# Welsh Government faces dilemma as rare ospreys disrupt Gilestone Farm development plans



The purchase of Gilestone Farm by the Welsh Government has become a complex saga intertwining environmental conservation and economic development, marked by controversy and unexpected ecological developments. Acquired in March 2022 for £4.25 million, the intention was to secure the farm as a supportive venue for the Green Man music festival, a key element in the government’s strategy to bolster the creative sector in Wales.

However, plans took an unforeseen turn when it was discovered that a pair of ospreys—now a protected species—had established nests on the property in August 2023, the first such occurrence in South Wales in over 200 years. This significant ecological find necessitated the implementation of a 750-metre restriction zone around their nest, effectively sidelining the initial festival-related plans. In early 2024, Welsh economy director general Andrew Slade confirmed the birds' return this spring, including the remarkable news that they had laid an egg shortly after arriving. He stated, “Members of the committee will appreciate the significance of the nesting ospreys at the site and I can confirm the ospreys have recently returned…”

While the valuation of Gilestone Farm stood at £3.75 million as of March 2022, Slade noted that the presence of the ospreys “inevitably brings some uncertainty.” The ongoing tenancy of the farm—yielding approximately £32,000 annually—continues until November, with future possibilities under consideration, all highly influenced by the birds’ welfare.

Scrutiny has arisen regarding the haste with which the initial purchase decision was made. An Audit Wales review uncovered that ministers acted with “avoidable haste,” exacerbated by an urgency to fully utilise an underspend in budgetary allocations before the financial year concluded. Critics assert that a more thorough due diligence process could have mitigated the financial risks involved in such a substantial outlay.

The former economy minister, Vaughan Gething, acknowledged the challenges posed by the ospreys’ nesting, recognising the need to safeguard both the birds and potential economic activities on the farm. His department has undertaken measures such as the commissioning of an Osprey Conservation Plan, aimed at balancing the ecological significance of the site with sustainable economic development.

The developments have not only drawn attention to ecological concerns but also ignited local tensions. Residents and farmers have expressed their opposition to the proposed festival lease, arguing that large-scale events could disrupt the local environment and exacerbate community issues. They have called for a more consultative and inclusive approach to ensure that decisions align with local interests and the preservation of the ecological integrity of the area.

In summary, the saga of Gilestone Farm highlights the intricate balance between economic ambition and environmental stewardship. As discussions evolve within the Welsh Government regarding the future use of the farm, the emphasis remains on protecting the nesting ospreys while exploring sustainable pathways forward, reflecting ongoing conflicts between development aspirations and ecological priorities.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraphs 1, 2
3. Paragraphs 1, 2
4. Paragraphs 1, 4
5. Paragraphs 4
6. Paragraphs 1, 4
7. Paragraph 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25163251.ospreys-return-gilestone-farm-mired-4-25m-controversy/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-politics-64474584> - In March 2022, the Welsh Government purchased Gilestone Farm in Powys for £4.25 million, aiming to support the Green Man music festival's expansion. However, the Auditor General for Wales criticized the decision-making process, stating that the haste to utilize unspent funds influenced the purchase. The report emphasized that a more thorough due diligence process could have been beneficial, and that the Welsh Government accepted financial risks that might have been avoided with a more measured approach.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2024-01-29/green-man-plans-for-farm-halted-after-ospreys-discovered> - In August 2023, a pair of ospreys, a protected species, were discovered nesting at Gilestone Farm, marking the first such occurrence in South Wales in over 200 years. This discovery led to the Welsh Government halting plans to lease the farm to the Green Man Festival, as a 750-meter restricted zone was required around the nest, limiting human activity on the site. Economy Minister Vaughan Gething expressed surprise and delight at the nesting, emphasizing the birds' welfare and the need for protection.
4. <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-future-gilestone-farm> - In January 2024, Economy Minister Vaughan Gething announced that the Welsh Government had learned of a pair of ospreys nesting at Gilestone Farm in August 2023. Recognizing the significance of this development, the government prioritized the birds' welfare, implementing surveillance and site security measures. An Osprey Conservation Plan was commissioned to advise on managing the site alongside sustainable economic development. The government extended the existing Farm Business Tenancy to facilitate discussions on the farm's future use, aiming to balance conservation with economic opportunities.
5. <https://www.sky.com/story/green-man-festival-nesting-ospreys-force-welsh-government-to-axe-its-163425m-gilestone-farm-plans-in-powys-13059407> - In January 2024, the Welsh Government's plans to lease Gilestone Farm to the Green Man Festival were disrupted after a pair of nesting ospreys were discovered on the site. The ospreys' presence necessitated a 750-meter restricted zone, limiting human activity and rendering the original plans unfeasible. Economy Minister Vaughan Gething acknowledged the challenge but emphasized the government's commitment to sustainable development and the protection of the ospreys, indicating that alternative uses for the farm would be explored.
6. <https://www.gov.wales/atisn16316> - In June 2022, the Welsh Government responded to a Freedom of Information request regarding the purchase of Gilestone Farm. The response confirmed that the farm was acquired for £4.25 million for economic development purposes, without an open tendering process. The government had not entered into an agreement with Fiona Stewart and the Green Man Festival at that time. The purchase was made to support the growth of the creative sector in Wales, aligning with the government's economic ambitions.
7. <https://www.fwi.co.uk/business/farmers-join-move-to-block-festival-on-government-owned-farm> - In January 2024, farmers and local residents expressed opposition to the Welsh Government's plans to lease Gilestone Farm to the Green Man Festival. Concerns included the potential environmental impact of large-scale events, the suitability of the site for such activities, and the lack of consultation with the local community. The group emphasized the need for sustainable development that aligns with the environment and the community's interests, advocating for a more transparent and inclusive decision-making process.