

Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee

EPC (2) 12-06(p10)

Date: 28 September 2006

Venue: Committee Room 2, Senedd, Cardiff Bay

**Paper from the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) for Item 10:
Environment Strategy Action Plan – outcomes and funding; management of
designated sites (11.50am – 12.30pm)**

Progress, Issues And Challenges For Ccw In Delivering The Targets Set Out In The Wales Environment Strategy

The Countryside Council for Wales is the Government's statutory advisor on sustaining natural beauty, wildlife and the opportunity for outdoor enjoyment in Wales and its inshore waters. It champions the environment and landscapes of Wales and its coastal waters as sources of natural and cultural riches, as a foundation for economic and social activity, and as a place for leisure and learning opportunities. We aim to make the environment a valued part of everyone's life in Wales.

The environment is a strategic national resource for Wales. Important for its own sake, it also helps contribute £9 billion to the GDP of Wales. It supports our very existence and shapes our lives, providing an essential service function in society: it provides the very basis for our existence in terms of air, water and soil resources. The environment is also essential to our ability to produce food and fibre; produce other resources for development; enjoy life in terms of space, recreation and leisure, playing an important role in our physical health and mental well-being. Investing in our 'green infrastructure' will make a significant contribution to social and economic well-being, nationally and locally.

CCW welcomes the Environment Strategy for Wales, which provides a strategic framework to integrate environmental objectives with socio-economic objectives outlined within other strategic plans. These include the Sustainable Development Scheme and Wales Spatial Plan at a national and regional level and Community Strategies, National Park and AONB Management Plans at local level. Making the connections between social, economic and environmental objectives is critical to ensuring integrated and more efficient delivery of services in support of sustainable development. Well thought out environmental policies also provide opportunities for innovation, create new markets and increase competitiveness through greater resource efficiency and new investment opportunities, as well as facilitating a reduction in our ecological footprint. This approach recognises that the environment has a limitation on its use in terms of natural resource capacity constraints and there is a need to respect these limits and mitigate impacts. Effective environmental management can also provide financial gains through improving business performance and competitiveness.

CCW is committed to taking forward the actions for which we are responsible and to supporting partners in delivering other actions. Implementation of the Strategy will

require connectivity across sectors and services, collaborative and partnership working and the pooling of resources to deliver shared outcomes - an approach supported by the public service reform agenda ('Making the Connections' and the Beecham Review 'Beyond Boundaries: Citizen-Centred Services for Wales'). The Wales Environment Strategy (WES) Action Plan facilitates this by setting out clear roles and responsibilities for CCW and other organisations.

Within this context, interpreting the WES at a local and regional level through the community planning and spatial planning processes is a current priority. CCW has a key role to play in helping progress key WES actions both with respect to direct delivery and in undertaking an integrating and enabling role at a national, regional and local level.

CCW is leading on 6 of the actions and is a partner in delivering an additional 25 actions. CCW is also already involved in a supporting or advisory role in the delivery of another 16 actions. Internal processes and strategies are currently being realigned to ensure that we are fit for purpose to deliver the WES within the wider context of the reform of public service delivery in Wales.

Annex 1 summarises our progress on key actions, and the issues and challenges in delivering these.

Paper For The Epc Committee On 28 September 2006

Annex 1: Ccw's Progress, Identifying Issues And Challenges, In Delivering The Actions Set Out In The Environment Strategy

ACTION NO.	ACTION	CCW LEAD	MILESTONES	WORK TO DATE/ISSUES/CHALLENGES
19	Rollout CCW's green space toolkit to increase the quality and quantity of public green space in Wales	Pete Frost	<p>By end March 2007 - Pilot toolkit in a large urban and a rural authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW • Partners: Local authorities <p>By end 2007 - Complete assessment of pilots and adjust toolkit as appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW • Partners: Local authorities <p>• By Mar 2008 - Begin rollout of toolkit across all Local authorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW / Local authorities <p>Aim for all local authorities to be participating in the Green Flag Award Scheme by end 2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW / Civic Trust 	<p>Planning Toolkit launched in May 2006 and rollout begun. Seminar held with Heads of Valleys (HoV) local authorities in July 2006 to promote a joint greenspace assessment for the HoV area using the toolkit. Toolkit figures prominently in the consultation draft of TAN 16 on Leisure, Recreation and Open Space.</p> <p>Issues and Challenges</p> <p>CCW hopes that the five HoV local authorities will do a joint greenspace assessment, but funding may delay progress and this is where the Assembly could help. CCW is constrained in giving grant aid at a rate of 50% maximum to local authorities but, because green spaces do not appear a high priority for funding in local authorities, they are reluctant to fund much of the follow-up works from the assessments. Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund are obvious targets for funding applications by local authorities and the greenspace assessments provide the evidence to support those bids.</p>
27	We will work with	Jont Bulbeck	By May 2006 - Identify main	Action completed. WAG has announced decision for

ACTION NO.	ACTION	CCW LEAD	MILESTONES	WORK TO DATE/ISSUES/CHALLENGES
	<p>key partners – including CCW, National Parks and local government – to increase public access to the coast of Wales.</p>		<p>options to improve coastal access in Wales and determine way forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW • Partners: WAG (ECM) <p>By Mar 2009 - Increased access to the coast will be secured in partnership with key stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: WAG (ECM) • Partners: CCW, local authorities, National Park authorities, user groups, landowners and their representatives 	<p>taking forward a Coastal Access Improvement Programme.</p> <p>Main programme of work is expected to be completed within 4-5 years, commencing April 2007. CCW identified as the lead for the project's management and co-ordination. WAG will continue to provide the strategic lead for the project.</p> <p>A Stakeholders Group convened by WAG has already met and is expected to continue to advise WAG (and CCW) during the life of the project. A CCW project board (including CCW and WAG) is to be formed to oversee the management of the project.</p> <p>Issues and Challenges</p> <p>CCW's advice to WAG identified the need for additional resources. WAG officers have made budget bids for additional resources as part of the Assembly's budget process. Resource allocations will be confirmed in due course. Securing EU structural funding is being investigated.</p>

ACTION NO.	ACTION	CCW LEAD	MILESTONES	WORK TO DATE/ISSUES/CHALLENGES
32	<p>We will bring designated sites into favourable or recovering condition through a suite of measures aimed at delivering more sympathetic management. Measures will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying land owned by the public sector, conservation charities and other organisations •management agreements • sharing best practice • targeting of agri-environment schemes 	<p>David Parker/Hazel Drewett/Christine Edwards</p>	<p>By July 2006 - produce a plan that will refocus existing expenditure in order to bring international sites and SSSI into favourable management and implement the plan immediately it is produced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW / WAG (ECM) • Partners: WAG, FCW, EAW, voluntary sector, WBP, WCMP <p>From April 2006 onwards - Monitor all International site and SSSI features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW • Partners: EAW, JNCC, land owners, voluntary sector 	<p>CCW group, with wide HQ and regional representation, established to take this work forward. This work has been carried out with support from the Nature Conservation Branch, (ECM). Latest version of the plan sent to WAG on 11/8/06. CCW held an event on the CCW stand at the RWAS on 26/7/06, where we told stakeholders about the target and our work to date, and initiated the process of working together towards agreed plans and actions. Feedback was positive. Workshop planned for November 2006 when we will encourage stakeholders to consider how they will contribute to meeting the target.</p> <p>Issues and Challenges</p> <p>The success in delivering this target is not down to CCW alone. The Welsh Assembly Government, the wider public sector and NGOs have their part to play in achieving the outcome. Achieving favourable management does not wholly rest on provision of adequate financial resources, but also depends on changing policy and practice. CCW is working hard to find new ways of refocusing expenditure and working with partners to achieve favourable management on designated sites. Much can be delivered through effective delivery of favourable management through Tir Gofal and higher tier agri-environment measures, and this advice has been</p>

ACTION NO.	ACTION	CCW LEAD	MILESTONES	WORK TO DATE/ISSUES/CHALLENGES
				<p>given to the Minister. However, CCW also needs to find more resources for Section 15 management agreements - this will form part of our internal resource planning round in October 2006. Significant additional money is not required immediately, and we are working with the Welsh Assembly Government on this and the associated staff resources.</p> <p>An immediate priority that CCW is currently addressing is the enhancement of data systems for designated sites. At present it is not easy for CCW to provide timely and up-to-date information on some aspects of site management, and this will be essential to maintaining the partnership we wish to establish, and to driving forward the programme of improvements required.</p>
33	We will set priorities for landscape scale projects in order to build up the resilience of biodiversity to adapt to climate change, including habitat restoration and	Russell Elliot/Jim Latham	<p>By end 2007 - Review of mechanisms completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW • Partners: WBP, WAG, landowners, voluntary sector <p>By end 2009 - Priorities and means of collaborating in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: CCW 	CCW has endorsed an integrated rural development approach to inform an integrated, multifunctional approach to the strategic planning of our green infrastructure and its integration with socio-economic objectives. We will work with partners to develop pilot projects, using our experimental powers to test new and innovative solutions with a view to replicating them in the wider countryside.

ACTION NO.	ACTION	CCW LEAD	MILESTONES	WORK TO DATE/ISSUES/CHALLENGES
	review the mechanisms that support this.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners: WBP, WAG, voluntary sector 	<p>A group has been drawn together within CCW to consider ecological connectivity and its application in Wales. Enhanced ecological connectivity is necessary to achieve key biodiversity objectives in the Strategy. Of particular relevance are EU/IUCN goals to stem biodiversity loss by 2010, to establish favourable conservation status of the SSSI network, and to adapt the rural environment in the face of the changing climate.</p> <p>Issues and Challenges</p> <p>Securing the engagement of partners is the main challenge in achieving this action.</p> <p>Policy development to allow targeting of action (e.g. through agri-environment schemes) to achieve improved connectivity.</p>
43	We will use CCW's landscape characterisation work as the potential basis for assessing the impacts of different land management choices	Keith Davies/Richard Kelly	<p>By end 2006 - Complete landscape characterisation work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead: CCW <p>By end March 2008 - Vision of and priorities for different landscapes in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead: WAG (ECM) 	CCW Council endorsed an approach to landscape characterisation in July 2006. Consultation will take place with stakeholders during the autumn, to inform completion of the work by March 2007. This will entail preparation of a character map, linked to LANDMAP, showing major regional and sub regional landscape types described in terms of their distinctiveness, functionality and capacity for change.

ACTION NO.	ACTION	CCW LEAD	MILESTONES	WORK TO DATE/ISSUES/CHALLENGES
	<p>on our landscape. This information will be used to develop broad visions and priorities for different landscapes in Wales and will inform our priorities particularly for agri-environment and forestry.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners: CCW, Local authorities, voluntary sector, farmers and landowners, WAG (Cadw) 	<p>CCW recently had a meeting with WAG officers, to explain our proposals for the character map and to discuss progress with our landscape work generally. Response was positive and further meetings with WAG are planned. The new map aims to fulfil the needs of the Wales Spatial Plan in terms of landscape issues.</p>
61	<p>We will ensure each Spatial Plan Area Group to address the issues in the Environment Strategy in their local area and report on progress.</p>	Keith Davies	<p>By May 2006 - Write to each Area Group inviting them to consider the Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead: WAG (EnvP&Q) <p>By Sept 2006 - The Assembly Government's statutory environmental advisers to have given a steer to each area group on priorities for action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead: CCW and EAW Partners: WAG (EnvP&Q) and (SPU) <p>By Nov 2006 - Each Spatial Plan Area</p>	<p>Spatial Plan Area Groups are considering the key environmental issues in the areas on the basis of advice from the statutory environmental advisers.</p> <p>Workshops to discuss priorities and opportunities to be arranged for each Spatial Plan Area in the autumn, to inform discussion at the Ministerial meetings in November 2006.</p> <p>This will, for each Wales Spatial Plan Area Group, help establish baseline environmental information and opportunities for securing investment in conserving and enhancing green infrastructure on a strategic scale.</p>

ACTION NO.	ACTION	CCW LEAD	MILESTONES	WORK TO DATE/ISSUES/CHALLENGES
			<p>Group to have considered the Strategy, agreed the priority issues in their area and how they will be tackled</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead: Spatial Plan Area Groups • Partners: WAG (EnvP&Q) and (SPU) 	<p>Issues and Challenges</p> <p>The main challenge is to ensure integration and synergy between the processes and timeframes underpinning the Wales Spatial Plan, Community Strategies, National Park and AONB Management Plans and the implementation of the European Structural Funds Convergence Programmes and the Rural Development Plan.</p>