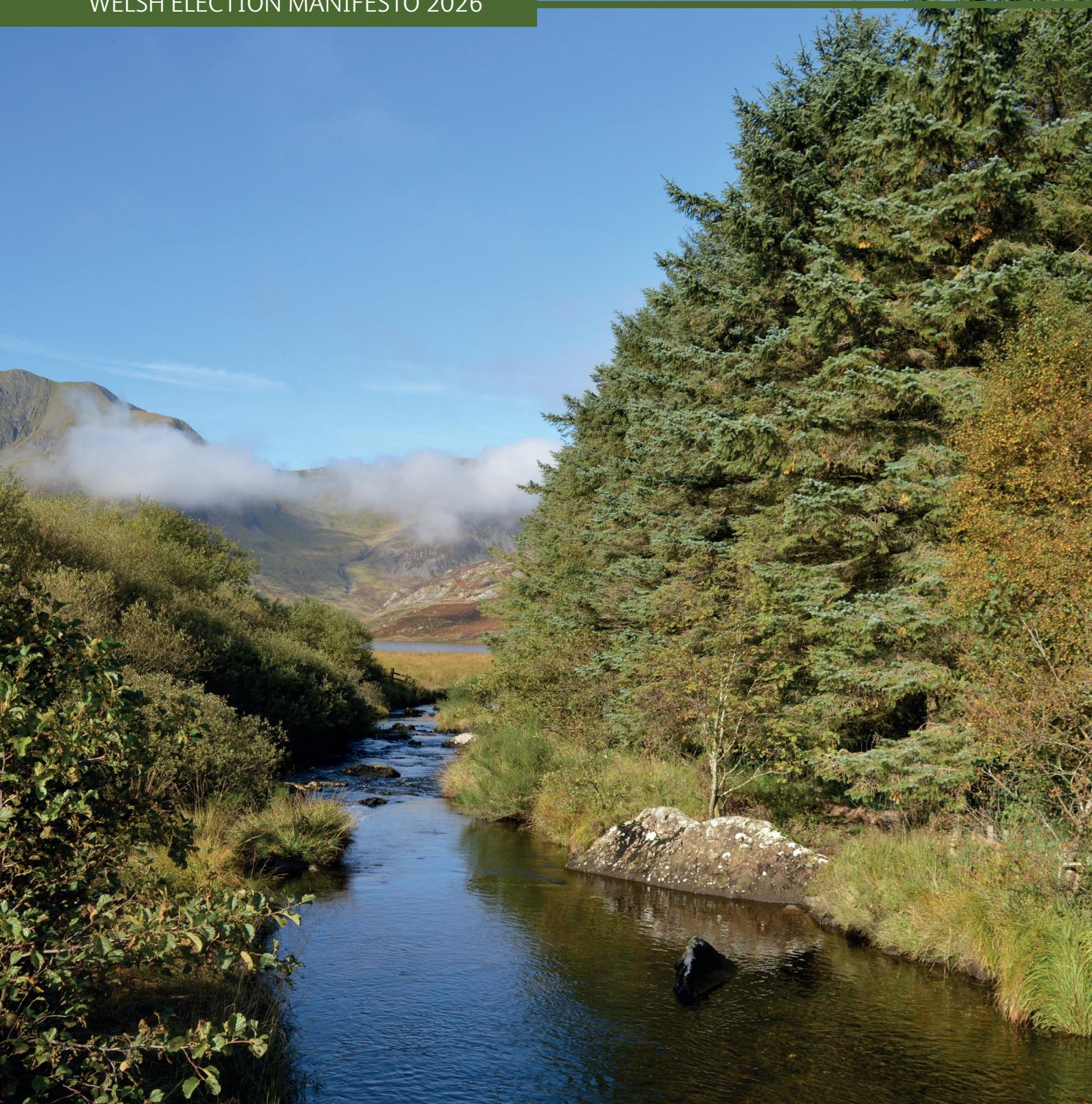


Timber is the future

Growing the Economy ✓ Building Homes ✓ Tackling Climate Change ✓ Improving Health ✓

WELSH ELECTION MANIFESTO 2026



Executive summary

Wales faces a set of interconnected national challenges: the need to grow a resilient rural economy, a housing emergency, the climate crisis, rising health pressures and skills shortages. The Welsh forestry and timber sector is uniquely positioned to help address all of these priorities - now and over the long term.

Welsh timber is a renewable, low-carbon material that alongside modern forestry supports creation of high-quality jobs, builds healthier homes faster, locks up carbon, enhances biodiversity, and improves physical and mental wellbeing. With the right strategic support, Wales can significantly reduce its reliance on imported timber, strengthen domestic supply chains, and create a circular Welsh forestry-timber economy rooted in rural communities.

This manifesto calls for a twin-track approach: accelerating the creation of well-designed new wood producing woodlands and increasing the use of timber from Welsh forests, especially in housebuilding. Investing in the active management, resilience and productivity of Wales's existing forests is essential to secure a sustainable long-term timber supply, protect past public and private investment, and ensure Welsh processors have confidence to reinvest and expand.

The Welsh Timber Industrial Strategy provides a clear blueprint for action. With collaboration between government, industry, landowners and communities, forestry and timber can deliver economic growth, climate solutions, healthier citizens, and a secure future for Wales.



Introduction

Elaine Heckley, National Manager for Wales

Growing the economy, creating jobs, improving health, building more homes, and meeting climate targets are among the most pressing priorities for the next Welsh Government, whilst supporting our Welsh language. Wales's forestry and timber sector already contributes to all of these goals - and with the right strategic support, it can deliver them faster, at greater scale, and for the long term.

Sir David Attenborough, in *Our Planet*, highlighted that using more wood is essential for a sustainable modern society. This requires both the creation of new forests and the responsible management of existing ones to produce a continuous supply of timber.

Well-planned forestry sequesters carbon, supports biodiversity, and unlocks economic activity across tree nurseries, planting, harvesting, processing, manufacturing and construction, particularly in rural Wales.

Building Welsh homes from homegrown timber maximises carbon storage, reduces embodied emissions, improves indoor health, and shortens build times. Timber construction helps address skills shortages in traditional construction trades, enabling higher housing delivery rates.

Government statistics published in June 2025 show that the UK forestry and timber industry contributes nearly £3 billion to the economy. This is a success story Wales can – and should – build upon to tackle the housing, climate and cost-of-living crises while creating skilled, well-paid rural employment.





Our vision

A Wales where thriving, well-managed woodlands support prosperous rural communities, supply locally made timber for Welsh homes and infrastructure, sequester carbon, restore biodiversity, and enhance public wellbeing.

1. Economy Growing the Welsh economy through timber

Wales has lower GDP per capita and productivity than the UK average, despite having innovative businesses with clear growth potential. Expanding the forestry and timber sector is a practical and proven way to grow the Welsh economy.

The UK is the second-largest net importer of timber globally. By increasing domestic supply and processing capacity, Wales can reduce imports, strengthen resilience against volatile global markets, and build a Welsh forestry-timber circular economy that keeps value, jobs and skills within the nation.

A critical challenge facing the rural land sector is an ageing workforce, combined with skills shortages, limited new

entrants, and perception barriers. Forestry and timber are part of the solution: they provide well-paid green jobs, long-term careers, and wide societal benefits - from cleaner air and water to soil stability and carbon storage.

We urge the Welsh Government to:

- Support full delivery of the Welsh Timber Industrial Strategy, increasing timber supply and regional processing capacity.
- Prioritise Welsh timber in public procurement and infrastructure projects.
- Ensure new woodland creation is attractive, voluntary, locally negotiated and flexible, including agroforestry and mixed-use systems that enhance farm viability.
- Invest in the active management and resilience of existing woodlands, ensuring they remain productive, healthy, and climate resilient.
- Work with industry to engage communities early through local planning to build trust and consensus.
- Invest in apprenticeships, retraining and SME support across the supply chain.
- Promote forestry and timber careers and partner with training providers to create clear progression routes.

2. Housing

Putting Welsh timber at the heart of homebuilding

Wales is experiencing a housing emergency, with over 10,000 people homeless, more than 170,000 on social housing waiting lists, and record spending on temporary accommodation. Rents in Wales are rising faster than anywhere else in Great Britain.

Timber construction is a key part of the solution. Timber-framed homes are faster to build, highly energy-efficient, lower-carbon, and deliver healthier indoor environments. Exposure to wood has been shown to reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and improve air quality by reducing volatile organic compounds.

Welsh-grown timber, processed in Wales, strengthens supply chains and supports local jobs while delivering the homes Wales urgently needs.

We urge action to:

- Prioritise locally sourced Welsh timber in public housing and infrastructure procurement.
- Align timber supply targets with housing delivery and retrofit programmes.
- Commit to transparent reporting on planting rates, timber supply, jobs and biodiversity outcomes.
- Convene regional partnerships to coordinate delivery and resolve local barriers.



3. Climate Change

Woodland creation and management for Net Zero

Wales has committed to net zero by 2050 and faces increasingly extreme weather, flooding risks and biodiversity loss. Forestry is a cost-effective, nature-based solution that delivers multiple benefits.

Planting new, well-designed woodlands - particularly productive mixed-species forests - captures carbon, reduces flood risk, and creates rural employment. Equally important is the ongoing management of existing forests, ensuring they continue to store carbon, resist pests and disease, and supply timber for long-lived products such as buildings.

We recommend:

- Scaling up annual planting to meet Welsh targets, focusing on productive, resilient mixed-species woodlands.
- Simplifying and stabilising funding for landowners with multi-year support.
- Applying best-practice standards to ensure woodland carbon trading is credible and long-term.
- Maximising carbon storage in long-lived wood products like timber for housebuilding.
- Protecting ancient woodland and ensuring new planting complements priority habitats.
- Investing in forest management, restocking, and adaptation to climate change.



4. Health

Forestry at the heart of wellbeing

Woodlands play a vital role in improving physical and mental health. Access to forests reduces stress, improves mood, and encourages physical activity. Research shows that regular woodland visits can boost immune function - a practice known as Shinrin-yoku or forest bathing.

Forest Research estimates that the mental health benefits of woodland access are worth £13 million annually to the NHS in Wales.

We urge government to:

- Promote existing and new woodlands as part of public health and air quality strategies.
- Integrate woodland access into mental health and wellbeing programmes in partnership with the NHS.
- Support woodland infrastructure that enables safe, inclusive public access.



What if we do nothing?

Failure to support forestry and timber growth risks higher climate costs, continued reliance on imports, missed net-zero targets, economic stagnation in rural areas, and worsening public health outcomes.

Doing nothing would mean:

- Greater exposure to volatile global timber markets and increased deforestation overseas.
- Missed carbon sequestration and biodiversity targets.
- Underinvestment and potential closure of Welsh processing facilities.
- Increased flooding, soil degradation and water pollution.
- Further disconnection from nature and loss of recreational spaces.

The challenge of land-use change is real - but the net benefits of forestry are overwhelming and align strongly with Wales's long-term needs.

Conclusion

Timber is not a short-term fix - it is a long-term national asset. By supporting both new woodland creation and greater use of Welsh timber, Wales can secure a sustainable timber supply, strengthen rural economies, deliver healthier homes, meet climate commitments, and improve public wellbeing.

The opportunity is clear. With leadership, partnership and strategic investment, forestry can help shape a resilient, prosperous and low-carbon future for Wales.

Closing pledge

Confor pledges to be a reliable partner to government, political parties, farmers and communities – delivering practical, evidence-based solutions for well-paid rural jobs, nature recovery, low-carbon homes and a secure economic future for Wales.

- ✓ **We are long-term.**
- ✓ **We are sustainable.**
- ✓ **We are part of the solution.**

THE BENEFITS OF MODERN FORESTRY



Confor is the voice of the forestry and wood-using industry and represents 1200 businesses from all along the supply chain – from nurseries growing young trees, through companies designing, planting, managing and harvesting forests to wood processors creating vital products from timber, including sawnwood and panelboard.

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