

FFOREST CALON CYMRU

Response to the Inquiry into the Future of Agricultural and Rural Development Policies in Wales



1. What are the fundamental outcomes we want to see from agricultural, land management and rural development policies?

1.1 The principal aim of policy should be to maximise sustainable food production, woodfuel, woodland craft and other produce, and value-added land-based productivity, and encourage the revitalisation of the rural communities of Wales. Calon Cymru Network is especially interested in Mid-Wales and the Heart of Wales corridor.

2. What lessons can we learn from current and previous policies?

2.1 Previous policies have failed and resulted in the slow decay of rural communities and economies, depreciation of the soil and biodiversity. The Mid-Wales region is a vital resource for Wales. It demands a much more productive vision.

2.2 Mid-Wales lacks a viable, diverse rural economy and the working population to power it, an economy that does not rely on agricultural subsidies, tourism and public sector employment. It is a serious problem for Wales now but as accelerating climate change begins to affect our food, water and energy security it will become a national emergency. Rural mid-Wales needs a new (or old) economic base, mainly horticulture and forestry, in order to prepare for future shocks.

2.3 These threats are recognised by the Welsh Government in the ground-breaking Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2016 which requires all public bodies to satisfy current needs without compromising those of future generations.

2.4 Its linked legislation, the Planning (Wales) Act, offers a natural opportunity to resolve current and future difficulties by taking a more strategic approach to planning and sustainable development in Wales.

3. To what extent should Wales develop its own agricultural, land management and rural development policies or should it be part of a broader UK-wide policy and financial framework?

3.1 Wales should absolutely develop its own policies. The policy framework is now in place that will enable carbon-neutral, “One Planet” economic development to be carried out on a strategic scale.

3.2 In line with the Planning (Wales) Act, Wales could declare a Strategic Development Area along a 90-mile stretch of the Heart of Wales Railway corridor. Doing so would avoid the current difficulties of policy fragmentation and introspective LDPs that struggle with the lose-lose combination of falling populations, underused resources and sustainable, but fragile, infrastructures.

3.3. The Fforest Calon Cymru / One Planet concept should be embedded as the guiding principle in this Strategic Development Plan. It would foster low-impact development founded on land-based productivity. This pioneering project, Fforest Calon Cymru, would be carried out incrementally by local non-profit groups and communities without financial help from the Government.

3.4 The Local Planning Authorities would need to embrace the mutual benefits of cross-border Strategic Planning and to press the case for a Mid-Wales SDA with the Welsh Government.

3.5. Although this sparsely-populated region may not normally be considered a high development priority by the Government, the project's purpose is not to revive Mid-Wales simply because it lacks people, but because in a challenging future this “green desert” – the heartland of the nation – will be expected to feed, water and supply power to most of Wales, and perhaps beyond. The railway line provides an infrastructure channel to take produce to populated areas and to bring in customers and clients.

3.6. The legislation, need and great opportunity are in place. The rail infrastructure is too, but much of the land is under-utilised. This genuinely transformational project would be of national significance and is capable of achieving the goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act in this region. It offers these outcomes:

- Productive, regenerative land-use, with extensive community-scale horticulture and forestry. A backbone for the regional economy.
- A balanced, viable population.
- Diverse, stable and durable local economies.
- Affordable land, housing and workplaces.
- A successful and convenient railway.
- A national, mixed forest for climate-change mitigation as well as a resource for local industry and renewable energy.
- Sustainable economic development that is virtually self-financing.

3.7 Wales leads the world with future-aware policies. This is an opportunity to set an inspirational example – a demonstration of how to make sustainable development a mainstream reality rather than a fringe activity, and bequeath an enduring way of life to future generations.