



The Welsh Environmental Horticulture Manifesto:

Priorities for a Future Welsh Government from the HTA

February 2026



What is Environmental Horticulture?

The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) represents 44 member businesses across 70 sites in Wales, and around 1,400 businesses across the United Kingdom.

We are the original green industry and the gardens, green spaces and plants that we grow, nurture and maintain, underpin the health and resilience of Welsh communities, the economy and the environment. In 2023, the environmental horticulture industry supported contributions of £1.8bn to GDP in Wales (excl. garden tourism) and supported 37,000 jobs¹. This has the potential to grow to £2.1bn by 2030.

This document builds on the HTA's Welsh Growth Strategy (hta.org.uk/policy/wales), and the work we have previously undertaken in collaboration with the Welsh Government and other stakeholders.

HTA key asks of the Welsh Government

- Recognise the value of gardens and green spaces by developing a Horticulture Strategy.
- Establish an Environmental Horticulture and Green Spaces Group to enhance cross-departmental working.
- Ringfence funds for green spaces to protect against shortfalls or budget cuts in project delivery.
- Improve police response times in rural locations and simplify the reporting processes for businesses.
- Raise the threshold for the higher business rates multiplier and apply it to sites with a Rateable Value of over £500,000.
- Implement consistent kerbside collections across Wales and include recyclable non-black plastic plant pots.
- Improve financial support for environmental horticulture businesses.
- Unlock barriers and deliver consistency in planning applications for environmental horticulture businesses.
- Develop an action plan for ornamental and productive plant and tree production to support UK-based plant production.
- Introduce a Statutory Requirement to 'Grow Plants' into the Curriculum for Wales.
- Build on the UK Government's Jobs Guarantee Scheme and go further with employment support for Welsh businesses.

This sector generally encompasses the following specific activities:



Supply of garden goods



Arboriculture



Landscape services



Garden tourism



Ornamental plant production



Wholesale of garden products and flowers



Retailing of garden products, plants and cut flowers



Priority Areas for Action



Protecting and Supporting Communities

Environmental horticulture protects and supports communities through its economic, environmental, health and wellbeing contributions. We welcome the Welsh Government's ambition to bring together policy priorities across government to deliver long-term benefits in line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Organisations like Keep Wales Tidy, Social Farms and Gardens, and the Local Places for Nature Programme are excellent examples of how local people working together can deliver both individual and collective wellbeing and improve their surrounding environment. With nearly 70% of Welsh adults having visited a garden centre in the last year², these businesses function as vital community hubs, and create opportunities to socialise, educate and share horticultural expertise. But we also need the right policy landscape to support the sector and help it to grow, delivering more positive outcomes for more communities across Wales. To deliver this, the Welsh Government should:

- **Recognise and maximise the value of gardens and green spaces across key policy areas by developing and implementing a holistic Horticulture Strategy and strengthen cross-departmental working through the establishment of an Environmental Horticulture and Green Spaces Group.** The group should convene representatives from industry, the third sector, environmental agencies, local authorities, and government officials from relevant portfolios to ensure that access to, and maintenance of, green spaces and infrastructure are considered across policymaking and delivery. This group could be delivered through an expanded version of Farming Connect's Welsh Horticulture Alliance Group and could oversee the delivery of the Environmental Horticulture and Green Spaces Strategy. Workstreams could include exploring the potential of establishing legal protection for green spaces, and maintenance standards requirements for them. This would ensure that vital green infrastructure is protected and maintained for future generations.
- **Ringfence funds for planting greenery and green spaces, to protect against potential shortfalls or budget cuts in project delivery, ensuring that tenders and contracts are fully realised and commitments to Welsh and UK sourcing are met.** We welcome the Welsh Government's recognition of the value of gardens and green spaces for supporting healthy communities in the Healthy Wales delivery plan 2025 to 2027, but the delivery and maintenance of these spaces must be prioritised by central government and local authorities, and supported with tangible action to secure and maintain funding. 81% of Welsh adults say that gardens and public green spaces benefit their physical health, and 86% note the benefit to their mental health².
- **Improve police response times, especially to rural locations, and simplify the reporting processes for businesses.** Over 70% of garden centres report crime as an issue, and many have invested significantly in theft-prevention measures. Response times and the crime reporting process make it difficult for businesses to engage and could be made more efficient, particularly for tracking organised criminal activity that often moves across jurisdictional boundaries. Wales could lead the way in coordinating efforts across police forces, and with forces across the rest of the UK, by adopting a single app for reporting crime and standardising reporting processes. Business confidence in reporting crime would be further improved if there was clear guidance from police forces on what information retailers must provide for successful identification. Currently, businesses are spending considerable time gathering evidence, only to be told it is insufficient for an investigation to be made.

84% of Welsh adults say that it's important for them to be able to access gardens and public green spaces².



Creating the Conditions for Growth

98% of our Welsh members are SMEs, many of which are family-owned businesses, however rising costs and the burden of regulation are hampering their ability to invest and grow. Many businesses report a 'never harder' or 'perfect storm' of costs which reduce their ability to invest, hire staff, and innovate. All cost reductions and efficiencies have been expended. The Welsh Government could take some medium-term actions to help alleviate cost pressures on SMEs in the sector. The HTA asks the Welsh Government to:

- **Deliver a business rates system across Wales that does not undermine competitiveness across the four nations, by raising the threshold for the higher multiplier to mirror England and apply to sites with a Rateable Value (RV) of over £500,000.** Overhauling the business rates system, to ensure fair and accurate valuations from the outset, must remain a priority. As must ensuring that garden centres continue to be eligible for the retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) rates relief. The Welsh Retail Consortium note that Welsh retailers face the highest multiplier in Great Britain, and with plans to introduce a higher multiplier for sites with an RV of over £100,000, HTA member garden centres will likely see their bills increase even more under the current proposals.
- **Implement consistent kerbside collections across all Local Authorities in Wales, similar to England's Simpler Recycling for households, which explicitly include recyclable non-black plastic plant pots, to ensure that garden centres are not facing additional costs and administration of disposing of household waste.** This will free up funds that can be invested elsewhere in the business, support the delivery of the government's circular economy ambitions and strengthen Wales' position as a world leader in household waste recycling. Closer alignment with England on this would address additional burdens businesses in the sector face while creating a level playing field with businesses across the border.



Driving Productivity, Employment and Investment

The debate around the economy and the environment is becoming increasingly polarised, with one often seen as taking precedence over the other. Achieving economic growth and increasing productivity, while tackling climate change and getting to net zero should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Businesses have an important role to play in helping deliver both, but need the right policy landscape to enable them to make necessary investments and adjustments to contribute to net zero delivery and growing resilience. Ensuring SMEs do not get left behind in the move to net zero and increasing the adoption of AI and automation are vital to deliver sustainable growth and better jobs to communities across Wales. Horticultural businesses, whilst prepared to invest, often can't raise the finance required to invest quickly enough, especially given the volatility of demand related to weather, which makes businesses subject to short-term fluctuations in revenue.

Productivity, employment and investment could be further improved if the Welsh Government:

- Work with the sector to improve financial support for SMEs in environmental horticulture, focusing on water resilience, peat-free growing, energy efficiency, automation, and technology.**

Work with Whitehall to create a central government funding pot to support productivity and sustainability, ensuring that garden centre retailers (often excluded from existing horticultural grants) are explicitly included. A greater appreciation of the different requirements for edible horticulture, environmental horticulture, and farming, which is reflected in the phrasing of grant opportunities and guidance, would also improve clarity for businesses. Simplifying application processes, increasing lead times, improving communication about grant availability, and ensuring that the minimum investment requirements are manageable would increase grant uptake, improve competitiveness, and deliver environmental and economic returns in a shorter timeframe.

- Unlock barriers in the planning system to deliver consistency in the treatment of planning applications for environmental horticulture businesses who deliver green growth.** We welcome the work currently being undertaken in this area, but it is vital that commercial horticulture production and garden centre retail are also represented. A more agile, responsive, system that allows sites to be retrofitted, particularly to make buildings more energy efficient would be welcomed. Reviewing the resourcing of planning officers would help to reduce costs and delays in the system. This would create more sustainable space to conduct business operations – resulting in better environmental and economic returns on investment.

- Develop an action plan for ornamental and productive plant and tree production, working across the nations and across sectors to identify activities that will support UK-based plant production.** This should include assessing raw material supply, skills gaps, and grant support for non-forestry production.

The Welsh Government could lead the way in modelling the demand for trees, and issuing multi-year contracts to nurseries to fulfil native tree planting targets, supported by government grants. A feasibility study could also be conducted to highlight which imported plants and trees could be grown in the UK.

- Introduce a Statutory Requirement to 'Grow Plants' into the Curriculum for Wales.** Horticulture and engagement with nature help to build confidence and creativity, foster awareness of geography and the wider environment, and teach young people healthy, fulfilling habits that carry forward into adulthood.

The industry takes the lead in inspiring the next generation of horticulturists, for example, HTA members Old Railway Line Garden Centre support local school gardening projects by donating plants, seeds, compost, and equipment, and by offering practical advice to help schools establish and maintain their own gardens. There is significant work underway across Wales to drive school gardening; however, this must be centrally overseen and embedded in the curriculum, to ensure that each child has the opportunity to grow a plant and benefit from these experiences. Our sector is ideally placed to support this.

- Build on the UK Government's recently announced Jobs Guarantee Scheme and conduct an impact assessment of the Kickstart Scheme to identify how many people were placed (and stayed) in work for a period of 6 months as a result of the Scheme.** Wales has the highest unemployment rate of the four nations in the UK, and Welsh businesses need staff. The Welsh Government must be bolder and go further. Environmental horticulture has a huge range of roles available for different ages, abilities and employment needs however, rising employment costs, including wage rises and changes to employer national insurance contributions, have made it more difficult for businesses to invest in new staff. The Kickstart Scheme gave employers an opportunity to hire staff who may not have otherwise met employment criteria, with many businesses reporting that these members of staff continued for years after the Scheme ended.

1. The Economic Impact of Environmental Horticulture and Landscaping in the UK (Oxford Economics for the Environmental Horticulture Group, 2024)
2. Independent survey of 4,031 UK adults aged 16+ (December 2024)

More information: hta.org.uk/policy

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HTA Welsh Growth Strategy hta.org.uk/policy/wales

HTA Strong Roots report hta.org.uk/strong-roots