



**National  
Trust**

Cymdeithas Defaid Mynydd Cymreig  
Welsh Mountain Sheep Society

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23 Mehefin/June 2025

Dear Society,

Thank you for your letter dated 12th June 2025, which was handed to me at the Hill Farming Event at Hafod y Llan. An event which the National Trust is proud to have hosted on behalf of the Caernarfonshire RWAS County.

I note your concerns in relation to the National Trust's approach to sheep numbers on our holdings in Eryri, and will try to explain the context and the rationale relating to local decisions made by our teams.

Both our new and outgoing strategies have underlined the important role which The National Trust should play in facing into both the challenges of nature degradation and the impacts of climate change both on and off our land. The National Trust owns just over 1% of all land in Wales, England and Northern Ireland, and as such we have a significant role to play in combating these challenges. However, as I made clear in my speech at the Hill Farming Event, we want to carry out this task by working collaboratively and in partnerships. We are also clear that we first need to take serious steps forward in improving the condition of our own land – where we can practically do so.

Restoring nature is a cornerstone of our new strategy, a strategy devised through an open process, involving tens of thousands of people, members of the public giving their views and ultimately providing us with a clear view on where our focus should be directed over the next decade. As I explained, our mission is not just to protect and preserve land in our care it is also to inspire current and future generations to join us in that endeavor, through which we hope people will be inspired to care for nature and the countryside.

We are aware that many of our tenants have hefted Welsh Mountain flocks, indeed we ourselves manage several flocks at Hafod y Llan, Gelli Iago and Foel in Cwm Penmachno. As you will know, the reductions in flock numbers have taken place not just on National Trust land but on land across the whole of Wales and that these changes are as a result of the changes in subsidy arrangements over the last 20 years. These changes were from headage payments to the introduction of agri-environment schemes including Tir Cymen, Tir Gofal and most recently Glastir.

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Going forward, I understand that the Sustainable Farming Scheme will be an important introduction in this difficult period of hiatus. We are aware that many of our own tenants are already adapting to the changing economic and political environment and have taken the step to reduce livestock numbers in order to comply with agri-environment schemes. In some cases this has meant they have changed breed and farming system entirely. They have in many instances introduced these changes into their farming businesses with absolutely no intervention from the National Trust but rather because they feel such moves benefit their businesses and they believe the changes are the right thing to do. These changes have occurred nationally across all land in Wales, whether National Trust or not. As we heard from several speakers at the Hill Farming event, urgent change is necessary for so many reasons.

I was surprised to read your statement that our land management practices have directly contributed to a reduction in certain bird species. In discussion with our local team and in our wider relationship with RSPB – who we proudly partner in several initiatives locally – I understand that our conservation efforts are particularly suited to the survival of species such as the curlew.

Lyme disease is of course a concern for everyone who enjoys walking in the outdoors, and the increases in number of ticks are likely to be attributable to a whole range of factors – not least climate change. However, where vegetation has increased and ticks as a result also increased, it's only fair to point out that this again has occurred across all land, whether National Trust or not.

On the topic of sheep numbers, we do not have a blanket policy or approach. Where we are letting farms, we look at stocking densities on a case by case basis, reflecting the condition of the land and the habitats on each holding. As such, some holdings are let with a minimal reduction (if at all) and others with a greater level of change.

We have excellent data to support the significant improvements in diversity of species - and abundance – where we have implemented such changes. Our most recent letting has seen a re-introduction of cattle grazing, using no-fence collars to effectively and efficiently manage distribution of animals, which is already seeing good results.

As you will know, the National Trust in Wales has recently let a number of holdings that include Welsh Mountain sheep, and these lettings are conducted in a clear, open and transparent way. It was our specific intention when filming Our Dream Farm with Channel 4, with which I was closely involved, to highlight the challenges posed to new entrants, but we are all highly confident that we have chosen a wonderful young couple, who will contribute to the local economy, to society, and the Welsh language.

A similar farm has been let since then, and again a local young family have secured the tenancy. We recognise and celebrate the culture of Wales, and the very special agricultural context of our culture in Eryri. This is about preparing ourselves for change – which no one is suggesting is easy – for a brighter future in the industry, and ensuring we succeed in getting the right type of farming in the right places, that ensures nature and people are able

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to thrive. I have asked the local team to initiate discussions with your Society, and thank you for raising your concerns so clearly.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Giles Hunt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Giles Hunt  
Land & Estates Director

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