



Ein cyf/Our ref SG/05795/26

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Dear Gareth,

Thank you for your correspondence of 20 August to the Cabinet Minister for Rural Resilience and Sustainability, regarding recent issues discussed at a public meeting of residents of Pendine, which fall under my portfolio.

Fly camping and wild camping are generally unlawful unless the landowner has granted permission. Camping without consent constitutes trespass, which is a civil matter. However, where an individual refuses to leave when requested to do so by the landowner or their representative, they may be committing a criminal offence, such as aggravated trespass.

We encourage those travelling by motorhome, touring caravan or tent to use established caravan and camping sites, which provide appropriate facilities and help minimise impacts on local communities and the environment.

I understand the concern the wildfire in the Pendine area has caused in the community and I have considered the points you have raised.

1. The adequacy of local authority emergency powers in response to repeated rural fire risks.

Responding to fires is a matter for the Fire and Rescue Service and, if a crime may have been committed, the Police. Both are fully empowered to do so, and there is no obvious need for local authorities also to have functions in this area.

2. The protection of critical rural utility infrastructure and SSSI-designated land.

We recognise concerns about the potential impact of wildfires on electricity infrastructure. Managing these risks is a key responsibility of electricity network operators, who undertake a range of activities to strengthen network resilience and work closely with emergency responders and other public services to prepare for and respond to wildfire incidents. This helps to minimise disruption to electricity supplies and restore power as quickly as possible where outages occur. Welsh Government is also working across policy areas through its resilience and adaptation programmes to improve understanding of climate-related risks, including wildfires, and to strengthen the resilience of critical energy infrastructure across Wales.

In terms of the protection of water supply assets from wildfires, if such infrastructure is threatened, there would be a concerted effort to protect them, as is done for other types of infrastructure. Water companies are Category Two responders under the Civil Contingencies Act, and a request for protecting such sites would be through Local Resilience Forums which water companies are members of.

The Welsh Government recognises that wildfires pose a significant and increasing risk to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), with the potential to cause extensive damage to protected habitats, species and landscape features. Reducing wildfire risk and improving the resilience of protected sites is therefore an important part of our wider approach to nature recovery, climate adaptation and land management.

We work closely with Natural Resources Wales (NRW), land managers, Fire and Rescue Services and other partners to support measures that help prevent wildfires, improve preparedness and minimise impacts where incidents occur. This includes promoting appropriate land management and habitat restoration activities that can reduce fuel loads and strengthen the resilience of vulnerable landscapes.

The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) will support these objectives by encouraging sustainable land management practices that contribute to healthier and more resilient habitats. Measures such as appropriate grazing and vegetation management have the potential to help reduce wildfire risk while supporting the long-term conservation of SSSI-designated land.

As wildfire risk increases as a result of climate change, the Welsh Government will continue to work with NRW and partners to strengthen prevention, preparedness and response arrangements, helping to ensure that Wales's most important protected sites are safeguarded.

3. Financial support for community councils facing disproportionate costs arising from such incidents.

Community Councils should work with their local authorities in response to emergency incidents. Local Authorities have access to the Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme if it is opened for an incident.

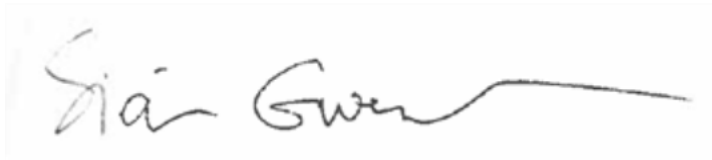
4. The establishment of a Wales-wide multi-agency rural crime and resilience framework.

The Prif Weinidog will convene a multi-agency summit later this year to consider wildfire risk in Wales. The summit will bring partners together to identify practical actions to reduce the likelihood and impact of wildfires and to make sure Wales is as well prepared as possible to respond effectively when incidents occur.

5. Whether the Welsh Government intends to engage with the UK Government on the question of enhanced legal protections and emergency powers where deliberate actions threaten critical infrastructure and essential public services.

I believe the powers to deal with deliberate fire-setting are adequate – such behaviour is normally charged as arson. The court would take into account the extent of damage caused and the risk to life in passing sentence, the maximum penalty for arson is imprisonment for life. It is entirely possible that someone who deliberately started a serious fire that destroyed critical infrastructure and put many lives at risk would receive a life sentence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Siân Gwenllïan', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Siân Gwenllïan AS/MS

Gweinidog Cabinet dros Lywodraeth Leol, Tai a Chynllunio
Cabinet Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning