

# The wood and the trees

A FORESTRY AND TIMBER MANIFESTO FOR WALES

CONFOR WELSH ELECTION MANIFESTO 2021



# Green shoots of hope

**Anthony Geddes**, National Manager for Wales, Confor

We haven't planted enough trees in Wales for many years – but things are finally changing.

Two facts make me optimistic for the future – farmers and landowners want to plant trees and the Welsh Government is putting funding in place to support that demand.

Round 9 of Glastir committed £8 million to tree planting, leading to 379 applications by the time the 'window' closed in July 2019 - enough to plant more than 2,000 hectares of new woodland (1000 rugby pitches), half the 4,000 hectares Welsh Government wants to plant "as soon as possible".

For Glastir Round 10, the Welsh Government committed £9m. The strong response (200 expressions of interest totalling 3200 hectares of potential new planting) delivers confidence to build momentum on tree planting.

Forest creation in Wales is heading in a positive direction, but continued political commitment and action is needed to maintain this momentum. A jump from 80 hectares of planting in 2019-20 to 2,000 hectares in 2020-21 would be a great start.

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) has proposed an additional 43,000 hectares of woodland creation in Wales by 2030 & 180,000 hectares by 2050. Both Welsh Government and forestry businesses recognise significant resources are required to support this planting, which will tackle the damaging effects of climate change. The Welsh Government declared a climate emergency in April 2019 and is committed to achieving a carbon-neutral public sector by 2030 and to coordinating action to make a decisive shift away from fossil fuels.

At the same time, tree planting and subsequent woodland management can create jobs and growth, helping to sustain rural communities. The forestry industry is growing and now employs



11,000 people and is worth £665 million to the Welsh economy every year.

Yet planting trees in Wales is still slow and complex. As the graph on the right shows, there is a long way to go to meet the Welsh Government's aspiration to plant 4,000 hectares of trees per year – and push up towards the 6,000 hectares annual target proposed by the CCC. The commitment to hit that target is one thing – we need action to get there. That means simplified planting processes, sustained public sector investment, creative approaches to unlock private investment and greater accessibility to schemes for tenant farmers.

We need commitment to support the skills and technology to deliver this planting – and clear action for the use of more Welsh wood in construction. The recent Forest Industry Recovery Scheme shows the serious appetite for Welsh forestry business to invest, adapt and thrive.

If we do this, the environmental and economic benefits will be significant. Delivering on the 4,000 hectares annual target to 2045 would see Wales reach 20% woodland cover, soaking up 40 million tons of carbon dioxide. A mix of agroforestry and on-farm planting would provide the raw material to deliver all housing in Wales through carbon-negative timber construction and forestry and wood would develop into an industry worth £1 billion+ annually.

Confor will work constructively with all political parties and everyone interested in the environment and economy of Wales to deliver these benefits.



# Planting the future in Wales

The Climate Change Committee says Wales' forest cover needs to be increased from just under 15% to 21% by 2050. This would still be much less than the majority of European countries; overall, forests cover 46% of the landmass of the 50 territories of Europe.

That rate of increase means planting about 180,000 hectares of new forests between 2020 and 2050 – 6,000 hectares each year, the target set by the Government's independent advisers, the Climate Change Committee.

This target for Wales is achievable – even from the current low base – with political will and positive support from farmers and landowners.

Evidence from Scotland shows that with the right policies in place, tree planting targets can be achieved AND surpassed. 90% of new tree planting in Scotland is done by the private sector. Its mixture of conifer and broadleaf trees, for amenity use and timber production, takes place all over the country. There is no reason why Wales cannot enjoy a similar boom in planting with the right policy framework – then manage those woods well to grow Welsh timber to use in Wales.

Confor believes that the current demand for planting means that the following targets are achievable and invites all parties to support these targets.

What have we planted over the last decade? (in thousands of hectares)

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
0.30	0.76	0.91	0.93	0.1	0.11	0.41	0.2	0.67	0.08

What are our targets for the next decade?

2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
2.0	2.0	3.5	4.5	6.0	7.0	7.5	8.0	9.0	9.0

### CASE STUDY

# Williams Homes

Owain Williams is joint Managing Director of Williams Homes, based in Bala, North Wales. The firm started manufacturing timber frames for housing in 2005 and also makes timber windows, stairs, cladding and other wood products for their homes.



We have always enjoyed working with wood – it's beautiful and tactile, the first thing people touch in a new home. We knew it was a sustainable option back in 2005, but even 10 years ago, only a small minority of people wanted to use wood because they were thinking about their carbon footprint. Green credentials were very low down most people's priorities.

Things have changed dramatically and people now really care about sustainability. As well as the mindset of the general public changing, the policy of the Welsh Government has changed too – they have really encouraged building with wood, thanks to some great work by WoodKnowledge Wales and others. In my opinion, wood is the only truly low carbon building product that can be used for mass housebuilding for the future.

The mindset of housing associations and councils has shifted. About six years ago, I persuaded three or four housing associations that have never built with timber before that they should start using it. Now, timber frames are pretty much the go-to material.

In some ways, I think changing attitudes has been the hard bit. But we still have a hard job to plant lots more trees, to guarantee that long-

term supply of indigenous timber to use in the wooden buildings we want in Wales.

We use indigenous timber, but it's increasingly difficult to get the product. In some ways, Wales is a victim of its own success in making the case for home-grown wood, because timber supply has become a real problem.

I'm being quoted prices of up to 30% higher over the last year for Welsh-grown sawn timber like spruce and Douglas fir – but I'm not going to go abroad to buy it, because I've made a commitment to using indigenous Welsh timber. If that means paying a bit more, then so be it. It's a matter of principle. I'll just dig in deep and stick with it.

There is just not enough timber out there and there hasn't been enough for a very long time. It's great that there is increased demand to use wood – but we need to address the shortage. We have to plant more, and we have to do it now. The best time to plant would have been 20 years ago. The second best time is definitely now.

I'm discussing a long-term planting project with Woodknowledge Wales and a housing association. As a user of wood, I would dearly love to be involved in planting trees.





## CASE STUDY

# Safn Coed

Derek Morgan has spent his working life sheep farming at Safn Coed at Llangurig, near Llanidloes, just off the A470 in Montgomeryshire.

I was approaching 70, and none of our three children wanted to take over the hill sheep farm that's been in our family since my grandfather bought it in 1947.

The small family farm is the backbone of Welsh rural life, but hill sheep farming just isn't as profitable as it used to be. I wanted to find a way of providing a new income stream to protect the farm and to have something to leave for my children.

Tree planting seemed the way to go, so I got support through Glastir Woodland Creation to plant just under 20 hectares in 2018 - on rougher ground at the top end of the farm that wasn't that good for grazing.

I worked with Tilhill to plant a wide variety of species, including 45% sitka spruce and 11% Douglas fir. Fast-growing conifers like sitka and Douglas will provide a solid long-term income when they're thinned (after 12-15 years), then harvested after 30 years or so. The market's there because demand for timber is really growing.

We also planted 12% birch, 9% Scots pine and 5% oak, and small areas of alder, aspen, poplar, rowan, hazel, field maple, wild cherry and crabapple. It's very diverse - and it's helped me diversify the business.

My wife Veronica and I only keep 50 sheep now. We saw that we could project forward better with trees; you can see a future demand which won't go away. It's more difficult with lambs because you are never sure what price you will get.

People say farmers are opposed to tree planting, but I've been in farming unions for many years and I'd say farmers will plant if the economics stack up. They are pretty open to it.

Half a century ago, my family was paid to clear this land, as the focus was on maximising food production to become self-reliant. Today's challenges are different. Farmers are environmentally aware and planting trees gives them an opportunity to help tackle climate change by locking up carbon from the atmosphere.

If it suits your farm business, go for it – the reward is both financial and environmental.

Quite a few friends in the valley are planting trees on ground that's hard to graze – 20 acres here, 30 acres there (between 8 and 12 hectares). Farmers are diversifying because they have to.

The only barrier is financial; the European funding we get now will have to be replaced or it will be hard to meet the long-term costs for the ongoing maintenance of your trees.

## WHY WE NEED TO PLANT TREES

### CASE STUDY

# Cwm Fagor

Matt Jones of Thorlux Lighting (part of FW Thorpe Plc), describes how the firm planted a woodland at Cwm Fagor, near Devauden, Monmouthshire, to offset its carbon emissions



After the coming winter (2021-22), we will have planted almost 200,000 trees on a site of almost 80 hectares (about 200 acres) at Cwm Fagor.

It will be the culmination of a project that has already seen close to 150,000 trees planted, taking around 32,000 tonnes of carbon out of the atmosphere when they reach maturity. That impact will rise considerably when the extra trees go in – with the continued aim of balancing out our emissions as a business.

We are a lighting company and we are always looking to deliver increasingly low-energy solutions, but we recognise the electricity needed for lighting has an impact – which is why we wanted to do something to offset that.

This started in 2008 when our Managing Director Mike Allcock (now Chair) said he wanted the firm to make a positive environmental impact – because it was ethically the right thing to do. We wanted to show our customers that we cared about the environment and looked at various options, settling on tree planting.

It was a positive way to offset our emissions and it created something tangible as well as environmentally-friendly. It has also had additional benefits, including supporting wildlife [the site has brought in nesting birds and

raptors] and helping with flood prevention.

We worked with Pryor & Rickett to find a site and bought Cwm Fagor in summer 2008. They then helped us to develop a plan for the site and since 2009, we have planted a mixture of conifer and broadleaf species over the years.

This has included Douglas fir, Norway spruce, Western red cedar, alder, oak, hazel and wild cherry. We will take out some of the conifer trees, which we planted to sequester carbon more quickly, to sell for timber. We intend to create a mainly broadleaved wood in the long-term.

We were delighted to be chosen as the first Woodland Carbon Code site for Wales, to measure the carbon captured on site and to highlight the climate change mitigation benefits of planting trees.

Planting the woodland at Cwm Fagor has created a very positive vibe around the business. Our customers really like it.

The interest in planting trees is increasing really quickly, with politicians across the UK really getting behind it – for environmental, economic and social reasons. Our next decision is whether to look at planting another woodland.

OUR MANIFESTO

# FIVE-POINT FOCUS FOR FORESTRY

## **1 POLITICAL LEADERSHIP TO MEET PLANTING TARGETS**

Confor calls for a clear commitment to planting targets by guaranteeing funding which matches demand and sets a clear path to meet the 4,000 hectare target by 2025. Sustained commitment is needed to build confidence in the industry supply chain to realise these targets.

## **2 MAKE PLANTING TREES EASIER**

Streamline the application and approval processes by translating the findings from the Wales Land Management Forum into action.

## **3 INVEST IN FORESTRY SKILLS**

Invest in the skills needed to deliver tree planting targets by encouraging new entrants to the industry through targeted apprenticeship and rural sector training schemes.

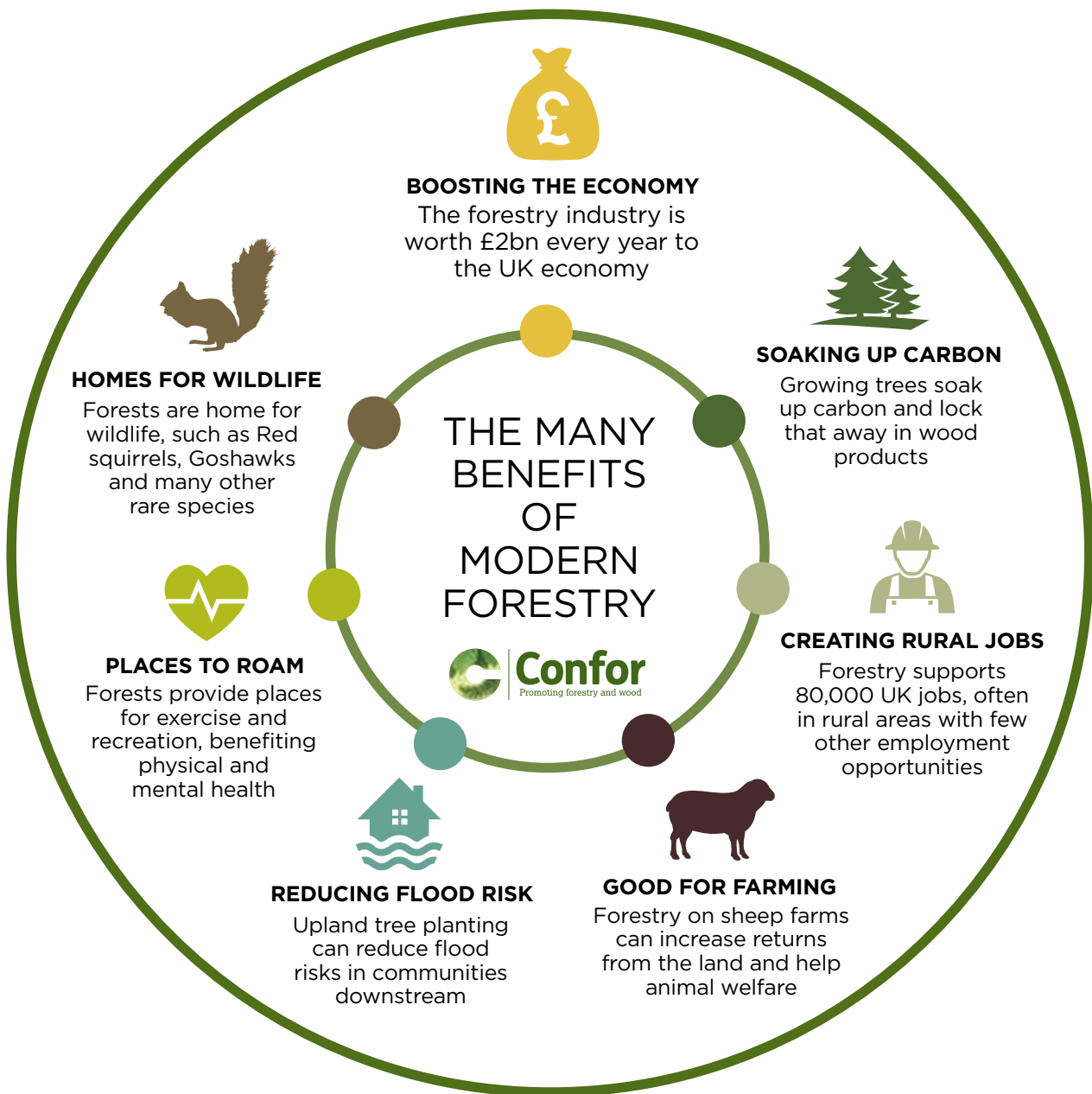
## **4 INVEST IN TECHNOLOGY**

Invest in technology to support the development of a high-value forestry and timber industry. The huge industry response to the Forest Industry Recovery Scheme underlines the desire for businesses of all sizes in Wales to adapt and invest to meet the challenge of afforestation in Wales.

## **5 USE MORE WELSH TIMBER**

Add greater social and carbon value to Welsh timber through the substitution of steel and concrete in housing and construction - while recognising that timber has a range of other important uses, including fencing, pallets and other products providing significant rural employment.

# THE BENEFITS OF MODERN FORESTRY



Confor is the voice of the forestry and wood-using industry and represents businesses all across the supply chain – from nurseries growing young trees through companies designing, planting, managing and harvesting forests, to wood processors and users.

Please contact Confor's National Manager for Wales if you require further information:

Anthony Geddes  
Tel: 07494 079305  
E-mail: [anthony@confor.org.uk](mailto:anthony@confor.org.uk)  
Twitter: @Confor W