

Tree planting in the UK - Westminster Hall Debate - Wales

7 December 2016

Introduction

This note has been written for Welsh MPs ahead of the Tree planting in the UK Westminster Hall Debate to be held on Wednesday 7 December, secured by Chris Davies MP. This note sets out Confor: Promoting forestry and wood's (Confor) position on tree planting in Wales and complements the briefing prepared for MPs by the Commons Library.

Background

From 2001 to 2010 the estimated area of woodland cover in Wales was reduced by 1.7% to 284,000 ha, largely due to the restoration of priority open habitats on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE)¹, a process which is continuing to this day. The most recent data estimates that woodland cover in Wales is currently 306,000 ha, an increase on the 2010 figure. Much of this increase, in particular the increase in estimated cover between 2010 and 2011, can be attributed to improved measurement techniques rather than an increase in the actual amount of woodland¹.

Since 2001, the estimated area of conifer woodland in Wales has decreased by 18,000 ha, while the estimated area of broadleaf woodland has increased by 35,000 ha¹.

In 2010 Elin Jones AM set a target of 100,000ha of new woodland creation by 2030² as a means to help Wales meet its carbon emission reduction targets. The aspiration was accepted by the Welsh Government and required planting of 5,000ha of additional woodland cover per annum from 2010 to 2030, a higher level of planting than ever previously achieved in Wales.

Unfortunately Wales has missed this target by a mile, figures indicate just 3,289 ha of new planting between 2009 and 2014¹.

The Welsh Government has since revised the target under the Woodlands for Wales Action Plan 2016⁴, which focusses on a more short term achievable target of 10,000ha of new woodland to be created by 2020. This will require an average of 2,000ha of tree planting per annum.

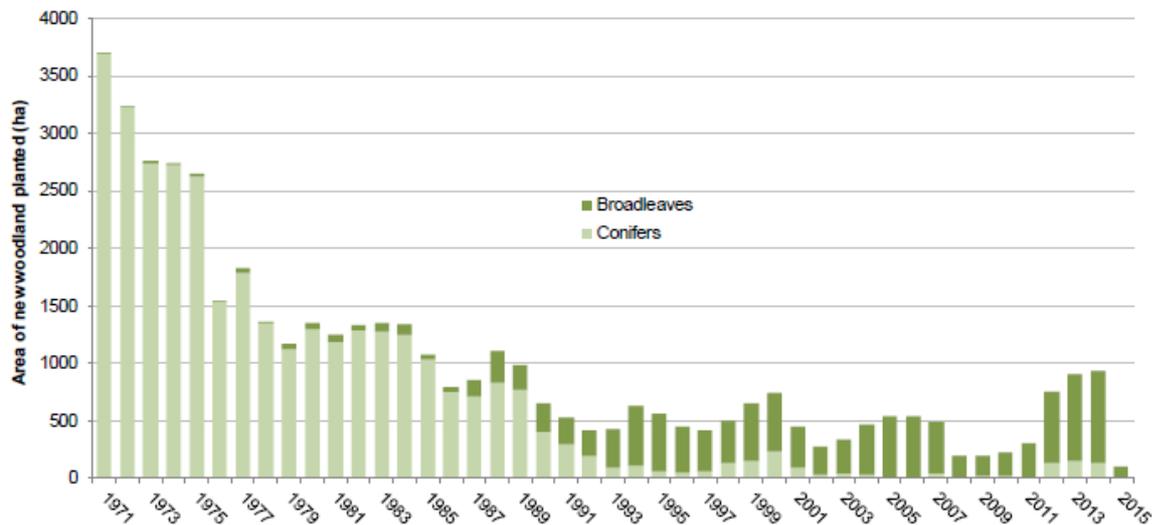
To add to the 3289ha between 2009 and 2014, in 2015 there was only 103ha planted¹. Up to year ending 31 March 2016 new planting was 39ha of conifer and 102ha of broadleaved trees⁵.

The total from 2009 to March 2016 is 3,533Ha. (The target indicated planting 35,000ha)

There are approximately 400ha of new planting proposals currently being assessed under the last round of Glastir Woodland Creation (GWC) which closed in October 2016.



Chart 2: Area of new woodland planting per year by woodland type



Source: Forestry Statistics

On restocking, figures for the year up to March 2016 indicate that 584ha were restocked with broadleaved; 1,199ha with conifer. This also represents a reduction in the conifer area as most of the broadleaved restocking would have taken place on areas previously stocked with conifer species - clear felling and restocking on broadleaved sites would be extremely rare. It is also difficult to be exact as these figures are compiled from areas grant aided and there are a rising number of owners choosing to restock without grant aid due to the restrictions they impose.

The Present Demand/Supply Balance from Welsh Forests

Every wood processing business, when asked, confirm that it would double or treble capacity if the resource was there to support it. Worryingly many have plans in place to do exactly that, which, given a declining resource, must put into doubt the viability that all the mills Wales has can now survive, even if they are profitable.

The Scale of Demand

Not including demand for woodfuel (which is notoriously difficult to calculate given the mix of large scale and small fragmented users), the demand for timber for processing into wood products by companies in or near Wales is over 1.9m tons which is more than the total softwood production in Wales now. There has been a vast amount of investment in wood processing in Wales, a small survey of just a few companies revealed investment levels of above £40m in the last 8 years with plans for investment in excess of £20m in the near future⁶. All of which is at risk by the lack of raw material caused by the very low levels of new replanting and a loss of productive forest area due to restocking with non-commercial species, both driven by WG policy and public support mechanisms that do not allow support for productive forestry.

As well as this 1.6m tons of demand for industrial roundwood for processing there are assumptions that the demand for biomass will exceed 0.5m tons by 2020 (forestry statistics 2009 and CEBR Analysis) and whilst some of this will come from sawmill co-products the vast majority will be for roundwood which will add further to the impossible supply/demand imbalance Wales will face in the future.

A total demand of 2.1m tons in Wales, well in excess of present supply, and with the forecast for available softwood declining dramatically in as little as 15 years⁷, Wales is looking at a catastrophic decline in the processing sector with a commensurate number of jobs lost, especially in rural areas.

The forestry and wood-using sector in Wales has an annual Gross Value Added (GVA) of £500 million and employs between 8,500 and 11,300 people in Wales¹. This GVA could be significantly increased by a programme of productive woodland creation in Wales.

Further information

For more information on tree planting in Wales please contact:

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If your questions relates to tree planting in the UK as a whole please contact:

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References.

Woodlands for Wales Indicators 2014-15, <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/woodlands-wales-indicators/?lang=en>

Forestry in Wales Quick Guide.

<http://www.assembly.wales/Research%20Documents/Forestry%20in%20Wales%20-%20Quick%20guide-04112013-227779/qg11-0031-c-English.pdf>

Climate Change Strategy for Wales.

<http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/climatechange/?lang=en>

Woodlands for Wales Action Plan

<http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/forestry/our-strategy/?lang=en>

Woodlands for Wales Indicators published soon. Also available at Forestry Statistics 2016

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7aqknx>

Informal survey of Confor members in Wales by the National Manager, November 2016

Welsh Softwood Timber Supplies and Our Green Economy workshop 2014.

<http://www.confor.org.uk/resources/publications/confor-publications/>