

From: [Iain Aitken](#)
To: [NDE](#)
Subject: Draft National Development Framework - consultation response
Date: 15 November 2019 23:35:21
Attachments: [191115 M Tregear I Aitken Objection to draft NDF.docx](#)
Importance: High

Dear NDF Team

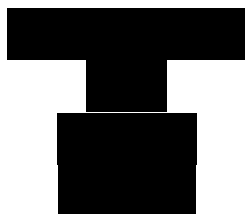
Please find attached response to public consultation on the National Development Framework.

Please acknowledge receipt.

Regards

Margaret and Iain Aitken

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NDF Team,
Planning Policy Branch,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

15th November 2019

Dear NDF Team

**OBJECTION TO WELSH GOVERNMENT'S DRAFT NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
FRAMEWORK**

Please accept this as my objection in the strongest possible terms to the National Development Framework – details as below. I have not used the standard form. I do not wish what I have to say to be used in a number-crunching box-ticking exercise and the questions are not adapted to an in depth examination of the flaws at the heart of this draft NDF.

The proposed centralisation and removal of democratic powers from local authorities and residents is unacceptable and incompatible with the Well-being of Future Generations Act: This NDF is characterised by an intention to remove powers ever further from local areas and increase the powers of Welsh Ministers to govern Wales as almost a personal fiefdom, with little accountability to residents. In particular:

1. The imposition of a middle layer of planning policy between Local Development Plans and the NDF, and the inclusion of Local Authority areas within wider regions where new planning tiers will be unlikely to be responsive to the opinions, desires and local knowledge of local people;
2. The designation of 1/5 of the land area of Wales as Priority Areas within which **all meaningful planning protections of people, biodiversity, environment and landscape will be removed** when applications for industrial scale renewable energy developments are considered;
3. The inclusion of specific (draconian) policy within the NDF, where surely a framework should be exactly that – parameters within which Local Planning Authorities may set their own policy, responsive to local conditions and local need.

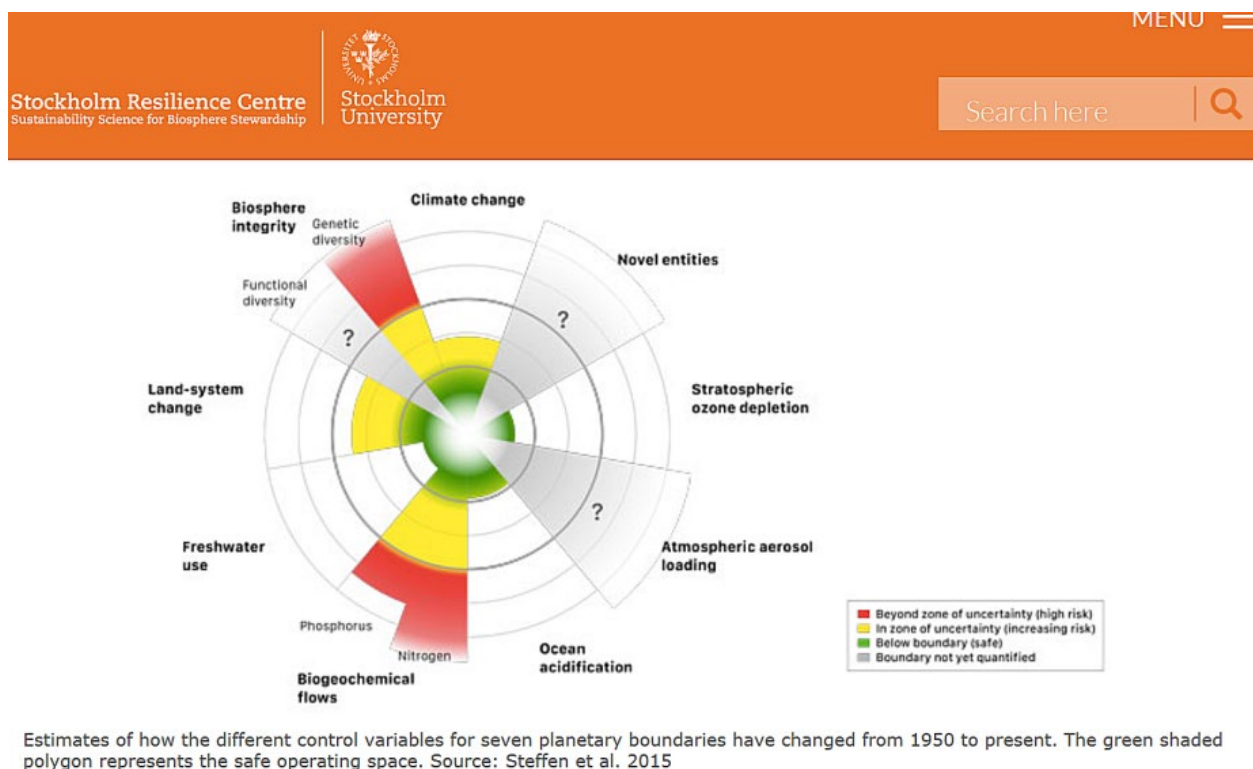
This, on the part of a devolved government is an extraordinary power grab, and is utterly at odds with the promises contained within the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Welsh Government's flagship piece of legislation.

The regions proposed by the NDF imply that Welsh Government has a view of the country as essentially revolving around its cities, each city requiring a rural 'hinterland' for provisioning purposes, and provisioning being the essential purpose of rural Wales. Rural areas and residents are given little focus in this NDF other than being viewed as, apparently, empty spaces available for the indulgence of the Welsh Government's obsession with onshore wind generation. This government appears to have no understanding of, or concern for, rural Wales and its residents. Is it because they do not, traditionally, support Welsh Labour?

What should a strategic framework address?

A national planning framework should set the parameters for the development of locally responsive, locally framed planning legislation. It should lead the way on strategic issues which require coordination across the nation, for example issues of transport, energy. BUT planning policy should be written at a more local level so that it can be responsive to local characteristics and needs.

What are the most urgent emergencies? The Central thrust of this NDF is explained as a response to climate emergency. Even though these plans were well under way long before the Welsh Government declared a climate emergency. The climate emergency is used to justify the designation of the Priority Areas and heavy-handed nature of Polies 10 and 11. Welsh Ministers must remember that there is an **ecological crisis** which urgently requires addressing. **See chart below which indicates the relative urgency of the exceedances of planetary boundaries, led by biodiversity loss and nitrification.** The NDF fails to address either. An opportunity lost.



<https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

WELSH GOVERNMENT WILL NOT SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE BY ADOPTING POLICIES WHICH WILL LEAD TO THE FURTHER DETERIORATION OF THE INTEGRITY AND RESILIENCE OF ECOSYSTEMS AND FURTHER CATASTROPHIC DECLINES IN BIODIVERSITY.

Welsh Government proposes 15 priority areas across 1/5 of rural Wales, within which there will be no planning protections in the face of industrial scale wind and solar applications, even though no effort has been made to determine what lies *within* these areas. Defined by exclusion, with reference to a very minimal set of environmental criteria, these search areas are, as far as large scale wind and solar development is concerned, excluded from any planning protections. How does this fit with the Government's stated intention to reverse biodiversity declines, or the commitment to a 'resilient Wales' in the Well-being, or the Government's duty to work for the well-being of the whole population?



Mid Wales landscape

Our Welsh Government takes the view that rural residents must accept landscape change. In fact, Policy 10 is explicit that Government has, on our behalf, already accepted this change. Though without mandate or consultation, or even themselves being amongst those who will suffer the change, lose tourism income, have their houses devalued, have their quality of life impaired.

Could Welsh Ministers pause for a moment and call to mind a rural landscape - perhaps, for example, something like the photograph above? When Welsh Government tells us that we, rural residents, must accept landscape change, meaning that we must be content to see this landscape - perhaps the very landscape pictured above - dissected by new access roads for turbines, cut into to create huge holes for the cement and metal foundations, trees removed for ease of access, lorries driven to and fro across the brook, pylons and transmission lines across the landscape, rural roads widened and straightened - because all of that and much, much more is the reality of the Welsh Government's wind energy dream - I ask them to remember that the ecosystems pictured above are what give us life and support our dwindling biodiversity, in what is now one of the most nature depleted countries on the earth. There, pictured, is our fresh water, multiple habitats supporting life, varied vegetation contributing to the health of that great forgotten ecosystem, our soil. Rural Wales is not just beautiful, but fulfils essential functions which sustain us all. When the Minister says we cannot preserve the aesthetics of the landscape, she must remember that a great deal more than the look of a landscape, and more than we can afford to lose if we are to have future on this planet, is sacrificed when remote rural landscapes are given over to industrial scale development.

Need I make the case for tourism, which provides income and employment to rural Wales? It's surely too obvious to need stating that if you lose the landscape, Welsh rural tourism will not survive. Our local pubs and B&Bs will lose vital income and close, rural high streets fail, young people leave the land of their birth in greater numbers than ever, and inward investment dry up.

Welsh Government claims to have excluded the 'best' landscapes, which appears to mean designated landscapes, from the Priority Areas. We refer Ministers to [**Appendix A**](#), which shows Priority Areas mapped against the regions of Wales recommended for designation on grounds of landscape quality by the Hobhouse Review in the 1940s. Wales is the only UK country to have failed to designate, in their entirety, the landscapes recognised for their beauty and integrity by the Hobhouse Review. Priority Areas 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 lie within or largely within areas recommended for the protection of designation.

In the determination of Priority Areas for wind and solar development, why have no suitable candidate sites not been found in unloved and unlovely landscapes such as industrial areas, on docks, alongside motorways and on other already developed sites? Why has the focus of the search been Wales's most treasured rural areas, areas which are providing the essential 'ecosystems services' on which we all ultimately depend?

Is the removal of planning protection from 1/5 of the land area of a country even legal? I found no evidence among the documents accompanying the draft NDF that this point has even been considered.

Has Welsh Government even discussed its renewable ambitions with the UK Government in order to establish whether the national grid can even absorb more intermittent renewable generation? If not, for heaven's sake why not?

Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience

We are all aware of the biodiversity crisis. We are all aware that the future of all life on earth **including our own** depends on our protection of our ecosystems and all the myriad lifeforms within them. This is not something we can ignore. Without healthy ecosystems there is no clean water, no air fit to breathe, no soil

to grow our food. Environmental protection should lie at the very heart of national policy. Wales has the potential to be green in a very real sense and to showcase exemplary protection of our beautiful, complex and not yet entirely compromised country.

Welsh Ministers are subject to their own legislation, including the Environment Act (Wales) from which:

EA (W) s6 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.*
- (2) In complying with subsection (1), a public authority must take account of the resilience of ecosystems, in particular the following aspects—*
- (a) diversity between and within ecosystems;*
 - (b) the connections between and within ecosystems;*
 - (c) the scale of ecosystems;*
 - (d) the condition of ecosystems (including their structure and functioning);*
 - (e) the adaptability of ecosystems.*

In complying with s6 Welsh Ministers have to have regard to UN 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (EA s6 4 (a) – from which couple of interesting extracts:

Conscious of the intrinsic value of biological diversity and of the ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values of biological diversity and its components.

Conscious also of the importance of biological diversity for evolution and for maintaining life sustaining systems of the biosphere,

Affirming that the conservation of biological diversity is a common concern of humankind,

..

Noting also that where there is a threat of significant reduction or loss of biological diversity, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to avoid or minimize such a threat.

Noting further that the fundamental requirement for the conservation of biological diversity is the in-situ conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings,

Policy 8 falls well short of offering a genuine answer to the biodiversity crisis. Policy 8 proposes minimally ‘safeguarded’ pockets of habitat and tack-ons to developments in the form of ‘green infrastructure’, to be identified by Welsh Government itself and its ‘key partners’. ‘Safeguarding’ only means pockets are ‘*not unduly compromised by future development*’. Meaning what? Who are Welsh Government’s ‘key partners’ – increasingly overburdened and compromised NRW? Is this another example of Welsh Ministers conferring obligations without power, and without resources, on the rump of our national environmental bodies, NRW?

The text of policy 8 does not address the issues raised in s6 (2) (a) to (e) above i.e. **ecosystem diversity, scale, connections, condition and adaptability.**

If the NDF is implemented as drafted the ecology and ecosystems of Wales will be negatively impacted by:

1. large scale industrial development potentially impacting natural systems, habitat connectivity and species across 1/5 of the land area of Wales, **inside** the Priority Areas, where planning decision makers will be obliged to have regard to Policy 10 and so to give reduced consideration to environmental issues in the planning balance;
2. large scale industrial development **outside** the Priority Areas to provide the required infrastructure for the RE development within Priority Areas, which will also be given a green light with reduced weight given to ecology;
3. the NDF's '*Strategic focus on urban growth*' (para 1 p33) which it is admitted '*requires an increased emphasis in order to ensure that the approach is sustainable*';
4. the development of Cardiff Airport (Policy 32).

Policy protections for the natural world within Local Development Plans will be swept away where the consideration of large RE development within Priority Areas is concerned.

The Welsh Ministers propose to counter this potentially devastating impact on Welsh habitats and species by the creation at some future date by persons unknown of some areas which are to be give protection-lite.

The Welsh Government's record of protection of internationally designated sites gives little cause for optimism:

1. Our river water quality is deteriorating and Welsh Government has repeatedly delayed the introduction of regulation to address this;
2. Welsh Government is failing to address the crisis of nutrification of the environment in the Welsh Marches in particular and across ecosystems of Wales in general, despite urgent pleas from environmental groups including Wales Environment Link, a collation of all major Welsh environmental NGOs;
3. Inclusion of designated sites, ancient woodlands, nature reserves, Wildlife Trust Living Landscapes and other sites important for nature conservation within Priority Areas within this NDF;
4. **Wales is now one of the most nature depleted countries in the world** (State of Nature 2019).

Welsh Ministers are bound by their own legislation and have committed themselves to the reversal of biodiversity declines.

This NDF will not deliver.

Regards

Margaret Tregear and Iain Aitken
Address as above

APPENDIX A: CORRELATION OF PROPOSED PRIORITY AREAS WITH HOBHOUSE IDENTIFIED LANDSCAPES RECOMMENDED FOR PROTECTIVE DESIGNATION (1940s)

