

# [Enhancing Welsh woodlands: Assembly Committee publishes report](#)

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27/07/17

The Assembly's Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee has published a report – [Branching out – A new ambition for woodland policies](#). Launched at a stakeholder event at the [Royal Welsh Show](#), the report sets out recommendations to the Welsh Government.

The Committee anticipates that the report will inform the revision of the [Woodlands for Wales strategy](#), which the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, has agreed to undertake by early 2018.



The Committee gathered a wealth of evidence over the five months of the inquiry, hearing from a variety of commercial forestry, environmental, community, recreational, and academic stakeholders, as well as Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Cabinet Secretary. This included written evidence, formal oral evidence sessions, and a stakeholder workshop.

Committee Members also visited woodlands and woodland businesses in Newport, Dinas Powys, Crumlin, Merthyr Tydfil, Newbridge-on-Wye, Pwllheli and Maesteg. Here they learned more about the challenges and opportunities facing woodland owners and managers about commercial forestry, conservation, and community access and recreation.

The report is divided into six parts.

Part 1 highlights the severe lack of woodland creation in Wales in recent years, with annual planting rates averaging just 10% of the target set out in the [Welsh](#)



[Government's Climate Change Strategy \(2010\)](#). The Committee found that this is mainly due to regulatory, bureaucratic, financial and cultural barriers.

During oral evidence, the Cabinet Secretary acknowledged that radical change is required to meet the target. The Welsh Government and NRW are working together to better align the regulatory and funding processes, and provide more support to applicants. The Cabinet Secretary said she is also committed to promoting the benefits of woodlands amongst the farming community.

Parts 2 to 5 follow the four themes of the Woodlands for Wales strategy, namely: responding to climate change; woodlands for people; a competitive and integrated forest sector; and environmental quality.

- The Committee found that the lack of planting is limiting Wales' ability to mitigate its carbon emissions, whilst adapting to the increasing flood risk has not been sufficiently addressed;
- Good progress is being made with the use of woodlands by community groups and for recreation, however the declining trend in canopy cover in urban areas was raised as a concern;
- The Committee found that the lack of coniferous planting is a particular problem, as it will begin to severely constrain the viability of the commercial forestry sector in the near future; and
- A lack of funding for management of native woodlands is thought to be affecting the restoration of plantations on ancient woodlands, and the environmental quality of woodlands more generally.

The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee that she is keen to increase Welsh timber production and for it to be used more in construction. She also committed to looking into the possibility of reintroducing the Glastir Woodland Management Scheme, and issuing guidance to local planning authorities on planting and replacing urban trees.

Part 6 explores how the Woodlands for Wales strategy could be improved for the future, in particular through alignment with the [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#) and the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#). Finally, the report also examines how Brexit presents an opportunity to:



- Develop innovative funding opportunities such as Payments for Ecosystem Services; and
- Better integrate different rural land uses, including forestry and agriculture, within a broader sustainable land management policy.

The Cabinet Secretary's full response to the Committee's recommendations is expected in the autumn.

The Research Service acknowledges the parliamentary fellowship provided to Helen Davies by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council which enabled this blog post to be completed.

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Article by Helen Davies, National Assembly for Wales Policy and Legislation Committee Service

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