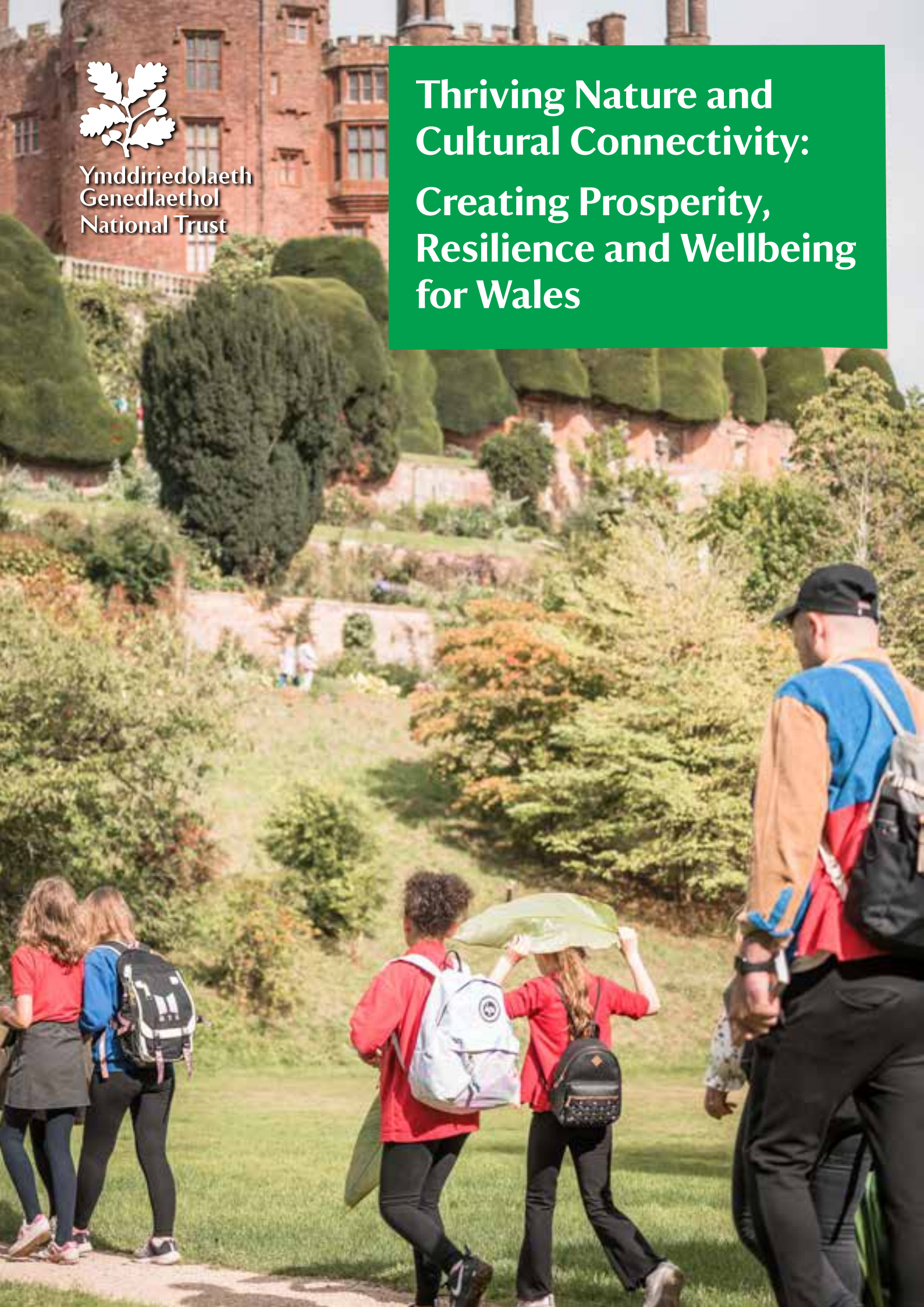




Ymddiriedolaeth
Genedlaethol
National Trust

Thriving Nature and Cultural Connectivity: Creating Prosperity, Resilience and Wellbeing for Wales





Priorities for Wales

In May 2026, the Senedd election will return an increased number of Senedd Members. This will mean that the people of Wales have greater representation in the Senedd than ever before, and that there will be an unprecedented need for collaboration across the political spectrum and beyond, to create a prosperous and resilient future for Wales.

Whatever the final make-up of the political parties in the Senedd, National Trust Cymru will support all political leaders in presenting a clear and ambitious vision for the future of Wales.

National Trust Cymru has a new 10-year strategy and at its core are three ambitious goals: to restore nature, to end unequal access to nature, beauty and history, and to inspire millions more people to care and take action by 2050. These are societal shifts that we need to help make if we are to live up to our charitable purpose and leave a thriving natural and cultural world for future generations.

Drawing upon our expertise, knowledge, and insights gained through 130 years of practical experience in Wales, we have identified 5 critical priorities that we believe must be at the forefront of the political agenda during the upcoming Senedd election. These are areas that we are committed to working with the Welsh Government, and the widest possible range of public, charitable and private sector organisations to deliver.

1 Restore nature for the benefit of Wales and the planet



2 Unlock access to nature, beauty and history



3 Revolutionise sustainable travel for a greener future



4 Future-proof Wales' workforce



5 Empower communities through renewable energy





1 Restore nature for the benefit of Wales and the planet

The climate and nature crisis affects us all. We all need nature to survive; the supply of clean water, the pollination of our crops, the air that we breathe.

Urgent action must be taken if Wales is to reverse nature's decline by 2030, its recovery by 2050 and meet its legal commitment to be carbon net zero by 2050.

We believe nature-based solutions have a critical role to play in supporting our society to adapt, from peatland restoration to sequester carbon; targeted woodland establishment to provide habitat, shade and reduce soil erosion; to floodplain meadows and river restoration to slow the flow of water and reduce flooding.

With over 90% of Wales' landscape used for agricultural purposes, there is a huge opportunity to support our nation's farmers and land managers to be even bigger players in nature recovery and climate resilience, whilst producing good, healthy food and running sustainable businesses. The choice is not nature or food, we need both; a healthy natural environment underpins good food production.

Playing our part

On the Llŷn Peninsula, we have been working in partnership to trial a Payment for Outcomes model with our tenant farmers. The trial takes an innovative whole-farm approach, with payments based on the desired outcomes for habitats and species, and places the decision-making in the hands of the farmer over the actions they undertake.

We are proud to be supporting our tenants to take a nature-friendly farming approach and believe a farmer led initiative has real value in helping us achieve healthy, resilient landscapes that are rich in wildlife. We are already seeing the gains for nature, from restored meadows and heathland habitats to reintroducing conservation grazing to the coastal slopes. The three farms in the scheme have seen an increase in biodiversity of 10%-15%, with farmers fairly rewarded for their work.

We need the next Welsh Government to:

- Prioritise monitoring, long-term funding and resourcing to support the implementation of the Environment Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets Bill, with clear, immediate actions for delivery between 2026 and 2030. Secondary legislation defining the targets needs to be brought forward within 12 months of the Bill's royal assent to ensure action is not delayed.
- Support farmers and land managers through the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) to progress beyond the baseline actions of the 'universal' layer into the 'optional' and 'collaborative' layers which deliver more for nature and climate. Advice and guidance need to be properly funded and readily available to support farmers through the scheme layers, progressing along the journey to sustainable farming.
- By 2027 introduce all SFS actions within the 'optional' and 'collaborative' layers. Allocate over half of the scheme's budget to these higher tiers to reward those doing the most for nature, climate and sustainable production of food and fibre. This commitment would ensure we don't repeat mistakes of previous schemes incentivising the status quo.
- Commit to annual reports on the SFS' impact towards meeting Wales' nature and climate targets, with a commitment to reviewing the effectiveness of actions and the ability to adapt them accordingly.
- Ensure that, in order to support nature's recovery, the SFS also facilitates thriving rural communities and businesses by providing opportunities to expand and improve access to the public; increase localisation of food supply chains; and increase job opportunities in diversified but ancillary industries.

What do voters think?

64% of voters are worried about climate change and its effects in Wales, with 56% calling for more action from the Welsh Government to halt and reverse the loss of nature by 2030!



2 Unlock access to nature, beauty and history

Access to nature, beauty and history should not be a postcode lottery, everyone in Wales should be able to enjoy the benefits they can bring to our health, wellbeing and communities.

In the wake of the pandemic, budget cuts and inflation, the sustainability of cultural organisations and access to our important Welsh culture and heritage has suffered significantly. Wales now ranks second lowest in Europe for cultural spending, with Wales spending £69.68 per person on cultural services, compared to the UK's £91.12². These financial pressures have hindered public bodies and the culture sector's ability to deliver services, which we know disproportionately affects communities with limited public transport, in rural areas with fewer cultural venues, and lower-income households.

In parallel, nearly half a million people in Wales lack access to nature and green space within a 10-minute walk from their home³. Urban areas and some of our nation's most deprived communities in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, Wrexham and Rhyl are particularly affected.

Valuing our cultural and natural wellbeing must be a priority and is integral to delivering the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. People who engage in cultural activities report higher life satisfaction, a sense of belonging and positive impacts on their mental health⁴. Whilst a study of 2.3 million adults in Wales found that increased exposure to green spaces was associated with a 20% reduction in the likelihood of developing common mental health disorders⁵.

We should all be able to enjoy culture and green space near to where we live, and we urge that more needs to be done to increase access and bring these benefits to every community.

What do voters think?

44% of voters want more access to cultural services in Wales, with 23% calling for more public green space in their community⁷.

We need the next Welsh Government to:

- Increase funding for culture until spending per head is comparable with similar European nations, enabling communities to access cultural services near where they live⁶.
- Create an anchor site for the National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales, increasing access to Welsh culture, creating local jobs, supporting artists to stay in Wales and forming an important part of the visitor economy in Wales. Wales is the only UK nation which does not have a significant centre for contemporary arts, able to showcase and support the creative industries and cultural importance of Welsh art and Welsh culture.
- Work with local authorities to ensure that at least half of the new tourism visitor levy income is ringfenced for local cultural services and visitor attractions in the area, helping to support their management and protection of the natural and cultural landscape for future generations.
- Support both rural and urban communities to connect with nature through improved infrastructure and quality green spaces. Commit to continue investing in Local Nature Partnerships and the creation of accessible green spaces – especially in Wales' most deprived areas – ensuring safe, clean, and well-maintained spaces near where people live.

Playing our part

At Erddig in Wrexham we are proud to have created a Commemorative Woodland in partnership with the Welsh Government and Wrexham County Borough Council, providing a new public space for remembrance, reflection and nature connection. The woodland was co-designed with the local community and is made up of different zoned areas connected through flat, accessible paths.

At its heart lies a wildflower meadow which gives an open-air social space for activities, along with wooded sections for wildlife and scattered ponds, hedgerows and wooded glades providing further habitats. Art and nature have come together beautifully at this special place with the woodland also including commissioned pieces of work from the National Poet of Wales and visual artist Rachel Jones.

This safe and accessible green space close to Wrexham gives local people, communities and visitors a place to benefit from nature and culture.



3

Revolutionise sustainable travel for a greener future

If Wales is to meet its target of 45% of journeys made by sustainable modes of transport by 2040 and become carbon net zero by 2050, we need to see a step change in delivery of green transport infrastructure, creating a transport system that delivers for both people and the environment.

Up to 50% of households now spend over 10% of their income on running a car, whilst 23% of people reliant on public transport services face the challenge of rising fares and in some areas, a reduction in services⁸. Almost 75% of young people say they would use public transport more if it was free⁹.

Transport poverty significantly impacts rural areas, lower-income households and young people, including their ability to access essential services and recreational opportunities such as access to culture and green space.

Investing in a more sustainable, reliable, and affordable transport network also presents a significant opportunity for the tourism sector in supporting greener travel options for visitors and people working at these locations.

We need the next Welsh Government to:

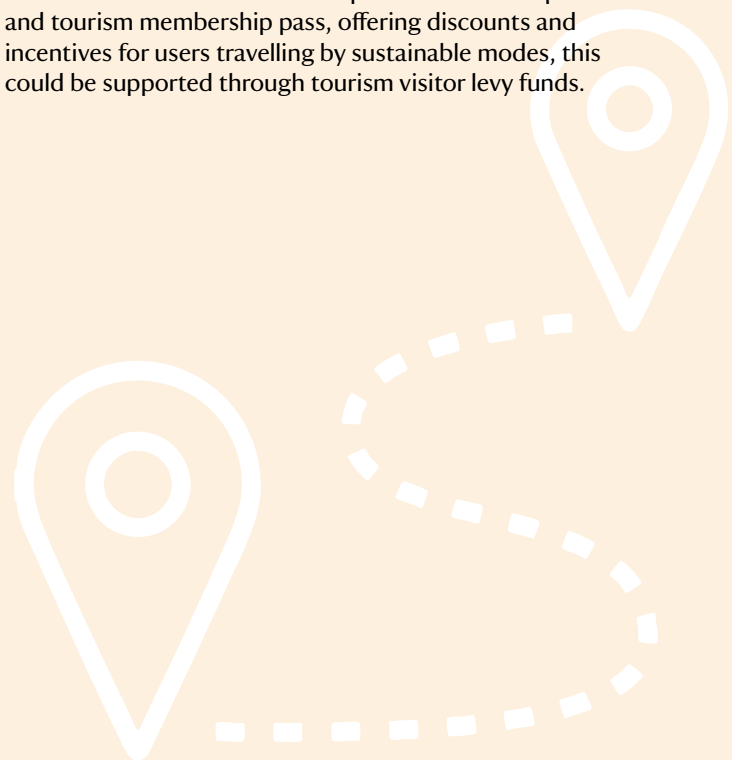
- Prioritise investment in sustainable transport infrastructure in both rural and urban areas to enable people to access services through well-connected and affordable public transport links.
- Build upon the reduced fares pilot for young people by introducing a free public transport scheme for under 25s, supporting equitable access to services across Wales.
- Work with the tourism sector to pilot a Wales transport and tourism membership pass, offering discounts and incentives for users travelling by sustainable modes, this could be supported through tourism visitor levy funds.

Playing our part

Every year more than 500,000 people visit Pen y Fan in Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons), South Wales' highest peak. Yet we know access to this incredible landscape has been heavily reliant on users having a car and a barrier for those without private transport.

We have been exploring sustainable travel options for this special place and we are pleased to be working in partnership with Bannau Brycheiniog National Park and Stagecoach to pilot a £1 bus ticket for journeys between Merthyr Tydfil, Storey Arms and Brecon.

The ticket enables both local communities and visitors to access the service at a reduced rate and benefit from time in the great outdoors.



What do voters think?

61% of voters are concerned their local area has too little public transport infrastructure¹⁰.



4 Future-proof Wales' workforce

If we are to meet our nature and climate targets, Wales needs to invest in green skills, eco-literacy and a workforce that is well-equipped for the future and our transition to a green economy.

We support the ambitions of a national nature service for Wales to connect, build capacity and raise visibility through new roles, paid placements, apprenticeships, education and training, and would like to see this infrastructure built upon in the next Senedd term. Unlocking new opportunities is especially vital in the context of growing unemployment and 1 in 8 jobs being paid less than the real living wage in Wales¹¹.

As well as supporting green skills and jobs, we also urge that more is done to protect our culture sector for the future. For every £1 received by the Arts Council of Wales, £2.51 went back into the economy, yet funding has dropped by 40% in real terms since 2010¹². These financial pressures have led to job insecurity and redundancies across the sector. It is crucial that our national collections and cultural heritage are protected for future generations and that we do not lose valuable heritage craft skills which are critical to the conservation of our nation's precious historic environment.

We need the next Welsh Government to:

- Overhaul the apprenticeship system in Wales and adopt the flexible levy approach used in England, giving employers more choice over fund allocation. This should include a review of tools, functional skill requirements, employer incentives and widening the reach of the levy to reflect hidden costs, helping to reduce blockers to uptake.
- Review Wales' existing apprenticeship frameworks in partnership with sector stakeholders to ensure these are best supporting Wales' nature and climate targets, and addressing the cultural heritage skills gap.
- Prioritise the integration of a national nature service for Wales within future environmental, skills, and wellbeing delivery frameworks.
- Future-proof Wales' workforce with investment in skills development, apprenticeships, and employment pathways that facilitate the transition to a green economy.



Playing our part

We are keen to open up new routes to working at the National Trust and offer a range of apprenticeships in Wales. Our apprenticeships are open to everyone and offer paid work-based learning opportunities, supporting people's journeys into cultural heritage, the natural environment, digital skills, hospitality and more.

As well as formal apprenticeships, we are proud to offer places for our communities to come together, develop new skills, and support nature's recovery.

At Ty Mawr Farm, in the heart of Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, we are committed to working in partnership to create a resilient nature-rich landscape. This includes the creation of a new Skills Hub for countryside skills, where we will be working with local colleges, schools, social justice and community groups to offer practical hands-on experience, fostering deeper connection between people and nature.

The hub will empower people from all backgrounds to contribute to nature's recovery, building a skilled network to protect and enhance the landscape for future generations.

What do voters think?

53% of voters believe the Welsh Government should be doing more to develop heritage-based skills and apprenticeships, with 48% calling for the development of more green jobs in Wales¹³.



5 Empower communities through renewable energy

Renewable energy has a critical role to play in Wales reaching net zero and if the Welsh Government is to hit its target of 100% renewable electricity by 2035, generation must nearly quadruple in the next decade¹⁴.

With growing investment in large-scale renewables projects across Wales, we believe there is a huge opportunity for our own nation to benefit more from sharing its natural resources. In line with the Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group's recommendation, we would like to see greater focus on the use of Community Benefit Funds (CBFs) as part of projects and the opportunities these could bring for the people of Wales.

Whilst some developers already provide CBFs, we believe there is a need to introduce a more formal approach for monitoring, establishing best practice and ensuring communities across Wales benefit, whether that be through an element of local ownership, new skills and training, investment in nature and climate action, and the provision of services such as cultural activities. It is crucial that we create a more resilient energy system and unlock decarbonisation across Wales.

Playing our part

We are committed to investing in greener energy solutions and more than 80% of the energy used at National Trust Cymru places is sourced from renewables. We are proud to share our knowledge, experience and learning with others, including playing our part to support local communities on their renewable energy journey.

In Eryri (Snowdonia), we have supported the development of small-scale hydro schemes and the establishment of community benefit groups – Ynni Padarn Peris, Ynni Anafon Energy and Ynni Ogwen – which generate electricity for the communities and surplus funds are reinvested in environmental and social projects in the area. Through collaboration, we also helped develop Energy Local, enabling more people to benefit from the use of local energy.

We need the next Welsh Government to:

- Introduce a nature, community, and employment skills benefits register and map retaining information across onshore and offshore wind and solar energy developments by the end of 2027.
- Define the criteria for accessing Community Benefit Funds in Wales and best practice principles by 2028, ensuring economic redistribution of income from Wales' natural resources back to communities.
- Ensure funding supports future-proofing Wales' workforce with investment in skills development, apprenticeships, and employment pathways that facilitate the transition to a green economy. This should include the establishment of a cross-sector group of key experts from education, environment, and business to work collaboratively with the Welsh Government in identifying opportunities, areas for development, and community needs.
- Stipulate that all new commercial renewable projects above 5MW offer a minimum level of 10% contribution to this fund for the lifespan of the technology based on modelling of the annual expected generation and current export market value.
- Work with the UK Government and Ofgem to enable Wales level electricity trading by 2035.

What do voters think?

More than half of voters (54%) want more support for communities to access local renewable energy¹⁵.



Get in touch

If you would like any more information or would like to discuss anything in this document, please do get in touch with our Wales External Affairs team.

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