

P-04-683 Trees in Towns. Correspondence – Petitioner to the Chair.
8.07.2016

Mr Mike Hedges AM

Chair, Petitions Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Dear Mr Hedges

Ensuring that Wales benefits fully from urban trees

Petition P-04-683 on Trees in Towns

I write in response to an invitation from the Petitions Committee of the previous Assembly and am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the letter sent by Carl Sargeant, then Minister for Natural Resources.

Could I say first that Coed Cadw Woodland Trust welcomes the Minister's positive letter. We welcome in particular the recently published Woodland Strategy Action Plan and the actions that it includes to increase and safeguard existing tree cover in towns and cities and to support sustainable tree management. We welcome also the work that NRW is doing to provide up-to-date evidence on the status of canopy cover with communities and towns in Wales and look forward to assisting this body on this, particularly as we are quoted as a delivery partner.

We welcome the duty that the Well-being of Future Generations Act places on Local Authorities to pursue a set of national well-being goals, and we very much hope that, in setting out and publishing well-being objectives,

Local Authorities in Wales will take full account of all the benefits which trees can offer in our towns and cities.

Could I ask, therefore, if guidance will be produced for local authorities on this making clear some of the different benefits which trees can offer in towns and cities?

Our concern is, of course, that there are real pressures on Local Authorities, not least from insurance companies, to cut trees down and not to replace them. Almost every week, there are reports in the press about local people's concerns about the felling of street trees and their non-replacement. Most recently, there have been reports along these lines from Caerphilly Road in Cardiff, and also from Penarth,.

And while almost all Welsh towns benefit hugely from urban trees, to the knowledge of the Woodland Trust, only one, Wrexham, has adopted a formal Tree Strategy. If Local Authorities were encouraged to make clear in their well-being objectives what they will do to protect trees and manage existing trees and to plant more, then this would help hugely in ensuring that the next generation of Welsh people have a healthy attractive environment to grow up in. Could the Minister give an assurance that Local Authorities will be encouraged to do this, through guidance on well-being objectives?

We welcome also the requirement under the Environment Act for Area Statements to be produced to set out the priorities and opportunities for the management of natural resources on an area basis. Could I ask whether guidance will be given to NRW that these statements should include, where appropriate, plans to improve urban environments around Wales by ensuring that tree canopy cover in our towns and cities is not lost, but gradually enhanced, so as to offer greater benefits to those living there?

Finally, I welcome what the Minister write about Glastir Woodland Creation grants. It should be recognised, however, that these grants are specifically designed for the creation of new areas of woodland, whether on farms, in parks or around factories or offices. They are not, generally, suitable for planting individual street trees. Typically, street trees need to be planted at a much larger size, they need to be specially protected and the location of each one has to be carefully planned. The cost per tree is therefore hugely

higher, and Glastir Woodland Creation would not generally provide much of an incentive for this. It was for this reason that, in our petition, we called for the establishment of a challenge fund for tree planting in towns and cities. Could I ask, as part of NRW's work to increase and safeguard existing tree cover, could that body provide positive support for planting individual street trees in towns and cities?

The Minister finishes by strongly urging Coed Cadw Woodland Trust to contact local authorities in Wales to that to that we can work together to ensure that people across the country benefit more from urban trees. I can assure the Minister, and this Committee, that we shall look for opportunities to take forward some partnerships with local authorities that give us opportunities to support their tree programmes and strategies.

Yours sincerely

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