

Usk Valley Conservation Group, regd charity no 1199730

“working together to protect & conserve the environment & wildlife of the Usk valley for the benefit of our communities and future generations”

Vaughan Gething MS,
Minister for the Economy,
Welsh Government
5th Floor, Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA
14th October 2022

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your ref: TO/VG/01278/22

Welsh Government purchase of Gilestone Farm

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the letter dated 6th October from Gerwyn Evans, Deputy Director, Creative Wales. The Usk Valley Conservation Group has submitted information to both the Public Accounts Committee and yourself challenging the extent to which the Green Man festival benefits the economy of Wales: the principal reason given for the investment in Gilestone Farm. In summary, the value claimed does not stand up to common sense scrutiny. For example:

Caterers	Over 70% were from England
Performers	78% were from outside of Wales
Services	78% were from England

The value of the festival to the Welsh economy ‘outside the festival site’ is quoted as £0.5M. Even this is excessive as it will include spend in the hospitality sector which would anyway be operating at near capacity in the summer season. Overall, it looks like Welsh Government subsidies support the English economy a great deal more than the Welsh economy. Respectfully we suggest that a future of confrontation with farming and environmental interests as well as the community can be avoided by considering alternative uses that might also be more effective in delivering Welsh Government policy.

We have at the forefront of our minds the ‘green’ and ‘climate change’ ambitions of the Welsh Government and suggest the Government should explore the use of the farm by organisations with skills in sustainable/green agriculture and biodiversity. One such is the Fathom Trust (<https://fathomtrust.com/>, that provides services to NHS Wales staff and patients and others needing physical, mental and spiritual support. The Trust has a business plan and is known to be interested in the site. Another might be Tir Natur (<https://www.tirnatur.cymru/>). It is a rewilding charity, set up to address the nature & climate crises in Wales. It stresses the key role of large grazers in rewilding, and showcase how farming has an important role to play in restoring nature.

Can the Minister confirm that due process will include proper consideration of alternative uses for the farm?

Yours sincerely,
Peter Seaman and Phil Darbyshire
Co-chairs, Usk Valley Conservation Group

Copied to: Lee Waters MS, deputy Minister for climate change and natural resources management
Leslie Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs
Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS, First Minister
Public Accounts and Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committees