

Lee Waters AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Deputy Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref LW/01431/22

Rachel Evans
Director
Countryside Alliance Wales
rachel-evans@countryside-alliance.org

25 July 2022

Dear Rachel,

I am writing to you in relation to the Countryside Alliance's campaign requesting Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) stop purchasing farmland to plant trees. As we have received several hundred letters, I am writing to you as the organiser of the campaign, rather than each individual.

The Welsh Government has declared a climate emergency, and, as part of our actions to tackle climate change, we need to plant 43,000 hectares of woodland by 2030. We want farmers to be central to planting more trees in Wales and to benefit from the opportunities of creating woodland whilst also supporting food production. We are keen to avoid outside interests buying up land and we want to work with Welsh landowners to achieve this. To date, the majority of our Glastir Woodland Creation grants has funded farmers to create small areas of mixed or native woodlands on their farms while continuing to remain productive.

Our proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme will create a new system of farm support that will maximise the protective power of nature through farming. We recently published an outline of the scheme which includes a proposal for 10% tree cover on all farms. By asking all farmers to create new and manage existing woodland through the scheme, the load will be spread across Wales and should help avoid large scale land use change and keep farmers on the land.

We want most tree planting in Wales to be done by existing landowners. However, we do believe there is a role for NRW in purchasing land where it helps meet strategic priorities. This is only a small part of the national effort to increase woodland in Wales and involves a very small proportion of land in Wales.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

NRW use the agricultural land classification mapping as a guide and typically avoid land of high quality for food production (land that is of a classification of 3a and better). They also take into account local context (such as relative local abundance of 'good' (e.g. 3b) land) to assess the impact of creating woodland on a particular site. When NRW bid for land they offer fair market value, are transparent and non-aggressive. Their focus is on parcels of land (as opposed to whole farms) and land near or adjacent to the existing Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE).

NRW use these new woodlands to meet their area statement priorities to connect people with nature, for example by exploring innovative ways of managing the WGWE. They can also use these sites as silvicultural exemplars, to demonstrate how we want other people in Wales to create new woodlands in the face of climate change and a nature emergency and the pressure on Wales' land to continue to produce food.

A good example of this is the Brownhill site at Llangadog NRW purchased to create a commemorative woodland to remember those we have lost to Covid 19 in Wales. NRW launched a second round of consultation on 23 June to seek people's feedback on their objectives for the site. Having listened to the responses from the first round of public consultation, NRW are proposing three distinct areas that will prioritise different objectives: a conservation space for wildlife to flourish; a woodland space for commemoration that is fully accessible; and a growing space to deliver sustainable opportunities for food, trees, and nature. The consultation closes on 28 July and we would encourage all those with an interest to feed in their views.

The Welsh Government is committed to a sustainable, vibrant and successful agricultural sector and food chain which helps to sustain the wider rural economy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee', is positioned above the printed name and title.

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