

## **Launch of the Welsh Timber Reserve Project**

Presentation given by James Moxey

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Garwnant Visitor Centre

It's so important to communicate the right message when talking about climate change. Our message is clear:

We want Wales to become a high value forest nation. We champion the development of wood based industries for increased prosperity and well-being in Wales. We aim to harness the collective spirit of businesses and organisations to put trees, timber and wood products at the heart of the sustainable growth agenda in Wales. Our ambition is to increase the market for Welsh timber.

The good news is there are a growing number of organisations that share our beliefs and so have joined us in becoming members of Woodknowledge wales. The project we are launching today is the Welsh Timber Reserve. The aim of this project is to collectively explore ways of changing the timber supply chain in Wales. We aim to achieve this through carefully researching the issues that are holding back the supply chain, understanding the market pull for welsh timber, exploring the skills gap and reporting back with solutions developed with our partners. The aim is sustainable growth of business and jobs whilst addressing climate change head on.

The domestic supply chain in Wales, as in the rest of the UK is struggling or as our neighbours have put it, it is chronically undersupplied [1]. Chronic is strong word defined as something ill or of poor quality that has persisted for a long time. The purpose of the Welsh Timber Reserve project is to work towards the creation of a healthy, vibrant and high quality supply chain of timber for construction in Wales We are delighted to have the support of Natural Resources Wales (who are accommodating us here in this fine building), Welsh housing associations and Universities, as well as Powys County Council. We want to grow this partnership and hope this event will provide an impetus for this.

So climate change is on the agenda and the emphasis today is on how Welsh Housing Associations might play a role through catalysing improvement to the supply chain. But a Director of Development in a Housing Association has enough on her or his plate what with planning, lack of suitable land, financial constraints, procurement, universal credit not to mention leaving the EU. And now we are asking them to save the planet.

I want to give some reasons why they should think seriously about timber as a way forward:

- The first is because together we can contribute in terms of global responsibility.
- The second is because of the changing framework of regulation.
- And the third is because of the commercial benefits that timber brings.

The first reason is far reaching: it's out of a sense of **Global Responsibility**. The International Panel on Climate Change gives us 12 years before we reach a tipping point as a result of historical carbon emissions. The impact is felt globally and locally. Yet we can remove carbon from the atmosphere by expanding forest cover and using its timber to build socially affordable housing. The market for locally supplied construction timber can provide the business model that drives that forest expansion and recreates our Forest Nation. Through forest expansion and timber use we demonstrate our sustainable credentials and strengthens our corporate responsibility and reputation. And it's the right thing to do for the generations that will follow us. Many of us feel helpless in taking individual measures to combat climate change but people who work in this sector and within this supply chain are in a unique position to do something about it.

The second reason to consider timber is that **regulations are changing rapidly**. As Sophie Howe, our Future Generation Commissioner says 'Home is where well-being begins'. For those who are obliged to or want to respond to the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations act, timber cuts across most of the pieces of the Well Being goals if not all of them. The recent low carbon pathway for Wales consultation conducted by Welsh government included 45 references to forests, 18

references to housing, and 12 references to timber. Two days ago Welsh government passed climate change legislation which sets ambitious new targets which will impact on individuals and organisations in terms of carbon emissions. And only yesterday Welsh government launched new planning policy which will examine a developers approach to low carbon and decarbonisation. Our representatives in the Senedd are taking climate change very seriously and I congratulate them for it. Their innovative housing program is a direct reflection of this, funding projects aimed at delivering innovative approaches to sustainable housing. We are pleased to see the innovative use of renewable materials as a vital component of this.

The third reason to consider timber is because of the **commercial benefits** it offers in terms of:

- the speed of construction,
- the benefits of precision engineering in an all weather environment,
- the creation of safe, healthy and attractive working environments for our employees,
- the integration of a sustainable and locally sourced renewable material.
- And the opportunity to increase and expand the forest in Wales.

That's the vision for the Welsh Timber Reserve and we need your help to meet the challenge. I am delighted to formally launch the Welsh Timber Reserve project here today.

Thank you.

[1] Why Invest in Irish Forestry? (<https://www.irish-forestry.ie/facts-a-faqs.html#12>)