinet Secretary's asked us to look at is innovation in funding, so use of lottery, use of taxation, some really innovative stuff that we're going to try and look at as well, linked back to carbon credits and other things as well.

[231] **Lesley Griffiths:** I mentioned we can't do it on our own. I'm assuming, when you mentioned the largest woodland that's been recently planted, that was the voluntary sector. Is that the one you were referring to?

[232] **Mr Lea:** Yes, exactly. The voluntary sector bought the land.

[233] **Lesley Griffiths:** They bought the land—a charity bought the land themselves and planted the trees. So, it just shows it's about everybody working together, not just relying on us.

[234] **Mike Hedges:** Huw's got a supplementary on this.

[235] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** You mentioned carbon credits and so on. Has any thought been given in that innovative funding to looking at whether there is a Welsh-specific, Welsh-targeted pool of carbon credits that could align with changes that might be made with Glastir or with rural development programmes that would actually really incentivise farmers/landowners to think, 'Well, actually, this is worth doing, because we're getting a little bit of grant funding. We're getting some buy-in here from major Welsh or UK corporate players'? Is that the sort of thinking you're rolling on?

[236] **Mr Lea:** That is exactly it. What we're looking at is innovation in the

delivery of public goods through whatever a new post-Brexit land management becomes, so not just looking at the role of tree planting in carbon, but trees in water, trees in biodiversity, and the wider suite of public goods that they provide.

[237] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Sorry, Chair, because my observation would be: are you considering that there might be a specific advantage for Wales if there is an identifiable—not just a strategy, but a well-thought-through mechanism that was Wales-specific—? It could actually attract some of that wider investment into Wales to help push this along.

[238] **Mr Lea:** Yes. Those are exactly the sort of options that we'll be looking at.

[239] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** And your timescale.

[240] **Mr Lea:** I don't think we've actually set a timescale as yet, but the work has started on it. I'm not sure whether we've got an end date for that yet.

[241] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay.

[242] **Mike Hedges:** Sian.

<p>[243] Sian Gwenllian: Troi at y map cyfleoedd creu coetir Glastir, a ydych chi'n credu bod y map yn effeithiol fel y mae o ar hyn o bryd, a beth sydd angen i wneud i'w wella fo?</p>	<p>Sian Gwenllian: Turning to the woodland opportunities map, do you think that the map is effective as it is at present, and what needs to be done to improve it?</p>
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[244] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, I do think it's effective, because what it does is highlight potential woodland plants to them, where the most appropriate areas for woodland creation are right across Wales. So, I think it enables—. If it's viewed at a strategic level, I think it enables our priorities then to be recognised, so, for instance, where we need more trees in relation to air pollution. So, again, it's about joining up other parts of my portfolio, in relation to planning policy, for instance. So, where we've got new roads or new housing developments, it's about making sure that planters know that the trees can be put there, too. It's now on its fourth iteration, so, again, it's refreshed often. So, when we get new data available, if it's deemed that at that time it should be refreshed, we do that. I don't think there's one size fits all; all the sites are different. I think it's a decision support tool, not a

decision-making tool, if you like, but I do think it's very beneficial.

[245] **Sian Gwenllian:** Mae hwnnw'n Sian Gwenllian: That's different to groes i beth mae rhai pobl wedi bod what some people have told us. That yn ei ddweud wrthym ni. Hynny yw, is, some people say that the map, in mae rhai pobl yn dweud bod y map, a way, includes more reasons for mew'n ffordd, yn cynnwys mwy o planting trees rather than reasons for resymau dros blannu coed yn hytrach not planting them. What is your na'r rhesymau dros beidio â phlannu response to that? coed. Beth ydy eich ymateb chi i hynny?

[246] **Lesley Griffiths:** Sorry, gives more reasons for planting—.

[247] **Sian Gwenllian:** Yes. That it should, sorry.

[248] **Lesley Griffiths:** Oh, it should. Sorry. That it should. Yes, it should. That's exactly what it does. So, they're saying that it doesn't—

[249] **Sian Gwenllian:** That it's acting as a bit of a deterrent, really, rather than—

[250] **Lesley Griffiths:** As an another barrier. Okay.

[251] **Mr Lea:** Just to add, I think one of the challenges is that some of the areas that are really attractive to plant woodland are also really attractive to manage our peatland or are really attractive for our wetland management and habitat, so it's getting the balance between those areas.

[252] **Lesley Griffiths:** What I thought it did, and I can honestly say nobody's raised it with me as a barrier, is that it did provide that further information that land managers needed to plant trees. So, if they're saying the complete opposite—

[253] **Sian Gwenllian:** Tilhill Forestry and Confor and Bangor University have said that it's a good beginning, but that it should be more proactive in favour of planting more trees, that it's not actually doing that.

[254] **Lesley Griffiths:** Okay, well, I will certainly take that up, because—. I'll ask officials if anybody's raised it with them.

[255] **Mr Lea:** It is a work in progress. Bill, you might want to say where we are. We are updating it now and trying to make it more user friendly. We're trying to improve all the data layers within it. I don't know if you want to add anything.

[256] **Mr MacDonald:** We do update the map, as the Minister has said, regularly, and we do try to make sure it delivers the two aims that it has, one of which is to highlight the places where tree planting would be the most beneficial. The other is to give the information that those who are planning tree planting need in order to do that planning properly and to understand the constraints that there may be. If they're going to be planting trees on top of a really important habitat, they need to know that so they can avoid important habitats. That's the aim of the map. I think, sometimes, people look at it and see all of the issues and constraints and see that as a barrier. It's not intended to be a barrier, but the reality is there are a lot of things that need to be protected in Wales, and that's the function of the map: to highlight those as well as the opportunities.

[257] **Lesley Griffiths:** I do meet with Confor regularly. I think I meet with them twice a year as a part of the sector, but also, obviously, they sit on the Brexit stakeholder board, so I'll certainly take that issue up with them, and I'm happy to provide further information to the committee, Chair.

[258] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you. Thank you. David—woodland strategy.

[259] **David Melding:** Thank you, Chair. I'd just like to ask about the woodland strategy advisory panel. Now, we heard from NRW that it ought to be revitalised and made more dynamic. We've heard from stakeholders who are not on it—you know, environmental and recreational ones—that they should be on it, and we've heard from Confor that we shouldn't view it as a strategic panel at all; it's all about liaison between the Government and the commercial sector. Now, obviously there's a huge range there, so what on earth is it for?

[260] **Lesley Griffiths:** It's an advisory panel to me. I think it's a very good panel. It's gender balanced, which always pleases me. I suppose you can't please all the people all the time, can you? But I would say their main purpose is as an advisory panel to me. I think there's a very broad range of skills on there—a good mixture. We can always—. If I want advice, I can always go outside that panel. So, again, I meet all my stakeholders. Environmental representatives sit on a variety of panels, so they can always

feed in to me about that, but these people give their time, so I don't like to hear that they should be revitalised. I think it's a very good panel.

[261] **David Melding:** So, it's functioning well at the moment, in your view, and giving you a range of, well, strategic advice. It's in the name, so one would hope that that's—.

[262] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, they give me advice around economic benefits, environmental, obviously. I've got no criticism at all.

[263] **David Melding:** So, to try and be specific, what sort of advice have they been giving around how policy ought to be shaped in the future with the use of the well-being of future generations Act, which is obviously core to the Government's strategy in this whole area?

[264] **Lesley Griffiths:** On the legislation, I've mentioned already that a lot of this has to fit in, obviously, with the well-being of future generations Act, how I want to link it in with planning policy much more—I think that was one of the things they advised me on. They're advising me on Brexit now—on our plans post Brexit. I'm trying to think what else. Is there anything else—

[265] **Mr Lea:** One of the other things, going back to your earlier question about land use and planting more trees—. Because we said that they're going to be doing a session—I think it's 20 July—later on this month, looking at what we can do, what's innovative, in tree planting. It has got a good balance of public, private and voluntary. They're helping us to do further work on health. We actually went out to visit some of the work that they'd actually suggested we look at, looking at using woodlands as gyms, so actually getting people out there in the woodlands. So, it's a whole range of areas that they're covering.

[266] **Lesley Griffiths:** Bill's just reminded me that, actually, today, they're looking at the management of grey squirrels for me.

[267] **David Melding:** I mean, it sounds descriptive rather than strategic, if I can be terribly direct. How are they using the future generations Act to map out and consider future priorities and options? My understanding is that's why the Act exists: so that you can have intergenerational policy making for long-term targets, and crikey, this is certainly an area that requires that sort of approach.

[268] **Mr Lea:** In a sense, I think it's also the way that officials use them. That's what we're also doing with them now: we're actually giving them bespoke questions. In fact, I think Bill, after this meeting, is meeting with the chair or having a telecon with the chair to look at some of the key questions that we actually want them to address now. So, they are very able, very willing, they have a wealth of expertise and they will be performing a major role now in helping us looking at woodland options across the board within the context of all the legislation.

[269] **David Melding:** Well, let me try and push you towards the specifics. In terms of woodland coverage by the latter part of the twenty-first century, would they be looking at that and where our current targets are, whether we should have new ones and be setting that sort of policy ambition, or is that not what the FGA is being used for at the moment?

[270] **Mr Lea:** Yes, exactly that. That is something we want them to focus on now: looking at the planting targets, looking at innovation and how we fund it as well, and, across the board, looking at the other areas of the sector, looking at construction and the links to industry, and looking at capacity. That's what they are there to do.

[271] **Lesley Griffiths:** One of their current pieces of work—and I did refer to this earlier—is, obviously: we're considering ways of increasing woodland creation, so they're meeting next week particularly in the post-Brexit sphere and it's about how we design future funding schemes. So, going back, I think I mentioned it in my answer to Sian, but I didn't say it was actually the panel that's meeting next week.

[272] **David Melding:** And so that I can understand the general scope of their strategic planning work, do they look at other jurisdictions? I mean, I suppose, in the UK, Scotland is probably the most integrated and successful, although there are limits to the progress they've been making against the targets that were set getting on for a generation ago. But, you know, some countries in Europe have made huge strides in terms of where they've gotten to now compared to where they were in the early 1990s—Spain and France fairly close by, for instance, but there are others. So, do they look at that sort of evidence, and particularly the interventions that have enabled that sort of progress around payments, usually, now they've adapted the CAP to meet those sorts of requirements for forestation?

[273] **Lesley Griffiths:** I know they certainly have looked at Scotland and

worked with Scotland, and obviously officials work closely with Scotland. I don't know about Spain and France, I'm afraid. I don't know if you know.

[274] **Mr Lea:** I don't think we've looked at France—

[275] **David Melding:** Well, you know, I don't mind where they've looked, but have they looked wider afield?

[276] **Lesley Griffiths:** They've looked wider; I know that.

[277] **Mr Lea:** And it's within their brief, as part of the work the Minister had mentioned earlier with Brexit and looking at international opportunities for forestry. That's what they—

[278] **Lesley Griffiths:** Outside of Europe.

[279] **David Melding:** Okay. I don't know if any of this evidence is ever made public, or the minutes of their discussions, but some of that would be very useful, I think, for the committee to see the scope of these discussions. I'm a bit unclear; are there plans to reappoint the panel or is the existing panel there and you—on occasions, then—change membership as required, or is there going to be a comprehensive reappointment of the panel?

[280] **Lesley Griffiths:** There's just been one. I think it was earlier this year. They started in March this year, and it's for three years.

[281] **David Melding:** Thank you.

[282] **Mike Hedges:** Thank you. On to commercial forestry. Jenny can start.

[283] **Jenny Rathbone:** Thank you. It's good to hear you say, Cabinet Secretary, that we need to be radically different, because if we listen to the commercial sawmill sector, they are reporting that we're going to run out of commercial timber within 10 years. So, clearly, previous governments haven't paid attention to this because it's somewhere between 25 to 40 years to grow commercial product. So, I just wondered what you thought were the main drivers for trying to rectify this situation now.

12:00

[284] NRW were fairly clear with us that, while they have commercial

forestry, they're selling it in order to use the proceeds for other duties, like management of woodland for recreational purposes, more flood mitigation or whatever. They have lots of duties, but there appears to be no ambition to continue to be a grower of commercial trees. But, clearly, that's not a sustainable policy because, eventually, all their commercial woodland will have gone and, therefore, they won't have that income. So, what are going to be the drivers now, in your view, to rectify the lack of planting that's gone on over many years?

[285] **Lesley Griffiths:** I mentioned that we've got to be radically different. If you look at the target that was set in 2010 for 20 years of 100,000 hectares, we are nowhere near that, and I absolutely think we should keep that target there, although it's incredibly ambitious and it's an aspiration. But if we accept that climate change is probably the biggest threat that we're facing then we've absolutely got to keep to that. So, whilst I want to keep that target, as I say, you've got to be pragmatic, and that's why we have to do something radically different because, in the last seven years, we've planted—I don't know—not 4,000 hectares of trees. So, it's going back to what I was saying before about partnership: it's not just down to us, it's not just down to the sector, it's not just down to NRW; we've all got to work together.

[286] Somebody mentioned Scotland before and, again, Scotland are not reaching their very ambitious targets. They've increased their targets, though, I think, and I've had discussions with Fergus Ewing about this. He has a particular interest, I would say, in forestry. That's why he wants to lay down that challenge of an increase.

[287] So, you're absolutely right about the commercial sector. One of the things we've done is to look at the way we fund. I go back to what I said before about Glastir not doing what it should do. We've had the timber business investment scheme; that's been very successful. We've had two rounds to date. Round 1 attracted 49 expressions of interest and 21 went through to the detailed assessment stage, and that was a £2 million budget. Round 2 has just closed. We've had 46 expressions of interest. Again, that's a £2 million budget. We've also brought forward the co-operative forest planning scheme. I'm very keen on that because what that's intended to do is fund from the bottom up—have a really different approach, if you like. So, again, we've got woodland managers working with stakeholders to seek agreement about where woodland can be created. That was launched in November last year. Again, it was an initial allocation of £180,000—not a

significant amount of money but just enough to kick-start it. I am looking to see if I can do another couple of rounds there. I really want to encourage an increase in home-grown timber.

[288] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, well, that's excellent to hear. Might it be useful to do case studies of the Llanrwst farmer who's planted 85,000 trees or the 400 to 500 acres you say have been planted somewhere else? Because the commercial sector is saying that, in Wales, you have to invest £150,000 to £300,000 in an application for commercial woodland with little prospect of it being agreed—that there's a much less enthusiastic embracing of commercial woodland than there is in Scotland, so that they've all defected to Scotland. So, what can we learn from the Scottish situation to try to retrieve that?

[289] **Lesley Griffiths:** What I was saying was that I want to see an increase in the use of home-grown timber because I want to see the use of timber in construction. So, one of the things I'm doing—you mention case studies—is meeting with Woodknowledge Wales and also the Structural Timber Association at the Royal Welsh Show. So, Huw, the farmer I met up in Llanrwst—I've asked if he's coming along to the Royal Welsh. It would be really good for people to hear his experience, because he was so positive about it, and you don't get that—. You know, there isn't that culture amongst some of the farming community. So, that's something that we can certainly use as a case study. The charity, the third sector one, I presume that was a one-off—

[290] **Mr Lea:** Yes. I think we could do further case studies to look at innovation in both the voluntary sector—. Actually, Coed Cymru, on exactly the points you've raised, agreed at the last meeting that we had them that they would produce a paper on innovation and how farmers can actually link through to community woodlands. They're going to produce a paper that would then influence our future land-use schemes as well.

[291] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. Well, that's great. It's really good to hear you're meeting the Woodknowledge Wales people and that you're thinking of changing the regulations to promote more timber construction in building. For example, we know that Powys has adopted a 'wood first' policy. Is this something that you'd be minded to promote across the whole of Wales, or to change the building regulations to implement that?

[292] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, as you know, I'm looking at the building

regulations; so, we're looking at that in the round.

[293] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. I suppose it then, from that, follows: how do we manage the gap we currently have between a shortage of building, of growing trees and the timescale involved before they become a productive product?

[294] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, that's the reason why we have to be radical. I visited a timber company up in north Wales who said, 'This is all we've got left'. I wasn't quite sure whether that was the case or not, but it is obviously of great concern to the sector. So, one of the reasons, as I say, I got everybody in the room was because they're telling me that we're not growing enough trees and we're not growing the right trees. The commercial sector loves conifers. Other parts of the forestry world don't. They prefer the broadleaved. So, it's about getting that balance.

[295] Just going back to Scotland—you mentioned Scotland and everybody going up to Scotland. I think one of the things I'm very keen to pursue—and I've asked officials to look at, and I don't know whether this has come across in the evidence that you've taken already—but they have looked at innovation in relation to sheep and trees. I don't know if this has come up in committee. The clerk is shaking his head. They've created a woodland creation grant, and farmers can apply for that and the forest infrastructure grant at the same time. So, basically, they can make tracks or roads alongside where they plant woodland because, again, that's something that people have said to me is a barrier. So, we're looking—officials are meeting the Scottish officials—to see if we can do something around that. But something is attracting people to Scotland, as you say.

[296] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. And what about the regulations? Because, obviously, we have much more constrained regulations here in Wales than they do in either England or Scotland.

[297] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. So, I mentioned earlier—

[298] **Jenny Rathbone:** Oh yes, so, you're looking firmly at that. Okay. Thank you very much.

[299] **Mike Hedges:** Huw, you wanted to—

[300] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Thank you, Chair, yes. In testing how radical your

thinking is, looking just across the border, one of the most successful—. It's had challenges, but one of the most successful schemes in large-scale spatial planting, particularly in despoiled areas, is the National Forest Company—a company limited by guarantee, that's brought in a lot of partners, and a lot of private investment behind it. I'm looking in front of me now at the mapping that you've already done of Wales. If you look at the dark green areas, which are the most likely for planting, it stretches basically from the Newport area across to Llanelli. Those are the ones that are really identified with potential. We talk about the Valleys Regional Park; I'm sure it will come up in the Valleys taskforce as well. Are you considering those radical thoughts that say, 'Well, how do we actually bring all this together??' We already have a lot planted within south Wales. The potential is even greater. We could be commercial. It could be indigenous planting, it could be community woodland, it could be a social enterprise model, and it could be a company limited by guarantee. Are you doing that sort of radical thinking?

[301] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, we have to have a completely different approach if we're going to reach that target. So, I've told officials they can come to me with absolutely any ideas to make sure we increase the number of trees that we are planting. So, I'm saying 'yes'. I'm hoping that officials are going to back me up here and say 'yes'.

[302] **Mr Lea:** Exactly, as you said—

[303] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** And particularly the National Forestry Company—

[304] **Mr Lea:** Yes, well, I think a case study on that would be something that would be really useful as part of our looking at innovation. But going back also to what we said earlier, this innovation in funding, which picks that up as well—innovation in business and innovation in funding—is actually key, and I think there will be opportunities. That's a good point that we need to look at.

[305] **Jenny Rathbone:** [*Inaudible.*]—new radical policy?

[306] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, because of Brexit coming so quickly down the track, we've got to be ready for it. I've said 2018 because that's obviously—

[307] **Jenny Rathbone:** Around the corner.

[308] **Lesley Griffiths:** —around the corner. I'm being told by the commercial

sector that they're going to run out of trees within the next decade. So, we have to do something very quickly.

[309] **Mike Hedges:** Jayne.

[310] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Cabinet Secretary.

[311] **Lesley Griffiths:** Good morning.

[312] **Jayne Bryant:** We've had a number of concerns around the lack of young people in forestry education and training, and NRW have said that they've got more of an enabling role, now, within that. Where do you see the Welsh Government's role within education and training, and encouraging and supporting young people to go into that, and how do you think improvements could be made?

[313] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, it's a discussion I've had with both the Cabinet Secretary, and also the Minister for skills. Obviously it's demand led, but I think there is that provision there. I was up in Bangor on the same day we went to Llanrwst, discussing, not specifically forestry but a wide range of subjects, and they have a degree, for instance, in forestry that I'm aware of, but I think there is that provision there. As I say, it's demand led so it's about making sure that young people find it an attractive career choice. I have to say that most of the people I've met within the commercial forestry sector haven't been particularly at the young end of the scale—they're probably more middle-aged. But, I think, again, we have had focus on the Forestry First project, and that was funded out of RDP funding, so, certainly, I think our role is fulfilled, if you like, in relation to that.

[314] **Jayne Bryant:** Is there any way to support other organisations that are doing the education and training to make it seen in its entirety in a more strategic view on trying to get young people into that?

[315] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. Certainly if we're told that there are skills gaps, we could work with them. Farming Connect is one organisation. Lantra: I don't know if you're aware of Lantra, but that's another organisation that we have; they lead on the delivery of lifelong learning and the development programme, so one thing they do is provide continuous professional development and support for farmers and the forestry sector. There are lots of e-learning packages also that they provide, so that training is out there.

[316] **Simon Thomas:** Roeddech chi'n sôn gynnu fach am gwrdd â'r grŵp merched mewn amaeth, ac rwy'n gobeithio cwrdd â nhw heddiw fy hun. Maen nhw wedi rhoi papur at ei gilydd sy'n sôn yn benodol am hyfforddiant, yn wyneb Brexit, fod angen sgiliau, bod angen i bawb sy'n gweithio mewn amaeth i fod â'r sgiliau i fod yn barod ar gyfer yr heriau sydd i ddod. Yng nghydestun coedwigaeth, wrth drafod gyda'r sector addysg bellach hefyd, nid oes llwybr clir iawn i berson ifanc sydd â diddordeb mewn coedwigaeth i fynd. Mae'r llwybrau yn y maes mwy amaethyddol yn fwy clir, ac mae yna ddatblygiad diddorol o ran dysgu amaeth mewn chweched dosbarth yn digwydd mewn rhannau o Gymru nawr ac mae yna mwy o ddiddordeb yn hynny, ond nid oes yna lwybr clir iawn o ran prentisiaeth, o ran hyfforddiant, o ran y gwaith efallai y gall Cymwysterau Cymru ei wneud i roi dewis o hyfforddiant a chymwysterau penodol i goedwigaeth. Rŷm ni'n gwybod bod lot o goetiroedd yng Nghymru heb gael eu rheoli yn briodol, oherwydd diffyg sgiliau, o bosib, yw rhan o hynny. Felly, a oes yna rywbeth penodol y gallwch chi ei wneud fel Llywodraeth i arwain yn y maes yma i yrru'r proses yma, o ystyried bod popeth yn mynd i newid mewn dwy flynedd ar ôl i ni adael yr Undeb Ewropeaidd?

Simon Thomas: You did mention a little earlier about meeting with the women in agriculture group, and I hope to be meeting them today myself. They've put a paper together specifically discussing training in the face of the coming exit from the EU, the need for skills, and for everyone in agriculture to have skills that enable them to face the challenges that will arise. In the context of forestry, having talked with the further education sector as well, there isn't a very clear route for a young person who has an interest in forestry to go. The routes in the agricultural sector more generally are clearer, and there are interesting developments about teaching agriculture in sixth forms in parts of Wales, and there's a great interest in that, but there's no clear route in terms of apprenticeships, in terms of training or in terms of the work that Qualifications Wales could carry out, perhaps, to give the option of training and specific qualifications in forestry. We know that there is a big number of woodlands in Wales that are not being adequately managed, perhaps because of a lack of skills. So, is there something specific that you could do as a Government to take a lead in this area and to drive this process, given that everything is going to change in two years' time after we've left the European Union?

[317] **Lesley Griffiths:** A lot less than two years, now. They did tell me they were meeting you, actually; I'd forgotten about that, Simon, sorry. I only had

half an hour with them so I only touched on that briefly, but you're quite right. I think, looking at the opportunities, Brexit does give us those opportunities, so apprenticeships is one area that I have discussed, not with my ministerial colleagues, but in our stakeholder group. So, for instance, the food and drinks sector, if you include everybody—food processors, abattoirs, restaurants—employs 0.25 million people, so that's one area where I have had specific discussions with Julie James around apprenticeships. But, I think you're right around agriculture and forestry. I think there are the opportunities to make sure those skills are there and, as I say, that's something I can certainly discuss, not just with ministerial colleagues but with Farming Connect, for instance, as they're represented on this group this morning, and Lantra too.

[318] **Simon Thomas:** Byddwn i'n **Simon Thomas:** I would welcome croesawu hynny. that.

[319] **Mike Hedges:** Woodland management, David.

12:15

[320] **David Melding:** Yes. We've heard that about 40 per cent of our woodland is not very well managed, or managed at all. How concerned are you about that and what do you think would be an acceptable level of next-to-no management, anyway? Because some, presumably, isn't conducive to being managed. Are you considering bringing back the grants that would allow more active management?

[321] **Lesley Griffiths:** I haven't heard that figure of 40 per cent. Your natural reaction is to say '100 per cent', but as you say, that's not feasible. I mentioned before the Glastir woodland management grant. That's not been opened, but it's something that I am considering, because I think that would help. So, that has come back to me. We've obviously had Glastir woodland restoration and Glastir woodland creation, and I mentioned before the timber business investment, but I am considering the Glastir woodland management, and perhaps, if you could look at that figure of 40 per cent, then I could perhaps consider that in light of that.

[322] **David Melding:** Yes, it's 40 per cent that is inadequately or not managed at all at the minute.

[323] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes.

[324] **Jenny Rathbone:** On a quick supplementary, can I just ask—? The commercial sector says that the woodland restoration work is at risk of displacing what little commercial forestry already exists on that land, and that what they think would be needed would be to identify other land where they could plant commercial forestry, and that would then make people a lot more willing to engage with the restoration process—if they had an alternative piece of land for commercial production.

[325] **Lesley Griffiths:** So you're saying they want us to find the alternative piece of land.

[326] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes, or not you personally, but, you know, that if other land is identified, 'Right, please put your commercial woodland on an alternative piece of land.'

[327] **Mr Lea:** I think in terms of the opportunities map, that's there to help support potential opportunities for woodland planting. The other issue is land availability and the link back to price. Obviously the price of land for agriculture or forestry use has been extremely high in Wales in the last few years. There's some evidence in some areas that it's dropped slightly recently, which hopefully, and possibly with Brexit, could be something that could release more opportunities. But in a sense, it's all about the land availability and its price, and a lot of it has been snapped up by other farms for commercial agriculture. The forestry sector is saying they're starting to grab some land where it's optimal now that they can actually afford to buy it and make forestry work.

[328] **Mike Hedges:** Onto access for recreation now, Gareth.

[329] **Gareth Bennett:** Thanks, Chair. Yes. Do you think that Natural Resources Wales is taking a sufficiently strategic approach to managing public access to its woodland managed areas?

[330] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. They directly manage, obviously, our estate. I think woodlands have a very important role to play in regenerating some of our most deprived communities, so I think it's really important. I certainly value access to open spaces and countryside, and I think probably everybody around this table does. In fact, I think to the public it's very important that they have their access to those open spaces.

[331] Obviously, NRW works with a range of partners to focus on the areas of greatest need. I've asked NRW—and I think they do—they encourage people to look at woodlands for activities and to encourage communities to go into the woodlands for activities.

[332] **Gareth Bennett:** There wasn't anything specific in the legislative programme of the Government on access reform to those areas. So, did you have any more information about any likely change, and what the timetable for that would be?

[333] **Lesley Griffiths:** There is nothing specifically in this year's legislative programme, but obviously I've gone out to consultation around sustainable management of our natural resources. It could be that when I hear the views and the thoughts of stakeholders and members of the public it's something that we can look at. With regard to legislation, I have to make sure I've got space post Brexit. In the Queen's Speech we heard about, for instance, an agricultural Bill and a fisheries Bill. Well, we had no prior knowledge of those. I've made it very clear that Wales will have its own agricultural policy going forward. We don't know, once the great repeal Bill or whatever it's going to be called is published, what legislation we're going to need, but it's something that I'll certainly consider around all aspects of green growth in relation to legislation once the consultation's finished.

[334] **Gareth Bennett:** Okay, thanks.

[335] **Mike Hedges:** Huw.

[336] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Thank you, Chair. At the recent inquiry session we held in Maesteg, we had stakeholders who were engaged in access issues, particularly to the publicly owned forestry. So, we had shooters, mountain bikers, motorcyclists, long-distance trail riders, ramblers, and so on. What was amazing was, one, the degree of consensus around the desire for access and the willingness to work together on it. It's moved on significantly. But the other thing is—and I can recall David reporting back on this at the end of their group there—was that many of those, including those with the noisier forms, were willing to look at the issue of paying for access. I think it would be problematic with ramblers, and so on, but those who realise they have an impact on it would be willing and able to actually pay for a licence, this, that and the other. I'm just wondering whether you're considering that sort of approach in terms of widening the access by some sort of cost sharing, or whether it would be an idea for you, Cabinet Secretary, with your officials to

convene a wider group than the usual suspects and to sit down and say, 'How do we pull some money into this situation and improve access for everybody?'

[337] **Lesley Griffiths:** That's a good idea. Maybe we could look to do that. I wouldn't say I'm considering it at the moment. As I mentioned in my answer to Gareth Bennett, I'm looking at the legislative regimes, if you like, around access. There was a big review undertaken by—I think not my predecessor, but my predecessor's predecessor, if you like—back in, I think it was about 2014. So, we've had that review of the legislative framework, if you like. I'm sure, if I remember rightly, that that consultation was the biggest one Welsh Government ever—. I think there were about 6,000 responses. So, it's something, as I say, we're currently considering, but I have to look at it in the wider context now.

[338] **Mr Lea:** Just to add, Cabinet Secretary, we're also looking at innovation with the NRW estate and the public land we've got in relation to some of the things that you mentioned—innovation in land use and whether those areas could be joined in with more collaborative ventures with other bodies. So, all that is in scope for working with NRW.

[339] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** I suspect there may well be potential for you, one, in how the debate has moved on and, secondly, the willingness of some to actually contribute to access payments, but also the fact that they're willing to look at areas where they could pilot this sort of approach. So—

[340] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think you're right, because I sat on this committee back in 2007 and 2008, and I think if that consensus is there then it has moved on considerably.

[341] **Mike Hedges:** Jayne, did you want to come on to community involvement?

[342] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to touch on the community involvement aspects. As Huw mentioned, we had this fantastic event in Huw's constituency in Maesteg recently, and we were very pleased to have gone there, but we heard conflicting views around the support and the guidance available for community woodland groups. How do you see that we could do more or that more could be done to support and guide those community woodland groups, particularly around supporting them and reducing the amount of barriers that are put in their way, perhaps, to take

over certain parts of the woodland?

[343] **Lesley Griffiths:** I visited a woodland in your constituency—

[344] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Llynfi.

[345] **Lesley Griffiths:** It's the same place. In pouring rain, if I remember rightly, Huw.

[346] **David Melding:** It was fine for us. [*Laughter.*]

[347] **Lesley Griffiths:** It was fine for you. The sun shines on the righteous. I think it was one of my very first visits, actually, when I came into portfolio and, obviously, they'd been very successful in securing core funding and then creating this wonderful area. They've got a lot of members, if I remember rightly; it's a very big one.

[348] I think we need to look—. Because you can provide funding, and we all know that funding is a big issue, but it's about making sure it's sustainable going forward. And funnily enough, I had a meeting this morning about looking at how my funding is split into project funding and core funding, and how we can get that balance, because it's the smaller groups that I would prefer to support than some of the very large bodies that can probably—. You know, their wings are probably fully fledged now, and they can fly off on their own. So, I think we need to look at the whole issue of funding. I think my funding streams, if you like, the core funding and the project funding, are until next year, but what I've asked officials to do is to take some time to have a look at how we can support groups such as you suggest in the longer term. I think it's also up to NRW to work with these groups as well, and I know they have held some seminars recently to support them.

[349] **Mike Hedges:** Jenny, you wanted to come back in.

[350] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes, I just wanted to ask you about urban tree cover and your approach to that. Obviously, the Woodland Trust recommends 20 per cent tree cover. Yet, miserably, many new housing developments have 1 per cent tree cover, and NRW told us that, whilst some local authorities engage well with them—and Wrexham was one of the ones they mentioned—others are simply not putting binding planning consent regulations into the applications, and section 106 money doesn't seem to be being used on this really important environmental and flood-risk and recreational aspect. So, I

just wondered what plans you might have to tighten up the planning regulations to make sure that this is a priority.

[351] **Lesley Griffiths:** And air quality—something I know you're very interested in.

[352] **Jenny Rathbone:** Indeed.

[353] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, I think you're right. It's not just about woodlands, is it, it's about urban trees as well? I did mention in an earlier answer that I'm trying to link in planning policy to make sure that, where we have new roads—. For instance, I came down to south Wales this week via Newtown—you can see the new Newtown road—and it kind of went through my mind then that we must make sure that there are a significant number of trees planted along here. So, it's something that we're looking at. Everywhere where we have, as I say, new roads, new housing developments, new parks, for instance, I think we should make sure that there is a significant thing. So, I'm looking to maybe issue guidance to local authorities going forward. So, that's an ongoing piece of work.

[354] **Jenny Rathbone:** Thank you.

[355] **Mike Hedges:** David.

[356] **David Melding:** I was very interested in your written evidence. You referred to the NRW study 'Tree cover in Wales's Towns and Cities.' In fact, I raised this with the First Minister in questions this week. And you've sent that study to the public services boards as part of what they should be considering in relation to the future generations Act. We've heard the Woodland Trust saying that we ought to have a minimum of 20 per cent canopy in urban areas. You say, and it's very interesting, that the potential is for up to 35 per cent urban coverage. And I think that's great that we're hearing that. My question is: why aren't you telling the local service boards that they should come up with an intergenerational target now that we should be working to, because that's how the FGA should be used? You've said a potential of 35 per cent. We've got a minimum—the environmental sector, anyway, is saying it should be 20 per cent. Why aren't they going to look at—? Well, are you going to ask them to really look at this and come back with some meaningful advice so we can set a good strategic target?

[357] **Lesley Griffiths:** The short answer is 'yes'—yes, we are.

[358] **David Melding:** That's a very pleasing answer.

[359] **Lesley Griffiths:** Good. I'm glad I've pleased you, David.

[360] **Mike Hedges:** And, finally, Simon.

[361] **Simon Thomas:** Just at the conclusion of this, I'd like to take us back to the beginning, and it kind of links in to one aspect of David's question. We've discussed several things here. David's question was on one aspect of this, which, when you look back at your woodland strategy, actually is not there. So, the woodland strategy doesn't address this 35 per cent. Your woodland strategy doesn't, I think, address the economic potential for woodland, and particularly, post Brexit, it doesn't address the training aspects that we've been discussing. You did, in replying to the committee Chair at the start, say that you were looking to refresh that strategy. What I'd like to get a sense from you now is how and in what way you'd like to change that strategy, and are these issues that we've been discussing this morning the ones that you will now be putting at the forefront of your strategy? And if I might just say, as a little adjunct to that, doesn't that then lead to a question of why you haven't opened the Glastir woodland management grant, and surely that should now be a matter of urgency for you, as you are underspending on these issues within that portfolio?

[362] **Lesley Griffiths:** So, I said at the outset, as you said, that I will be refreshing it, maybe later this year, but certainly, early next year, if not later this year, because of the gaps—because the gaps are in it. So, you come into portfolio and it takes you a little while to get to grips with everything, but, certainly, this is an area where I've had a lot of representation, to the point where I got everybody in a room together because I was just getting such conflicting messages. And, as I say, you'll always have a tension between the regulator and the people who are being regulated. However, you need to find out what the real issues are. So, I think it was the gaps, particularly around urban, because, as I say, if we're going to have a radical change of direction in order to reach those targets, it's not just about woodland creation and we can't just rely on farmers; we have to all pull together. And I think urban is an area where there is a big gap, and that's why I was very happy to put that in the paper.

12:30

[363] In relation to your question around Glastir woodland management, as I say, I am considering it at the moment. So, watch this space.

[364] **Mike Hedges:** Cabinet Secretary, can I thank you for your attendance and that of your officials? And, as you know, you'll be sent a transcript of the meeting, to check before publication. But thank you very much for coming and answering our questions so succinctly. Thank you very much.

[365] **Lesley Griffiths:** Thank you, Chair.

12:30

**Papurau i'w Nodi
Papers to Note**

[366] **Mike Hedges:** We now move on to a series of papers for noting. Can I ask somebody to move we note them, and then readdress them at the appropriate time, because some of them are actually tasking us to do something, but now is not the appropriate time to do so? Thank you. Well, see you all back at one o'clock.

[367] **David Melding:** So moved.

[368] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, happy.

[369] **Mike Hedges:** Right, thank you. See you all back at 1 o'clock.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12:31.
The meeting ended at 12:31.*