

Statement from Plantlife - New tree planting must not replace existing habitats of high nature value in Welsh Government's Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS).

25 November 2024

Lizzie Wilberforce, Plantlife Cymru Lead, said: “We welcome Welsh Government's continued commitment to require farmers to manage 10% of their land as habitat for biodiversity if they are to benefit from funding available under the new SFS. This is a bold starting point for achieving the more ambitious action for nature recovery which the SFS will ultimately need to deliver if the Welsh Government is to reverse the decline in biodiversity in Wales. With 90% of Welsh land being farmed, it is essential that agricultural land contributes towards our nature and carbon targets.

It is also encouraging to see permanent species-rich grasslands finally getting the recognition they deserve for their role in delivering additional on-farm carbon sequestration and storage, which had previously been overlooked.

However, Plantlife is concerned that there will not be sufficient support and advice for farmers planning to expand their tree cover which could displace existing habitats of high conservation value or high restoration potential, undermining the scheme's delivery for nature and climate.

In addition, we would urge Welsh Government to put in place sufficient finance to provide a full programme of nature focused actions in the Optional layer of SFS, on top of the funding which is being promised for tree planting and carbon sequestration actions.

We look forward to working closely with Welsh Government to ensure that the scheme delivers for nature, climate action and farmers as they transition towards more sustainable farming.”