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Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

1. Protecting and Restoring Peatland

As you noted, Wales has approximately 90,000ha of peatlands, however, not all require restoration. Wales' first National Peatland Action Programme (2020-2025) represents a significant milestone for peatland restoration and a significant investment by Welsh Government. It provides the resources, direction and national coordination to begin the process of delivering against our Peatland Policy ambition and the Net Zero Plan. The NPAP has an in-built review in 2024 to make recommendations regarding the needs, scale and pace of a future programme.

The restoration of peatland is central to the fight against the climate and nature emergencies with Wales' peat resource storing vast qualities of carbon and supporting some of our most important habitats and species. Ensuring peatlands are restored to functioning ecosystems will also help the natural environment in Wales become more resilient to the effects of climate change.

It is important to acknowledge the initial five year Programme is just the starting point for meeting our peatland ambition. It will take many more years of work by Government, NRW and partner organisations if we are to achieve the ambition in full. Partners across Wales have been restoring peatlands for many years and this continues through delivery mechanisms such as the Sustainable Management Scheme and LIFE projects. This is a collective endeavour and the NPAP builds on this excellent work. The Programme team is also working with Welsh Government to develop the Sustainable Farming Scheme and any other supporting grant or private funding mechanisms to aid in the restoration effort.

Building capacity amongst partner organisations, many of which you represent, contractors and NRW to deliver at an increased pace is central to the Programme. The Welsh Government is currently assessing options to develop the pace of restoration following the successful first year of the Programme. You can access the Year 1 report here.

2. Peat for Horticultural Purposes

On 18 December, the UK Government and Welsh Government launched a joint consultation on ending the retail sale of peat in horticulture in England and Wales. Should the consultation receive support for the ban, we will work with the UK Government to implement it. Whilst there is no current peat extraction in Wales, preventing sales of peat compost is in line with our commitment to be globally responsible.

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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.

3. Farming Policy and Support Schemes

Welsh agriculture is at the heart of many of our rural communities and our high standards are key to our response to the climate emergency and enhancing biodiversity. Future farm support will reward farmers who take action to meet these challenges.

The proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme will be different - the level of payment will be linked to the actions which an active farmer undertakes. We will reward both creation and maintenance. Rewarding farmers for their contribution to the health and wellbeing of our nation will provide them with an income and create a sustainable, resilient agriculture sector for future generations.

We will publish an outline of the scheme alongside the Agriculture Bill then begin our next phase of co-design to allow farmers and stakeholders to engage on the technical details and ensure the Scheme is practical and deliverable.

As we develop the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme, domestically funded transitional schemes will support activities which tackle the climate and nature emergencies. To ensure continuity the Welsh Government has offered extensions and renewals to all Glastir Advanced, Organic and Commons contracts until 2023. This will bridge the gap to future support for sustainable land management practices.

I intend for the National Minimum Standards to be implemented in time for the introduction of the proposed Scheme, although these proposals will not form part of the Agriculture Bill. The National Minimum Standards are intended to provide clarity about the existing law to ensure compliance and compliance with the law will be required for anyone wishing to be part of the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

4. Access to Green Space in towns and countryside

We are committed to enabling more people to enjoy green spaces and take advantage of the benefits of getting outside. We want to increase opportunities for people to access the outdoors and take part in a wider range of activities whilst appreciating the beauty of our landscapes and the importance of our environment.

Local authorities have a duty to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan describing how they will identify, prioritise and improve their local network and our Access Reform Programme is looking at increasing opportunities for people to access the outdoors and ensure responsible recreation. During 2021-2022 we are providing £2 million capital funding to all Local Authorities to enable them to improve access to/on the public rights of way network, open access land and green space in Wales. Through 2022-23, the Rural Communities-Rural Development Programme will provide £1.2m to Ramblers Cymru's *Paths to Wellbeing* project, which will improve access to green spaces across 18 communities.

As part of the Access Reform Programme, we are seeking to increase and promote outdoor recreational access. The Sustainable Farming Scheme will play an important role in delivering the programme's objectives, not least by incentivising landowners to upgrade appropriate paths. We want to increase the proportion of public rights of way which are open, easy to use and well signed.

We are committed to creating more community green spaces in town centres to support the wider vision of strengthening their social and cultural usage, central to the health and well-being of people. The Welsh Government funds *Local Places for Nature* which intends to create 'nature on your doorstep' in areas of deprivation, urban and peri-urban areas or those with little or no access to nature. If people engage with nature they will value nature and take action to restore and enhance it.

The introduction of green infrastructure and improved public realm in town centres is central to successful place making and is a fundamental part of projects supported under our £136 million Transforming Towns programme. A range of green infrastructure interventions have already been supported, including the creation of green walls and roofs, rain gardens and pocket parks in town centres. This Our Transforming Towns Placemaking Grant, launched in April 2021, allows local authorities the broadest and most flexible package of support to revitalise town centres with interventions including green infrastructure. Local Authorities' Green Infrastructure Audits of town centres ensure they continue to look for ways to incorporate greening into all of their projects. Our *Building Better Places* focuses on key areas of Planning Policy Wales, including the importance of green spaces, encouraging the creation of new spaces, and improving people's access to green space.

5. Protected Sites Network

Designations have an important role in tackling the nature and climate emergency, although on its own that is not enough. We need to back this up by improving the condition and connectivity of our existing protected sites network. We are developing the multi-year Nature Networks Programme with NRW to create resilient ecological networks with our protected sites at their core, ensuring that our most precious habitats and species are given the chance to recover and thrive, improving all our well-being. This builds on The Nature Networks fund which was launched last year, with 29 projects funded, benefitting more than 100 habitats and species of international significance.

The Welsh Government is committed to supporting the 30 by 30 target, which is currently being negotiated at COP15, with new designations in the marine and terrestrial environments likely to be an important component to success. I am considering the role legislation can play in underpinning nature recovery targets more broadly, including the 30 by 30 target.

We are committed to creating a new National Park for Wales – the first in more than half a century – covering the breath taking Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. We will be announcing the plans to engage with communities about protecting and enhancing the special qualities of this landscape.

6. Marine environment habitats, species and carbon storage

Wales has 139 Marine Protected Areas covering 69% of inshore waters and 50% of all Welsh Waters. The Welsh Government is committed to the network completion of MPAs and will shortly be seeking views for the potential designation of new Marine Conservation Zones. Effective MPA management is hugely important as it complements our MPA designation process and ensures these designations and the features remain in a favourable condition. The MPA Management Grant Scheme will ensure our network of MPAs are well-managed. Actions which lead to an improved understanding of risks and threats to marine conservation benefit not only the MPA network but the entire Welsh marine zone.

Blue carbon habitats are important in addressing the climate and nature emergency. Marine and coastal habitats such as seagrass and sub-tidal sediments provide us with many benefits - storing up to 170% more carbon compared to forests, as well as providing flood protection, and increasing biodiversity. We are working with Defra and the other Devolved Administrations to establish the UK Blue Carbon Evidence Partnership, and will continue to work with NRW and others to develop and deliver a shared blue carbon evidence plan, to include the impacts of human activity and climate change on blue carbon habitats and emissions. We will take action where necessary, informed by this evidence.

7. Nature Recovery Targets

I have agreed to consider the role of legally binding targets for nature, as is reflected in the Co-operation agreement and our Programme for Government. We are considering options for such targets and we will take account of the approach set out in the Environment and Wellbeing of Future Generations legislation, the wellbeing goals and suite of indicators. This recognises that biodiversity loss and recovery are driven by a wide range of pressures and drivers on our natural resources and ecosystems, as well as land use change and of course climate change, which require action and monitoring.

The post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework – the refreshed set of 10-year targets replacing existing Aichi targets - is still in draft with the aim that negotiations will conclude at COP15 Part 2 later this year. In developing targets we will take account of the new GBF. 30 by 30 is one of the targets proposed for the post-2020 biodiversity framework. My officials have undertaken some initial analysis, scoping options available to improve or expand our protected areas for effective delivery of this target.

8. Tree Planting and Canopy

Wales needs a step change increase in woodland creation to tackle the climate emergency. We want to plant 43,000 hectares of new woodland by 2030, and 180,000 hectares by 2050 to meet the ‘balanced pathway’ set out by the UK Climate Change Commission. We have begun work to develop a National Forest for Wales. The National Forest will create areas of new woodland and help to restore and maintain some of Wales’ irreplaceable ancient woodlands. In time it will form a connected network running throughout Wales, which will bring social, economic and environmental benefits.

Last year the Deputy Minister for Climate led a deep-dive exercise into how we can remove the barriers to planting trees in Wales, and how we can use more Welsh timber in construction. This identified a series of actions, including a new funding scheme for woodland creation and an industrial strategy to coordinate the timber supply change and construction sectors.