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Subject: Wildlife Trusts response to the draft NDF consultation
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[NDF Consultation WTW FINAL.pdf](#)

Dear NDF

Please find attached the Wildlife Trusts Wales consultation response to the NDF consultation.

Yours

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NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK (NDF) 2020-2040 CONSULTATION – Wildlife Trusts response

Deadline: 15 November 2019

Sent to: ndf@gov.wales



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Background

1. Wildlife Trusts Wales (WTW) represents the five Wildlife Trusts in Wales – Gwent, Montgomeryshire, North Wales, Radnorshire and South and West Wales (hereafter referred to as the ‘Wildlife Trusts’) working together in partnership to achieve common aims. The Wildlife Trusts collectively speak on behalf of more than 25,000 members and manage over 200 nature reserves, covering more than 8,000 hectares of prime wildlife habitat, from rugged coastline to urban wildlife havens.

2. The Wildlife Trusts in Wales protects, champions and acts for wildlife and wild places on land and at sea. Nature is fundamental to everyday life; it provides the air we breathe, the food we eat, the fuel we use for warmth, and the resources we consume for shelter and modern life. Nature and people are not separate; nor is nature separate from our economy. Without a healthy environment, society cannot be resilient but for nature to look after us, we need to look after nature.
3. People are part of nature; everything we value ultimately comes from it and everything we do has an impact on it. The Wildlife Trusts in Wales strive for a **Living Landscapes** and **Living Seas**, recognising this as an inspirational end point where our environment, society, and economy coexist for the benefit of wildlife and people. Wales's natural environment is also major part of Wales national identity.
4. The Wildlife Trusts work with national and local government, businesses and local communities to influence planning and development to achieve better outcomes for wildlife. Across the UK, the Wildlife Trusts respond to around 6,500 planning applications per year, and tens of thousands more are vetted and checked for impacts on wildlife.
5. Building homes, business premises, renewable energy and energy conservation and transport links could and should have a positive impact on nature. We are also promoting the planning of a Nature Recovery Network, which will allow development to be located in areas which are less important for nature. It can be used to target activity that will contribute to enhancing biodiversity.

Introduction (Question 14 - Further comments)

6. **Wales is one of the world's most nature depleted countries in the worldⁱ and none of our ecosystems show signs of resilienceⁱⁱ.** There has been a 56% decline in wildlife with severely depleted populations of birds, insects and many species at risk of extinctionⁱⁱⁱ. This loss has created an 'empty landscape syndrome'^{iv}, where even if we have the habitats available, we do not have the wildlife left to occupy them.
7. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) stated that **one million species may be pushed to extinction in the next few years**, with serious consequences for human beings as well as the rest of life on earth^v. **They ranked the direct drivers of loss of biodiversity with the largest one being changes in land and sea use which includes habitat loss due to development.** The IPBES Report also finds that global goals for conserving and sustainably using nature and achieving sustainability cannot be met by current trajectories, and goals for 2030 and beyond may only be achieved through '**transformative change**'. It states that the policy tools, options and exemplary practices include;
 - *Policy actions and societal initiatives are helping to raise awareness about the impact of consumption on nature, protecting local environments^{vi}, promoting sustainable local economies and restoring degraded areas. Together with initiatives at various levels these have contributed to expanding and strengthening the current network of ecologically representative and well-connected protected area networks^{vii} and other effective area-based conservation measures, the protection of watersheds and incentives and sanctions to reduce pollution.*
 - *In urban areas: promotion of nature-based solutions; increasing access to urban services and a healthy urban environment for low-income communities; improving access to green spaces; sustainable production and consumption and ecological connectivity within urban spaces, particularly with native species*

8. The Welsh Government and the Welsh Assembly also recognized this and created two pieces of groundbreaking legislation, the Environment Act and the Well-being of Future Generations Acts. These Acts are the considered resolution of the Welsh Parliament and should not be interpreted as mere window dressing. They are a legislative recognition that a changed approach is necessary and the way that things have previously been done was not working. For example, Government should not bring forward climate and ecologically destructive schemes i.e. M4 Relief Road.
9. Mark Drakeford, in his leadership manifesto, also recognised this and stated that *“The principles of environmental growth offer a route to **reconciling some of the historical tensions between the economy and the environment, especially in rural Wales**. It means increasing the quality and productivity of our environment by investing in those activities which **provide new foundations from which harmful outcomes can be avoided** and the economy can grow.”*
10. His proposals include;
 - *Develop an **Environmental Growth Plan for Wales, halting and reversing the damage already caused** to our natural environment.*
 - *Promote **green industries which enhance, rather than damage, the environment**.*
11. Therefore, the Wildlife Trusts in Wales are pleased to see that the NDF states (under ‘Challenges & Opportunities’)

“We face a number of challenges and opportunities and these have shaped our first NDF. Climate change and the decline in biodiversity are global challenges and the biggest issues faced by our nation. Addressing these is our greatest responsibility when considering the legacy we will leave for future generations ...”
12. **This is the most powerful statement within the NDF and possibly within any Government document** as the climate and ecological emergencies are *the* existential threats of our time. **Therefore, this statement should be the green thread woven into every outcome, policy and supporting text in the NDF.**
13. We welcome the intent behind Outcome 10, Policy 8 and Policy 9. **It is these obligations, amongst others, that every other policy and outcome within the NDP should be judged against. The NDF must be part of that ‘transformative change’ required to restore biodiversity and address climate change and therefore drive forward the well-being of future generations in Wales.**
14. The NDF is the top tier development plan in Wales (Paragraph 5 page 6). Therefore, the NDF is a development plan in the town and country planning sense of a plan and should have significant policies on the environment^{viii}.
15. Therefore, the Environment Act, should be given more prominence in the evidence base, outcomes and policies of the NDF and it should include policies for
 - spatially defined policies for natures recovery
 - addressing climate change through nature-based solutions and energy conservation measures (not just renewables) and
 - not allowing/facilitating ecologically destructive climate busting developments i.e. road schemes that impacts designated sites and priority habitats (such as ancient woodlands) or areas with priority species
16. Specifically, the sections of the Environment Act that require more prominence include

- **Section 3 - Sustainable management of natural resources** which includes Section 4 (c) not taking action that hinders achievement of that objective. This could be defined as refusing any development that harms biodiversity or misuses natural resources.
- **Section 4 - Principles of sustainable management of natural resources**
- **Section 6 - Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty** (1) A public authority must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.
- **Section 7 - Biodiversity lists and duty to take steps to maintain and enhance biodiversity**
- **Section 11 - Area statements**
- **Section - 29 The 2050 emissions target** (1) The Welsh Ministers must ensure that the net Welsh emissions account for the year 2050 is at least 80% lower than the baseline – although this has been superseded the net zero requirement.
- **Section - 31 Carbon budgets**

17. The latter is particularly important given that **Policy 32 (Cardiff Airport)** states “*The Welsh Government supports the growth and development of Cardiff Airport*”.

18. **Policy 32 is a complete contradiction to the climate and ecological outcomes and policies within the draft NDF and other climate change government policies.** There is no recognition of this policies contribution to climate change in terms of the airport (flights) and its ancillary developments etc. There is no mention of how these effects might be mitigated, offset or what is required in carbon budgets to get to net zero carbon target^{ix}. **This needs to be urgently addressed.**

Out-Of-Date Data

19. Large parts of the NDF (especially housing and transport) are based on an out of date and significantly overstated population projections. The NDF housing calculations background paper states that the calculations are based on 2014 figures. Paragraph 1 page 12 of the NDF states: “**...population (of Wales) is projected to rise by 4% between 2018 and 2038**”.

20. However, the most recent ONS projections^x (released on 21ST October 2019) states

- a population rise of only 0.6% by 2028 in Wales
- a projected population decline of 0.9% between mid 2018 and mid 2043
- the UK population growth rate is slower than in the 2016-based projections; the projected population is 0.4 million less in mid-2028 and 0.9 million less in mid-2043.
- net migration falls over the next 10 years
- national population projections do not attempt to predict the impact of political circumstances such as Brexit.

21. As such, there may be considerably less housing and other infrastructure required than previously thought. This is very significant because Welsh Government housing calculations, as set out in the draft NDF, are used in Strategic Development Plans (SDP) and Local Development Plans (LDP) for their housing figures.

22. It also has impacts upon other infrastructure schemes such highway schemes which also have significant environmental impacts i.e.

- **Deeside Relief Road**
- **Cardiff Airport Link Road**

23. Therefore, we recommend that the NDF utilize the most up-to-date information and adjust its figures (i.e. required housing calculations) accordingly.

Balance

24. The Future Generation Commissioner commented on the use and interpretation of the word 'balance' by Welsh Government^{xi}. Ms Howe, stated that **historically it has not been uncommon for perceived economic benefits to be given precedence over environmental assets**. This in part is one of the reasons why NRW State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) states that no ecosystem in Wales is resilient. **This is one of the reasons why legislation was needed to redress this imbalance and why Mark Drakeford addressed it in his manifesto (see above).**
25. *As the NDF has stated "We face a number of challenges and opportunities and these have shaped our first NDF. **Climate change and the decline in biodiversity are global challenges and the biggest issues faced by our nation. Addressing these is our greatest responsibility when considering the legacy we will leave for future generations ...**"*
26. Given these crises, we recommend that the NDF is aligned with the FG Commissioner's interpretation of the WFG Act. The NDF should highlight that applications must maximize all goals and pillars of sustainable development and **crucially not harm critical elements of well-being i.e. biodiversity. If so, NDF should recommend that applications should be refused.**
27. We recommend that a version of the 'Sandford Principle'^{xii} is created, for example, *"If it appears that there is a conflict between purposes, the Welsh Government shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity and addressing climate change".*

Inappropriate Development

28. **The NDF cannot, and must not, allow climate busting or ecologically destructive applications.**
29. As previously highlighted, under 'Challenges & Opportunities' the NDF states *"We face a number of challenges and opportunities and these have shaped our first NDF. Climate change and the decline in biodiversity are global challenges and the biggest issues faced by our nation.*
30. Therefore, it is essential that the scale of the challenge is not made even more significant by policy decisions that have the potential to harm biodiversity, increase emissions and lock us into carbon intensive activities. Such schemes would be emblematic of a failure to acknowledge the challenges enshrined in the Paris Agreement and the Environment Act.
31. Mark Drakeford manifesto states, in 'Transport & Travel', that
"clear warnings about the dangers of climate change, the menace of polluted air and the growing problems of obesity all point to the need to give people realistic alternatives to car travel.
For essential road journeys by car we need to invest in road maintenance and make full use of technology to keep traffic moving...
We must be ready to embrace those new technologies and infrastructure changes where they can help us to advance our environmental and social justice aims."
32. Under principles, this manifesto stated
- **Better integrated transport systems** can help tackle inequality by improving access to work, leisure, community facilities and public services.

- Wales' public transport infrastructure should be a source of pride and reflect the value we place as a nation on achieving social justice and the protection of the environment.
 - The **public sector should take a leadership role in helping people to make more journeys by walking, cycling and public transport.**
 - National and local government investments made in transport, including the subsidy provided to transport operators, must be made in a way that makes the best improvement possible to the wellbeing of the people of Wales.
33. This is because road transport is the one of the largest sectoral emitters of greenhouse gases. The ONS states^{xiii} that
- In 2017, GHG emissions from road transport made up around a fifth of the UK's total GHG emissions
 - reducing emissions from road transport remains a significant challenge as the UK looks to reach net zero emissions by 2050;
34. However, given the above and the warnings from the IPCC and IPBES scientists, it is troubling that we see climate busting and ecologically destructive proposals such as the
- **Deeside Relief Road** – a proposed new stretch of the A55 which will significantly damage an ancient woodland and be built through 138 acres of organic farmland.
 - **Cardiff Airport Link Road** which will destroy six ancient woodlands^{xiv}.
35. **Also, Policy 32 (Cardiff Airport) is very troubling also.** Policy 32 states *"The Welsh Government supports the growth and development of Cardiff Airport"*. This is a complete contradiction with the climate and ecological policies within the draft NDF and other government policies and legislation. There is no recognition of the contribution to climate change in terms of the airport (flights) and its ancillary developments etc. There is no mention of how these effects might be mitigated or carbon budgets required to get to net zero carbon target^{xv}.
36. Policy 32 also contradicts the need for the Cardiff airport Link Road, re: *"modal shift from the private car"*.
37. **We would recommend that the NDF contain a transport hierarchy and set out a presumption against new highway construction and other climate busting developments.**

Mitigation

38. Many plans put forward to mitigate the ecological impacts of a development are not based on science or backed up by long term monitoring studies of their effectiveness. This leads to a continuing loss of biodiversity.
39. Any mitigation proposed from any development needs to be robust and based on scientific evidence of it. Given the ecological crisis, the Welsh Government, Local Planning Authorities competent authorities must only rely upon proposed mitigation measures to grant consent if they are confident that those measures will succeed. Confidence should require 'no reasonable scientific doubt' regarding the effectiveness of the mitigation measures.
40. For example, Professor Sir John Lawton, stated that the mitigation measures for the M4 Relief Road which would have dissected 10kms of the Gwent Levels SSSIs were unlikely to be effective as they were unproven viability, and in some cases even appear impossible; they will not, significantly reduce the detrimental impacts on wildlife that will inevitably follow.

Retrofitting Developments of National Significance with priority areas

41. The draft NDF does not make clear what the Welsh Government intends with regards to Developments of National Significance which are currently lodged with the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) *vis-a-vis* the NDF.
42. It is assumed that considerable weight will be attached to the draft NDF in such circumstances, as it has reached an advanced state of formulation, but this is not set out. It is furthermore assumed that such developments would very likely to be refused on prematurity grounds, but this is also not explained in the document.

Coast

43. The draft NDF has no specific policies for the coast. Given the timeline and implications for climate change, and its impacts upon coastal areas, this seems an omission. There should be a policy for the coastal zone (such as coastal realignment, compensation for coastal squeeze) which integrates with marine planning.

Question 1 - NDF Outcomes

44. As highlighted above, the statement within 'Challenges & Opportunities'^{xvi} regarding the climate and ecological crisis, **is the most powerful statement within the NDF**. It should be the green thread woven into every outcome, policy and supporting text throughout the NDF. However, this is not the case.
45. We are sure that the intention is that the Outcomes (and Policies) are to be read as a whole but there is a danger that they will be siloed, and cherry picked. Therefore, we would like to see the green thread woven through each Outcomes and Policies given that ***Climate change and the decline in biodiversity are global challenges and the biggest issues faced by our nation. Addressing these is our greatest responsibility when considering the legacy we will leave for future generations ...***".
46. There is overwhelming evidence that nature, nature-based solutions can help us deliver against all the Well-being Goals. Specifically, Wildlife Trusts Wales (2016) literature review, *Green Infrastructure: A Catalyst For the Well-being of Future Generations In Wales*^{xvii} and others^{xviii} highlight this.
47. **It is vital that we take the opportunity to create and maintain healthy and sustainable urban environments.** Biodiverse green spaces such as domestic gardens, parks and woodlands provide a multitude of benefits to human urban populations, and a vital habitat for wildlife. By improving physical fitness and reducing depression, the presence of green spaces can enhance the health and wellbeing of people living and working in cities. Green spaces also indirectly impact our health by improving air quality and limiting the impact of heatwaves by reducing urban temperatures. In addition, urban vegetation stores carbon, helping to mitigate climate change, and reduces the likelihood of flooding by storing excess rain water. They also attract inward investment, increase productivity and much much more.
48. See Cities Alive by Arup^{xix} and Wildlife Trusts Wales Green Infrastructure Report^{xx}.
49. Therefore, we offer the following comments on the outcomes;
 - **Outcome 1** - The references to accessible green and open spaces are important, but this reference should be biodiverse accessible green and open spaces space.

Urban public greenspaces form the arena of many people's daily contact with nature and such contact has measurable physical and psychological benefits. These psychological benefits increase with the species richness of urban greenspaces. Moreover, greenspace users can more or less accurately perceive species richness depending on the taxonomic group in question. Therefore, the successful management of urban greenspaces should emphasize biological complexity to enhance human well-being in addition to biodiversity conservation^{xxi}.

To deliver multiple benefits, green infrastructure must deliver against the **Welsh Governments Pollinator Action Plan** (rather than just be planning 'green concrete'^{xxii} such as hybrid tea plants and monocultures of cut grass).

- **Outcome 2** – states that there will be support for the agricultural sector. This should include support for biodiversity.
- **Outcome 3** – addressing environmental inequality can help to address socio-economic inequality. The natural environment also helps define regional character.
- **Outcome 5** - We are pleased to see green infrastructures inclusion in this outcome. We would like to see this outcome highlight the need for, and how development can contribute to, **Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards**^{xxiii xxiv} and a **target for 20% minimum tree cover** in towns and cities. We need to **fit and retrofitting city, towns and villages with native vegetation** for our health and well-being, attract inward investment, promote biodiversity, reduce flooding, improve air quality etc. See Cities Alive by Arup^{xxv}.
- **Outcome 6** – This should highlight the evidence that biodiverse green infrastructure can make a significant contribution to the economic and social opportunities. This includes green roofs and green walls. A review by Economics for the Environment Consultancy Ltd, entitled 'Green Infrastructure's contribution to economic growth: a review' which shows how green infrastructure can increase economic growth at a local and national level. The report reviews current national and international studies, examining the link between green infrastructure and economic growth.
- **Outcome 7** – needs to highlight the sustainable transport hierarchy to reduce the need to travel, prevent car-dependent developments in unsustainable locations, and support the delivery of schemes located, designed and supported by infrastructure which prioritises access and movement by active and sustainable transport. **This should include transport developments that will not impact upon other parts of well-being such as important biodiversity assets including ancient woodlands.**
- **Outcome 10** – We would like direct reference to protection, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats and species as per section 6 and section 7 of the Environment Act. Infrastructure must significantly contribute to nature's recovery with each development required to secure biodiversity benefits which are factored in at the start rather than bolted on as an afterthought.
- **Outcome 11** – this outcome must include protection, restoration, creation or enhancement of natural carbon stores such as peatlands, wetlands, woodlands, green roofs, new parks etc.

Question 2 - Spatial Strategy (policies 1 - 4)

50. As highlighted above, the statement within 'Challenges & Opportunities'^{xxvi} regarding the climate and ecological crisis, **is the most powerful statement within the NDF**. It should be the green thread woven into every outcome, policy and supporting text throughout the NDF.
51. We are sure that the intention is that the Policies are to be read as a whole but there is a danger that they will be siloed and cherry picked. Therefore, we would like to see the ecological green thread woven through each Policy given that ***Climate change and the decline in biodiversity are global challenges and the biggest issues faced by our nation. Addressing these is our greatest responsibility when considering the legacy we will leave for future generations ...***".
52. We have already evidenced that by creating biodiverse green infrastructure including changing current 'green concrete' into more wildlife friendly green infrastructure you can deliver against all 7 well-being goals.
53. Therefore, we welcome the incorporation of 'embed green infrastructure' in the text Policy 1 (but it is missing from Policies 2-4) but **wonder what the level of ambition is to achieve this**.
54. We need to fit and retrofitting city, towns and villages with native vegetation for our health and well-being, to attract inward investment, promote biodiversity, reduce flooding, improve air quality etc.
55. For nature to recover and combat climate change (via nature based solutions to mitigation and adaptation), we need the inclusion of Nature Recovery Network maps and plans, to identify where good wildlife habitat is already, where it should be and how it will be protected, restored, created and joined together to achieve recovery. The maps would then be used for development decisions and to target investment in ecological restoration. We must work together to map, plan and create a Nature Recovery Network.
56. Therefore, we recommend
- The protection of the current high-quality green infrastructure including designated sites, Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)/Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and priority habitats and areas with priority species populations including ancient woodlands
 - looking at opportunities to make these important areas bigger, better and create more of them.
 - looking at opportunities to reduce isolation and fragmentation of habitats and species populations
 - turning existing wildlife poor greenspaces (green concrete) into biodiverse green infrastructure
 - creating new areas of biodiverse green infrastructure including green roofs and green walls
 - setting out zones for managed realignment of the coast, flood plain restoration, creation of new habitats
 - **using NRW's connectivity mapping**
 - creating accessible Natural Greenspace Standards^{xxvii xxviii}
 - **including a target for 20% minimum tree cover in towns and cities**. We know that NRW's i-tree survey of three Welsh catchments (Wrexham, Swansea and Bridgend) calculated that the trees in those areas delivered £3.9m worth of benefits each year with the ecosystem service of Wrexham's trees are valued at £1.2m per year.
 - stating that **every new building especially requiring new commercial buildings to have green roofs and solar panels**

57. This investment in fitting and retrofitting out towns and cities with biodiverse green infrastructure **must be a priority for Public Investment, Public Buildings and Publicly Owned Land** (Policy 3) and also be required from all developers and developments.

What is our ambition?

58. What is our ambition – wildflowers or green concrete? Livable towns and cities or concrete jungles? Riparian corridors or degraded systems? Permeable infrastructure or barriers to movement?





Question 3 - Affordable Housing (policy 5)

59. The evidence strongly suggests that high quality green spaces can help reduce health and social inequalities. However, good quality greenspace can be unevenly distributed in urban areas, often benefiting people living in affluent parts of a town or city. It has been shown that the most deprived communities are significantly less likely to live in the greenest areas.
60. Poverty is not simply the result of low income, but also reflects a deprivation of basic human requirements for wellbeing such as access to high quality greenspace.
61. A biodiversity green infrastructure network that brings wildlife into every neighbourhood would provide fairer access to nature for people.
62. Access to green space improves our mental wellbeing^{xxxix}, reducing the need to treat for anxiety and mental health conditions^{xxx}. Depressive disorders are now the foremost cause of disability in middle-and high-income countries^{xxxi} and can be precursors for chronic physical health problems.
63. Spending time in green spaces has been shown to produce levels and patterns of chemicals in the brain associated with low stress^{xxxii} and positive impacts on blood pressure^{xxxiii}. Positive links have also been demonstrated between how well people perform at attention-demanding tasks and time spent, either beforehand or during, in green space^{xxxivxxxv}.
64. Across Europe, approximately 1 in every 15 deaths is associated with a lack of physical activity^{xxxvi}. In the UK, only one third of the population achieves the recommended level of exercise^{xxxvii} and the impact of this on our health is estimated to have a direct economic cost of £1 billion per year^{xxxviii}.
65. Green areas encourage physical activity by providing a pleasant environment in which to exercise^{xxxix}; linear woodland trails encourage walking and cycling, whilst large sport and community parks encourage more formal physical activity^{xl}.
66. Where green space is available, the socioeconomic position of the local population does not affect how frequently it is used^{xli}, implying that where accessible green space is provided it will be used and may help to reduce socioeconomic health inequalities^{xliixliii}. Urban green spaces provide pleasant areas to relax and socialise, promoting greater levels of social activity and stronger neighbourhood relationships^{xliiv}. This can be particularly important in maintaining a high quality of life for elderly people^{xliv}.
67. Time spent in nature has a hugely positive impact on key social indicators.
68. Therefore, the delivering high quality green infrastructure alongside affordable homes is vital. As such, we would want high quality green infrastructure to be incorporated into this policy.

Case study - Parc Peulwys was an estate in Conwy where people didn't want to live. It had high levels of anti-social behaviour and was the first place in mainland Britain where plastic bullets were fired. However, working with the Community the Council delivered major environmental improvements through large scale planting based. This included planting:

- over 10,000 spring flowering bulbs,
- 5,500 shrubs,
- 1,600 native trees
- 60 semi mature trees and
- 2 hedges

The idea was to create a park like atmosphere within a social housing environment, adopted and owned by the community. Much of the vegetation was planted by the local community and school children. Long term sustainability was ensured by developing a tenant horticulture group resulting in two active environmental community groups to maintain the high value green space. In addition, of the four people taken on from the estate by contractors, three were retained and one went on to start their own landscaping business. The estate won a Green Flag Award in 2015 and was the first housing estate in Wales to do so, putting it on a par with the Royal Parks in London and Bute Park in Cardiff.

Question 6 - Nature Conservation Policies

69. Outcome 10, and Policy 8 must be more ambitious in order to reverse biodiversity decline and combat climate change.

Ecological network

70. **Natura 2000, SSSIs and LWS/SINC together form a ecological network** of the best examples of species, habitats and rock and landform features throughout Wales, and **support a wider network across Great Britain and the European Union.**
71. The network of designated sites are a major store of carbon rich habitats and play an important role in responding to the challenges we face from climate change, both through mitigation and adaptation. It also delivers other socio-economic benefits such as maintaining water flow and quality, conserving natural pollinators, preserving landscape and amenity values, and supporting tourism and recreation.
72. Development over sensitive ecological habitats can lead to **an extinction vortex triple jeopardy** (events that ultimately lead small populations to become increasingly more vulnerable as they spiral toward extinction); development reduces the total amount of habitat, it squeezing remaining wildlife into smaller and more isolated patches and indirect impacts such as pollution can cause significant impacts on the remaining populations.
73. Policy 8 to “ensure the enhancement of biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystem” **or the supporting text does not explicitly state that we must protect biodiversity.** The emphasis on ecological networks is very important, but the policy needs to highlight **protecting and restoring priority habitats and species populations, making them bigger, better, creating more of them and connecting them to each other and us^{xlvi}.**
74. **It should include**
- Section 7 habitats and species from the Environment Act
 - securing the protection and positive management of local, national and international designated and non-designated sites.
75. The draft NDF also uses weak language in places such as Policy 8 stating “*areas **which could be safeguarded** as ecological networks for their potential importance for adaptation... securing the enhancement of biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems **should** be demonstrated*”.

Local Wildlife Sites / Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation

76. LWS/SINCs are an important part of the ecological network. They are identified and selected locally using robust, scientifically-determined criteria^{xlvii} and detailed ecological surveys. As a result, these special and often secret spaces have a huge part to play in the natural green fabric of our towns and countryside. They make up a web of stepping stones and corridors for wildlife, forming key components of ecological networks.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

77. SSSIs offer just a sample of our most important habitats and species and, in some counties; LWS are where most of our special wildlife can be found. **SSSIs are only a representative series of the best examples of each significant natural habitat** (known as the exemplary site principle^{xlviii}), it was only rarer habitats that all examples were included (known as the critical standard principle)^{xlix}. To provide a good representation of the range and diversity of 'best example' sites across the UK, SSSI selection was carried out on an in 'Areas of Search' (regional geographical areas). For example, if 10 unimproved wildflower meadows were within an Areas of Search, only two might have been designated as a SSSI via the exemplary site principle. The areas not selected, if fortunate, may have been designated as Local Wildlife Sites^{lii}. Therefore, LWS/SINC can be of equal or greater value for wildlife than some SSSIs.
78. A study^{lii} to estimate the current benefits SSSIs in Wales placed their value at £128m million per annum. This benefit would increase to £241 million per year if SSSIs were all restored to favourable condition. However, **the last review of favourable condition of SSSI in 2006 highlighted that 68% of SSSIs were in unfavourable condition and 71% of assessed habitat features are judged to be in unfavourable condition^{liii}.**
79. One of the reasons why SSSIs and other protected sites are in unfavourable condition is because the current planning system still allows development that harms them. Development eats away at these sites creating death by a thousand cuts. For example, **there has been 331ha lost within the Gwent Levels SSSIs, this figure includes both land already developed as well as allocations within the relevant Local Development Plans yet to be developed^{liv}.**

Recommendations

80. We recommend that Policy 8 must
- a) require nature network mapping to ensure important ecological areas are not unduly compromised by future development, but are actively protected, enhance or restored.
 - b) strengthen the language to 'must' rather than 'should'
 - c) **explicitly state that Natura 2000, SSSIs, Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)/Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), priority habitats, areas with priority species populations are sacrosanct and thus exempt from development including within Priority Areas for renewables.**

You cannot halt the loss of biodiversity by allowing development on the most biodiverse sites. Making important ecological areas sacrosanct would align the draft NDP with the Environment Act, Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) and policies such as the Natural Resources Policy (NRP)^{lv}. It would also make things simpler and less time consuming and expensive for Welsh Government, developers, members of the public and statutory and non-statutory stakeholders such as NRW and the Wildlife Trusts. It would also reduce the chance of 'call-in' and/or judicial review.
 - d) Given the potential for conflicts between wind power and species recovery (i.e. white-tailed eagle re-introductions) there should be more consideration of impacts (especially cumulative impacts) on species is undertaken at the NDF level.
 - e) state that plans and projects 'must' undertake the mitigation measures stated within the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the NDF. This is a legal requirement to avoid adverse

effects on Natura 2000 sites. The NDF should not rely on the current weak wording of the NDF to be a 'a strong guide' to lower-tier plans and projects.

- f) Include the following *If, during the course of a planning application or development plan formulation, it transpires that a development site or proposed allocation is worthy of LWS, SSSI or Natura 2000 designation, it will, as a matter of Welsh Government policy, be treated as if it were designated*".
- g) State that the protection afforded to designated sites qualifying interests should follow those interests whether or not they are within the designation itself. This is the purpose of the protection i.e. to sustain the nature conservation interest for which the area has been designated.
- h) Require a significant contribution by all developments to reversing the decline of biodiversity through requiring net biodiversity benefit – for example, requiring each Priority Area to have a Statement of Environmental Masterplanning (SEMPs)^{lvi} which will identify nationally significant opportunities local to contribute to the ecological network.
- i) Look to create a national target of having at least 20% tree cover in towns and cities and a minimum of 25% tree cover in new builds.
- j) Include targets, support and advice for green infrastructure such as green roofs especially on commercial buildings including a requirement for every new commercial building to have a green roof.
- k) Include a way of translating policy 8 into credible and timely implementation including a commitment to identify areas of national significance for biodiversity enhancement. There is a role for the national spatial plan to identify national spatial priorities for enhancement.

Question 7 - Renewable Energy and District Heat Networks

81. We believe that the NDF does not focus enough on the energy conservation measures. This needs to give greater attention within the NDF.

82. We also have major concerns in relation to the treatment of SSSIs within the energy policies. RSPB have shown that there are 179 SSSIs within the Priority Areas. It is likely that there is a significant amount of LWS/SINCs and non-designated ancient woodlands and other priority habitats and important species populations also.

83. As such, our concerns include

- a) The draft NDF doesn't highlight nationally or locally significant biodiversity assets i.e. SSSIs, ancient woodlands, National Nature Reserves (NNR) and LWS/SINC etc.
- b) The traffic light diagram states that national wildlife designations such as SSSIs are not exempt from development. Therefore, this policy sets the level of protection of national (Welsh) landscape designations (National Parks and AONBs) higher than that of the national nature conservation designations. This is perverse. It is worth noting that SSSIs and National Parks are both UK-national designations. However, unlike SSSIs, AONBs are not a UK-national designations as they are not present in Scotland.

- c) Not making important ecological assessments an absolute constraint is contradictory to National Outcome 10 and Policy 8 of the NDF as well as Welsh Government's legal and policy obligations.
- d) The draft NDF, in combination with PPW 10 Renewable Energy Section, constitutes a considerable but understated downgrading of the protection afforded to SSSIs.
- e) The methodology used to produce the Priority Areas lacks transparency in terms of decisions made i.e. how the section 6 of the Environment Act was considered. The approach was obviously strongly landscape led and ecosystem resilience was not considered as a primary criterion. No environmental NGOs were involved in discussions regarding the delineation of the Priority Areas. This is contrary to the five ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, i.e. collaboration and involvement. This may also be contrary to the Aarhus Convention which establishes a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment. The Parties to the Convention are required to make the necessary provisions so that public authorities (at national, regional or local level) will contribute to these rights to become effective

84. We cannot allow one response to a crisis, such as climate change, to be offset at the expense of another such as biodiversity.

85. Therefore, we recommend that SSSIs and LWS/SINC sites are given full protection in Policies 8 and 10, 11, 12 and 13. We recommend that these policies highlight that there are areas within the Priority Areas that cannot be developed because of important ecological resources. It would also make things simpler and less time consuming and expensive for Welsh Government, developers, members of the public and statutory and non-statutory stakeholders such as NRW and the Wildlife Trusts. It would also reduce the chance of 'call-in' and/or judicial review.

86. Also, habitat management plans were established (with steering groups) for most of the large renewable schemes. This, along with major ringfenced funding for implementation and ongoing management, should be explicit for all major developments, in order to get net benefit and reverse the loss of biodiversity and fulfil the requirements of Policy 8.

87. We recommend that each Priority Area should have an ecological masterplan in order to aggregate environmental benefits. A good example is the Clocaenog Statement of Environmental Masterplanning Principles (SEMP)^{lvii}. The SEMP was to be used by the Local Planning Authority and the developer to guide the spatial location of the wildlife element of Community Benefit beyond the development boundary. The aim of the SEMP was to

- To identify broad Ecological Character Zones in relation to windfarm development within the SSA, and to draw up simple, but robust schedules of land management in order to maintain, improve or convert habitats within Zones, to be adhered to by developers applying for consent for windfarm development within the SSA.
- To provide certainty to the developer, the local planning authority (LPA) and to the community, as to what the LPA expects from the developer in terms of land management in respect of planning applications within the Clocaenog Windfarm Zone (WFZ).
- To provide for an agreed strategic land management pattern, in order to avoid a pattern of inappropriate and conflicting land management proposals in respect of onshore wind.
- To assist in meeting the requirement set out in the TAN, and in the emerging Denbighshire and Conwy LDP's, to address land management, community benefit and enhancement.

- To provide a strategic analysis and rationale for the spatial location of environmental community benefit.

Bad Planning Practice

88. The traffic light system, and therefore Policy 11, is further deficient because it constitutes bad planning practice. In establishing Priority Areas for development type within which there is a presumption *in favour* of development, (i.e. wind and solar energy) but it does not to state there is a presumption *against* such developments outside these zones except in exceptional circumstances.

Question 8, 9, 10 and 11

89. We support the delineation of the greenbelts in Wales, for example, the Southeast Wales greenbelt in the draft NDF. We recommend that the boundaries of the greenbelt in SE Wales are amended to take in the Gwent Levels SSSIs as it fully meets the criteria for designation.
90. We consider that such a Boundary amendment would fulfil the criteria set out in Planning Policy Wales 10 (page 39 and 40);
- The main aim of Green Belts is to **prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open**; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their **openness and their permanence**.
 - Due to their strategic nature Green Belts will have significance beyond a single local authority
 - The purpose of Green Belts is to:
 - prevent the coalescence of large towns and cities with other settlements;
 - manage urban form through controlled expansion of urban areas;
 - assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
 - protect the setting of an urban area; and
 - assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Question 13 Habitats Regulations Assessment

91. We recommend that the NDP state that plans and projects 'must' undertake the mitigation measures stated within the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the NDF. This a legal requirement to avoid adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites. The NDF should not rely on the current weak wording of the NDF to be a 'a strong guide' to lower-tier plans and projects because this is deficient.
92. It would be unprecedented in Wales for LDP or SDP formulator is to be compelled to carry out HRA tests (i.e. alternatives test), as it would not be possible for a local planning authority to claim that there are no alternative solutions to that contained within a draft LDP/SDP i.e. there is always alternative locations for a housing development.

Ends.

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- ⁱ State of Nature (2016) Available at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ NRW State of Natural Resources
- ⁱⁱⁱ State of Nature (2016) Available at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf>
- ^{iv} Akin to the 'empty forest syndrome' reported by Redford's 'The Empty Forest' which states that often trees remain in a forest that human activities have emptied of many of its large animals. The absence of these animals has profound implications, one of which is that a forest can be destroyed by humans from within as well as from without.
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<https://web.archive.org/web/20131111203443/http://www.biology.ufl.edu/courses/pcb5356/2011fall/kitajima/Redford1992Biosci.pdf>
- ^v <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>
- ^{vi} Such as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) or Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)
- ^{vii} Such as Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- ^{viii} It is not a defense to state "Planning Policy Wales sets out a range of policies to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems, including the stepwise approach" (paragraph 1, page 33) "The NDF does not repeat PPW nor cover all of the same policy areas" (paragraph 2, page 10). Because PPW is not set out in development plan policy form, PPW is policy, not a development plan or LDPs, and presumably SDPs, have policies on biodiversity, therefore in the pursuit of consistency the draft NDF should also do so.
- ^{ix} Welsh Government accepts the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) recommendation for a 95% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and it will go further with an ambition to reach net-zero, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths confirmed <https://gov.wales/wales-accepts-committee-climate-change-95-emissions-reduction-target>
- ^x National population projections: 2018-based - The potential future population size of the UK and its constituent countries. This is widely used in planning, for example, fiscal projections, health, education and pensions.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2018based>
- ^{xi} Ms Sophie Howes letter to the Public Inquiry <http://bailey.persona-pi.com/Public-Inquiries/M4-Newport/E%20-%20PI%20Documents/PID/ID109a.pdf>
- ^{xii} <https://nationalparks.uk/students/whatisanationalpark/aimsandpurposesofnationalparks/sandfordprinciple>
- ^{xiii} <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/roadtransportandairmissions/2019-09-16>
- ^{xiv} <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/new-road-linking-a48-m4-14872178>
- ^{xv} Welsh Government accepts the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) recommendation for a 95% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and it will go further with an ambition to reach net-zero, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths confirmed <https://gov.wales/wales-accepts-committee-climate-change-95-emissions-reduction-target>
- ^{xvi} "Climate change and the decline in biodiversity are global challenges and the biggest issues faced by our nation. Addressing these is our greatest responsibility when considering the legacy we will leave for future generations ..."
- ^{xvii} http://www.wtwales.org/sites/default/files/green_infrastructure.pdf
- ^{xviii} https://leaf.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/LEAF_benefits_of_urban_green_space_2015_upd.pdf
- ^{xix} <https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/cities-alive-rethinking-green-infrastructure>
- ^{xx} As evidenced in Wildlife Trusts Wales (2016) literature review, *Green Infrastructure: A Catalyst For the Well-being of Future Generations In Wales* http://www.wtwales.org/sites/default/files/green_infrastructure.pdf
- ^{xxi} Fuller, Richard A., et al. "Psychological benefits of greenspace increase with biodiversity." *Biology letters* 3.4 (2007): 390-394.
<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/abs/10.1098/rsbl.2007.0149>
- ^{xxii} **Green concrete** - many most popular ornamental bedding plants have been bred for big blooms, extra petals and colours at the expense of nectar and pollen supplies. They no longer contain enough nectar to feed insects and often drenched in pesticides. Other flowers now have nectar tubes that are too long for bees to reach inside. Intensive selection has made these flowers useless to insects; they have lost their organic function which evolved to attract bees. Some plants like lavender and catmint are buzzing with bees and other insects. But if you make a different choice of plant, there will be silence and no insects attracted to it at all for example, brightly-coloured pansies, petunias, tea roses, begonias have little or no nectar.
- ^{xxiii} <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/65021>
- ^{xxiv} Natural England - 'Nature Nearby' Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance
http://www.ukmaburbanforum.co.uk/documents/other/nature_nearby.pdf
- ^{xxv} <https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/cities-alive-rethinking-green-infrastructure>
- ^{xxvi} "Climate change and the decline in biodiversity are global challenges and the biggest issues faced by our nation. Addressing these is our greatest responsibility when considering the legacy we will leave for future generations ..."
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- xlvi See 'Prof Sir John Lawton Making Space for Nature' <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-space-for-nature-a-review-of-englands-wildlife-sites-published-today>
- xlvi Sites are assessed against the relevant set of Wildlife Site Criteria as contained within the South Wales Guidelines for Selection of Wildlife Sites <http://www.sewbrec.org.uk/content/attachments/SouthWalesWildlifeSitesCompleteDoc.pdf>
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- iii GHK Consulting Ltd and partners were commissioned by Defra to examine the **benefits of Sites** of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in England and Wales – see [here](#)
- liii Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in Wales Current state of knowledge Report for April 2005 – Mar 2006
- liv [Jessica Poole NRW Proof of Evidence to the M4 Public Inquiry](#)
- lv The NRP, page 10, states that “*To build resilience into our ecosystems we need to: Proactively develop resilient ecological networks to maintain and enhance the wider resilience of Wales’ ecosystems. The evidence shows that diversity is declining and that land and sea use change, including urbanisation, is leading to fragmentation and loss of habitats and species, and soil sealing. Building on the protected sites Wales has, our aim is to improve resilience and reverse the decline of biodiversity in Wales. Reversing this trend, by better managing existing areas and creating new ones will also provide important wider benefits for society.*”
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