

Rt. Hon. Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas PC

Cadeirydd y Gweithgor Tirweddau'r Dyfodol | Chair of the Future Landscapes Wales Working Group

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Minister for Natural Resources
Welsh Government
Ty Hywel
Pierhead Street
Cardiff Bay CF99 1NA

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Dear Minister

When I accepted the role as Chair of the Future Landscapes Wales working group I agreed to provide you with an interim update prior to the elections to the National Assembly. This note performs that function. It does not pre-judge the conclusions of the Working Group and Project Group activity; they will follow in due course. Instead it illustrates the scope of discussions we have had since January and provides a sense of the broad direction of travel across the whole Future Landscapes Wales programme.

The Marsden report has triggered a significant debate within the Future Landscapes Wales groups about the principles and functions for designated landscapes in a Wales which has a clear focus on the well-being of future generations. Over a relatively short space of time the Future Landscapes Wales programme has taken the Marsden Report, isolated its key themes and recommendations and considered them within the new legislative framework; a context much better understood now than twelve to eighteen months ago. Our deliberations have been driven by an ambitious and collaborative spirit from all participants.

The relationship between people and place has emerged as an important element of well-being; the landscapes of Wales reflect this relationship. Our discussions are considering how designated landscapes both in their present form and any future approaches can be managed to enhance their distinctive qualities using the principles of sustainable management of natural resources as defined in the Environment (Wales) Act in ways which maximise the contribution to the well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

It is clear that new ways of working will need to be adopted. An approach that is underpinned by principles which respect and strengthen the relationship between people and place may lead to better shared outcomes. Such principles are also applicable in areas outside the current designated landscapes.

Flexibility in structures and governance has also been discussed. This approach may better respect the distinctive qualities of landscapes and the balance between national and local interests than the more centrally determined and uniform structures currently available in statute. Possible approaches include, adopting basic standards for governance for any entity associated with an existing area or proposed for a new area. This would then allow for the needs and opportunities of the specific area to determine the precise approach, helping to

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unlock genuinely participatory approaches to landscape management. We have also considered enabling existing statutory authorities or lead bodies to request changes to their structure or status where they can demonstrate that doing so will enhance delivery.

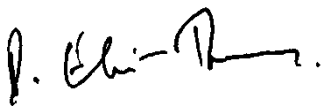
The special qualities of the existing designated landscapes extend beyond a visual amenity interpretation of natural beauty and incorporate the potential for soil, carbon, and water management, and the potential sustainable management of other valuable natural resources. The working group wants a national conversation about Wales' landscapes and their value to the nation. The public should play a part in determining a contemporary interpretation of the special qualities of designated landscapes. The existing designated landscapes should then be able to state clearly the respective special qualities to be enhanced.

The Marsden report drew our attention to the untapped potential for developing new approaches to economic development within these areas. Done effectively such approaches could be replicated across rural Wales. I am pleased to report that these issues are being explored and considered in detail.

Our work is moving in the direction of a flexible, place based, approach which is locally determined within agreed national principles and values. Harnessing the distinctive qualities of landscapes through the sustainable management of natural resources well-being will be maximised. I anticipate us identifying short term actions that can be taken by Government; existing authorities, and partners to improve administration and outcomes, as well as setting a clear direction for the medium to long term.

Wales' landscapes are hugely important and valuable, culturally, socially, environmentally and economically. Our designated landscapes, the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks, contribute to this rich diversity. I am confident that approaches will emerge from the Future Landscapes Wales programme of work to provide a lasting, forward-looking settlement that is grounded in contemporary Welsh legislation.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas

Chair of the Future Landscapes Wales Working Group