

ROOTED TOGETHER

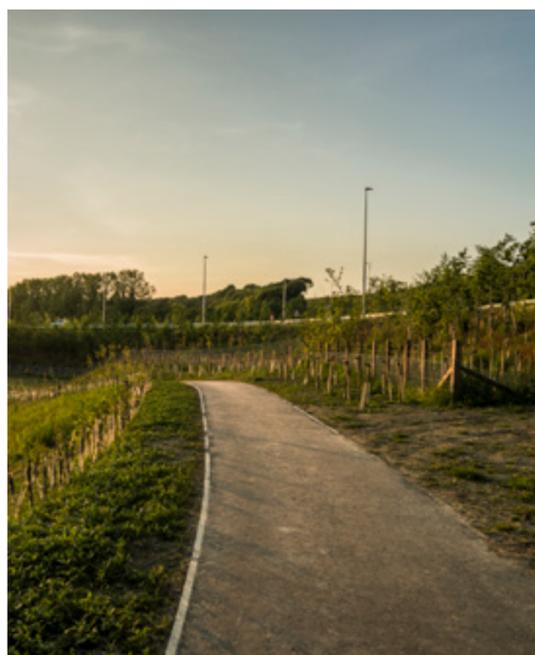


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WOODS AND TREES: WALES' SMARTEST INVESTMENT

A manifesto for a healthier, fairer and more resilient Wales

Kylie Jones Mattock
Director - Wales



Right now, times are hard for people in Wales. Many are juggling rising bills, pressures on the health service, job insecurity and a sense of wider political and economic uncertainty.

With so much demanding attention, it's understandable that trees and woods don't always feel like the most urgent concern. They're often overlooked - not because people don't value them, but because there is so much else on their minds.

But trees are not a side issue. They are one of the most practical and cost-effective tools to improve public health, protect communities, strengthen and safeguard the economy and prepare Wales for what comes next during an uncertain future.

That's exactly why this conversation matters.

This isn't about asking people to care more about nature than anything else. It's about recognising a simple truth: when Wales looks after its trees, Wales is better off - healthier, fairer and more resilient.

Trees are not a luxury. They are essential.

Trees and woods cool our streets during heatwaves, they clean the air our children breathe, slow flood waters before they hit homes and farms, protect soils that grow our food, and store carbon that we cannot afford to release if Wales is to meet its climate commitments. Polling consistently rates health and wellbeing, and the economy as the two top voter concerns -

trees have the power to deliver great returns in both these areas.

Put simply, trees are our Natural Health Service. An investment in them is an investment in our future health and wellbeing, and one of the most cost-effective ways to improve lives and prevent harm.

Yet access to these benefits is deeply unequal. Our most disadvantaged communities and those facing the poorest health outcomes are often those with the fewest trees. That isn't a coincidence. It's a policy choice - and one we can change.

We've been here before

During the pandemic, many of us rediscovered just how much nature matters. When almost everything else stopped, people turned to nearby woods, tree-lined streets and green spaces - for comfort, for calm, for solace.

Those moments reminded us of something basic; something many of us had taken for granted: nature isn't a nice to have. It's a necessity.

As the climate crisis accelerates and public services come under increasing strain, treating nature as optional is a false economy.

The choice in front of Wales

A smarter path is available. One that treats woods and trees as a national asset, not an afterthought.

To deliver a healthier, fairer and more resilient Wales, we are calling on the next Senedd to focus on four clear priorities which will ensure the full value and irreplaceable services of trees are protected and delivered to everyone.

- Make tree equity a national mission - so everyone benefits from healthier, greener neighbourhoods
- Secure a resilient future for farming, rural communities and Welsh culture by ensuring the essential services of trees are realised.
- Protect and restore our living heritage - investing in ancient woods and rainforests as national assets
- Grow Wales with trees, supporting green jobs - building skills, supply chains and long-term prosperity



OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT WELSH GOVERNMENT

1.

WE CALL UPON THE NEXT WELSH GOVERNMENT TO:

MAKE TREE EQUITY A NATIONAL MISSION

Where you live should not determine how healthy you are - yet in Wales, this can often be the case.

Trees are proven preventative healthcare. They reduce air pollution, cool neighbourhoods during heatwaves, support mental wellbeing and lower the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular disease, easing long-term pressure on the NHS. Despite this, the communities facing the greatest health inequalities are often those with the lowest tree cover.

THE ASK:

Adopt tree equity as a national cross-government programme, targeting investment where trees will deliver the greatest health, climate and social benefits.

THE EVIDENCE:

- The annual mental health benefits associated with visits to the UK's woodlands were estimated to be £185 million per year (at 2020 prices). In Wales this value is £13 million. The annual valuation of overall health benefits from recreation in woodlands was estimated at £1.149 billion in 2022, while in Wales this value is £99 million.¹



Illustration: Lauren Nicholson / Shrubsy Art - Woodland Trust Igniting Innovation Conservation Challenge

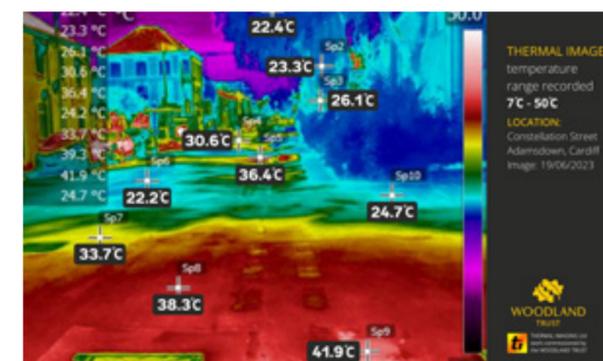
- 96% of GPs want stronger preventative action on climate related health risks. Over three-quarters believe more trees could reduce pressures on the NHS i.e. lowering asthma among children through targeted tree planting around schools.²
- An annual investment of under £5 million up to 2030 could deliver a minimum 20% urban tree cover across Wales, repaying itself several times over in health and wellbeing benefits.³
- According to a recent survey, 90% of people in Wales support the Woodland Trust to encourage more tree planting in urban areas and 82% of those living in deprived communities in the UK support tree planting.⁴
- A minimum 20% tree cover in urban areas**, and 30% minimum tree cover for all new developments.
- Adopt a standard for publicly accessible green space** based on the 3-30-300 principle, extending high-quality and accessible green spaces, especially for the most deprived communities in Wales.⁵
- Use the Tree Equity Score to close the green asset gap** in the most disadvantaged areas - targeting tree protection and new planting in areas with the lowest tree equity.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE:

- Eryri National Park Authority has adopted a 100-year strategy to expand, protect and restore the Park's wooded landscape.⁶
- Wrexham's Tree Strategy recognises trees as public assets that deliver health, climate and economic benefits.⁷

THE POLICY SOLUTIONS:

- Every council in Wales prepares a long-term Tree and Woodland Strategy** that values both existing and new tree assets.



Thermal heat map images, Adamsdown Cardiff.

2.

WE CALL UPON THE NEXT WELSH GOVERNMENT TO:

SECURE A RESILIENT FUTURE FOR WELSH FARMING AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

With over 90% of Wales managed for agriculture, farming practice impacts us all. Farming resilience is national resilience.

Integrating trees and nature-based solutions into farming systems improves productivity⁵, animal welfare and soil health, while reducing exposure to flooding, drought and rising input costs. This is not about taking land out of production – it’s about helping natural systems to work better, reducing the impacts of extreme weather patterns for all.

THE ASK:

Fully resource the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) so that working with nature and integrating trees becomes an accessible, practical and profitable default for Welsh farmers.

THE EVIDENCE:

- Woodland cover of approx. 30% will reduce peak stream-flow during storms by at least 5%. This translates to a reduction of more than a cubic meter every second in the flow rate, equivalent to 1000 litres per second, or 86.4 million litres a day. Equivalent to above 35 Olympic swimming pools.⁸

- Increasing natural solutions on farms can naturally reduce farm costs and management hours - showing average profitability increases of over 40%.⁹
- Shelterbelts and agroforestry significantly reduce peak flood flows during heavy rainfall events, protecting both farms and downstream communities.¹⁰

THE POLICY SOLUTIONS:

- **Ring-fence long-term funding for the SFS for the next Senedd term**, giving farmers confidence to enter the Universal tier and ensure the social and environmental value payment is linked closely to demonstrable gains.
- **Greater emphasis on Optional and Collaborative tiers**, where additional environmental and climate benefits will be delivered.
- **Invest in practical, locally delivered support for farmers** including peer learning, face to face expert guidance and accessible digital tools such as Peak Overland Hydrological Flow Mapping.
- **Permitted development rights** must be urgently amended to grant defined competent bodies, deemed consent to affordably develop and install Nature based solutions.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE:

- The full benefits of integrating agroforestry into our agricultural landscape are now being realised. Land-based businesses are gaining greater climate resilience and economic savings, while communities are seeing reduced flood impacts, improved freshwater quality, and the return of biodiversity.¹¹
- Community participation in upstream climate action has empowered flood effected communities and reduced the human costs of flood impacts.¹²

- The Sustainable Farming Scheme, National Nature Service, social and green prescribing, and the educational curriculum have been integrated with Community Tree Nursery (CTN) programmes. Crucially, this has enabled practical, boots-on-the-ground climate action.¹³
- As a result of scaling up local tree nurseries, the Sustainable Farming Scheme and Local Authorities now have access to sufficient locally provenanced trees, along with the skills and services required to plant “the right tree in the right place.” UK and Ireland Sourced and Grown (UKISG) trees are now standard practice, significantly reducing the risk of imported pests and diseases.¹⁴

Photograph: Nigel Pugh - New Hedgerow, Geraint Davies, Fedwarian Farm.



3.

WE CALL UPON THE NEXT WELSH GOVERNMENT TO:



Photograph: Kylie Jones Mattock - Coed Felenrhyd & Llennyrch

PROTECT AND RESTORE OUR LIVING HERITAGE

Wales's ancient woodlands, temperate rainforests and veteran trees are irreplaceable. Once degraded or lost, they cannot simply be replanted. These landscapes are not just ecological assets; they are cultural ones - shaping identity, creativity and heritage. Protecting them is an investment in the living heart of Wales.

THE ASK:

Give Wales' most important and iconic wooded landscapes and veteran trees the long-term protection and restoration funding they urgently need.

THE EVIDENCE:

- Only 9% of native woodland and 22% of temperate rainforest is in good condition - these vital ecosystems lack complexity, such as having enough trees of differing ages, states and sizes, making them less effective as habitats for wildlife.¹⁵

- Since 2000, at least 11 species have been lost from Wales, with many more at risk.¹⁶
- An investment of around £212 million (at 2024 prices) by 2030 could see two thirds of our ancient woodlands well on the road to restoration, for nature and people.¹⁷

THE POLICY SOLUTIONS:

PROTECT

- Establish legal protection for ancient and veteran trees as irreplaceable national assets through the establishment of a living heritage asset register.¹⁸
- Strengthen planning protections for all ancient woodland and veteran trees, supported by clearer guidance, publicly accessible TPO mapping and properly resourced local authority tree officers.

- Set and deliver long and short-term targets and milestones to reduce threats to woodland, including ammonia pollution, invasive species and unmanaged deer populations.
- Strengthen Natural Resources Wales' powers in line with England and properly resource enforcement.¹⁹

RESTORE

- **Co-design and deliver a Wales Rainforest Strategy** with landowners and experts, backed by long-term funding and landscape-scale partnerships that bring together public and private finance. Such a fund could form a prototype for a new, quality-assured financial ecosystem to deliver the benefits of woodland creation, restoration and urban trees equally to the people of Wales.²⁰
- **Bring at least two thirds of ancient woodland into active restorative management by 2030**, using statutory targets under the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act, to drive delivery and set clear interim milestones.

- **Ensure the Environmental Protection Assessor for Wales is empowered** to hold public bodies to account for delivery against environmental obligations.
- **Renew and deliver the Wales Deer Strategy**, ensuring coordinated, evidence-led and humane deer management across borders to enable woodland regeneration and long-term ecosystem recovery.
- **Make the Welsh public forest estate an exemplar of best practice** for conservation, ensuring all ancient woodland sites are under restoration and managed sustainably for long-term ecological resilience.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE:

- The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest demonstrates how collaboration and natural capital investment can restore rare temperate rainforests at scale. Inspired by this model, the Alliance for Wales' Rainforests published its first report in 2024, setting out how a similar collaborative approach could be developed and replicated in Wales to accelerate rainforest recovery and attract investment.²¹

4.

GROW WALES WITH TREES, SUPPORTING GREEN JOBS

The collaborative journey to a green economy is already underway. The choice for Wales is simple: build skills and supply chains at home or continue relying on a model that drives deforestation and environmental harm overseas.

Wales must seize the opportunity to be at the forefront of this momentum.

Trees underpin skilled, long-term employment across the whole value chain from tree nurseries to woodland creation and management, sustainable timber construction, manufacturing, and product innovation. These are practical, place-based jobs that keep value circulating in Welsh communities while reducing our reliance on global supply chains that drives deforestation and environmental harm overseas.

But a strong woodland economy depends on people. The next Welsh Government must invest to tackle skills shortages - taking forward the National Nature Service, apprenticeships, and training - so that Wales has the workforce needed to deliver restoration on the ground, build resilient domestic supply chains and secure longterm economic growth.

WE CALL UPON THE NEXT WELSH GOVERNMENT TO:

THE ASK:

Invest in the skills, services and infrastructure Wales needs to lead in the naturebased economy.

THE EVIDENCE:

- Forestry, timber and landscaping already contribute over £528 million annually to the Welsh economy.²²
- Meeting national planting targets will require a major expansion of the skilled workforce - up to an 86% increase by 2030.²³

THE POLICY SOLUTIONS:

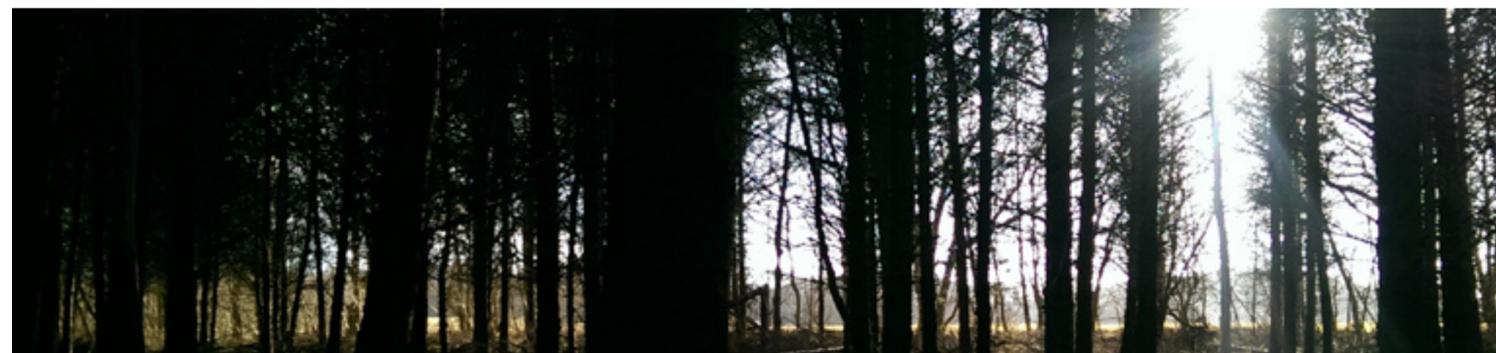
- **Deliver on National Nature Service Wales** as a flagship skills and employment pathway, linking people seeking work with paid placements, apprenticeships, training, volunteering and enterprise support focused on nature recovery.
- **Embed land-based economy and rural skills in national and regional development plans** with seed funding for circular economy approaches including innovation in local wood products, training for woodland management, development of local and community tree nurseries and programmes that engage a diverse and younger audience.

- **Publish a clear woodland delivery plan** to meet Climate Change Committee recommendations, accelerating woodland creation to 24% cover by 2050, with native trees delivering more than half of expansion through hedges, agroforestry and native tree regeneration.²⁴
- **Invest in Welsh tree nurseries as part of the UK & Ireland Sourced and Grown nursery sector** to meet increased demand for locally sourced, verified and bio-secure tree supply, keeping economic value in Wales and setting high standards for publicly funded planting. Normalise best practice by requiring local provenance and verified bio-secure tree stock (such as UKISG) for all publicly funded native planting and restocking schemes.²⁵
- **Take a strategic Wales-wide approach to woodland management** that draws stakeholders together, focusing on defragmentation of woodland, ecological enhancement, systematic inventory and mensuration, and the development of timber markets to underpin local supply chains.

- **Public procurement** that backs Welsh businesses and sustainable wood products.
- **Re-imagine the Wales National Forest** as a powerful and proactive enabler and delivery partner for community woodland networks, enabling communities to co-design and deliver local tree and woodland projects that generate multiple benefits and strengthen local circular economies.

WHAT COULD GOOD LOOK LIKE?

- By using existing timber and building local supply chains, The Dartmoor Forest Futures project provided a roadmap for the creation of skilled jobs, circular economies and more resilient forests.²⁶



OUR CALL TO THE NEXT SENEDD

Protecting and restoring our living heritage is not a luxury. When budgets are tight, natural solutions are the smart investment. Trees and woods support preventative health, resilient farming, flood protection, skilled jobs, and long-term prosperity – day in, day out.

Grow Wales with trees.



Photograph: Will Barker - The Social Approach

¹ Woodland Trust (2025), [State of the UK's Woods and Trees](#)

² Woodland Trust (2024), [Green space investment could reduce pressure on the NHS.](#)

³ Woodland Trust (2023), [Pathways to 2030: 10 key areas for investment in nature's recovery across Wales.](#) / Greener Grangetown, Arup. [A sustainable urban drainage project that aims to transform a neighbourhood](#)

⁴ Woodland Trust (2025) [Public Attitudes Survey 2025](#)

⁵ Konijnendijk, C. et al. (2023). [The 3-30-300 rule for urban forestry and greener cities.](#) UK Government (2025). [Environmental Improvement Plan.](#) Bluesky (2030). [3+30+300 Rule Analysis](#)

⁶ Eryri National Park Authority (2025). [Eryri Tree and Woodland Strategy 2025-2125](#)

⁷ Wrexham County Borough Council (2016). [Wrexham County Borough Council Tree and Woodland Strategy - 2016-2026](#)

⁸ British Ecological Society (2025) [Natural flood management benefits of catchment-scale woodland creation in the UK uplands.](#)

⁹ NFFN Cymru [How farms in Wales are boosting resilience.](#)

¹⁰ Science Direct, [Measuring the 3-30-300 rule to help cities meet nature access thresholds](#)

¹¹ Woodland Trust (2025), [Agroforestry in Wales](#)

¹² Woodland Trust (2025), [How Talybont is tackling flooding with trees](#)

¹³ Llais y Goedwig, [Supporting the development of community, small scale and social enterprise tree nurseries across Wales](#)

¹⁴ Woodland Trust (2025), [Strong Roots: Growing British Tree Nurseries](#)

¹⁵ Woodland Trust (2025), [State of the UK's Woods and Trees](#)

¹⁶ Natural Resources Wales, [Terrestrial and Freshwater Species in Peril in Wales](#)

¹⁷ Wales Environment Link, [Pathways to 2030: 10 key areas for investment in nature's recovery across Wales](#)

¹⁸ Woodland Trust, [Ancient Tree Inventory](#)

¹⁹ Welsh Government, [The Protection of Trees and Woodlands in Wales](#) - we would endorse IEPAW recommendations (1, 2, 3, 4, 7 & 8).

²⁰ [Future Generations Report 2025](#)

²¹ ACT, [Saving Scotland's Rainforest with Natural Capital Investment](#)

²² Confor, Forestry in Wales, [A sustainable industry for the 21st century](#)

²³ Woodland Trust (2025), [State of the UK's Woods and Trees](#)

²⁴ Accelerate new woodland creation year on year, to exceed 5,000 hectares per year by 2035. This delivery plan will need to include targets and milestones, approval process and project pipeline, processes for tracking all forms of new tree cover including agroforestry and natural colonisation, forward planning for Wales-based tree nursery demand and a systematic approach to threats such as deer and new pests and diseases.

²⁵ Woodland Trust (2020). [Tree provenance in a changing climate: Position statement.](#)

²⁶ UK Government (2025), [Dartmoor's Future Forests](#)

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