

# **Countryside Council For Wales**



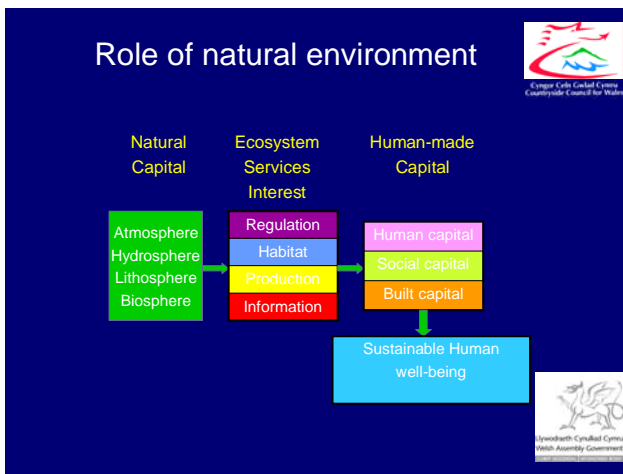
## **Evidence To The Environment, Planning And Countryside Committee**

**26 October 2006**

## **Report On The Achievements Of The Countryside Council For Wales 2005-6**

**Introduction**

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. We champion the environment and landscapes of Wales and our 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.

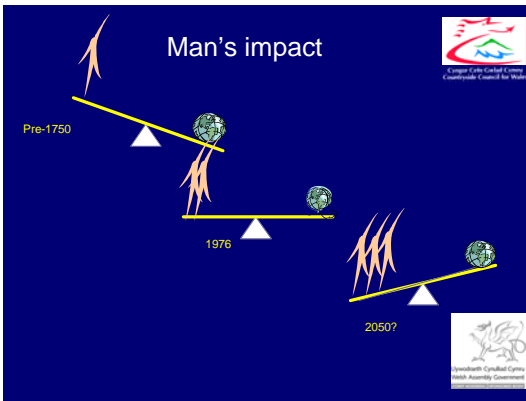


But our natural environment is threatened as never before, even though it is mankind’s ultimate strategic resource, representing earth’s natural capital (*Diagram 1*). Interest from this capital is generated, to support us, through four renewable functions – collectively known as ecosystem goods and services.

*Diagram 1: The Role of the Natural Environment*

These provide, amongst other things, clean air and water, soil, timber and biodiversity (for example, 13 of the 20 most popular prescription drugs in the western world are either natural products, slightly modified natural products or manufactured copies of natural products) as well as life-fulfilling functions such as recreation and aesthetics (evidence suggests that we begin to relax mentally after only three minutes in a natural environment).

At the Wales level, the environment contributes £9 billion to the GDP of Wales – 1 in 6 jobs and the second largest economic sector after construction.



Before the industrial revolution, human population and technological capability was such that we really had no adverse impact upon the earth's natural capital – the interest generated in the form of ecosystem goods and services greatly exceeded mankind's needs.

Diagram 2: Man's impact on earth's natural capital

But post industrial revolution, we have gradually used more and more of this interest – coming into balance (no net interest) around 1976 and, since then, eroding the earth's capital (Diagram 2). Current predictions are that, by 2050, we will have reached the tipping point beyond which it will be difficult to recover. And in Wales we have experienced the consequences of our profligate use of natural resources – through floods, droughts, storms and seasonal changes.

## Addressing the Challenge – CCW's Contribution

We deliver the natural environment component of the Assembly Government's strategic plan 'Wales: A Better Country' as well as being responsible for the implementation of much environmental legislation. We want everyone in Wales to value and care for our natural environment and we aim to achieve this by:

- Raising the quality of our natural heritage across the length and breadth of Wales, including our coastal waters
- Engaging with our people so that we all understand the fundamental underpinning role of the natural environment to our health and well-being as a nation
- Provide improved opportunities for people to enjoy the environment and derive economic and health benefits from it

## **Key Achievements for 2005/06**

Our work in 2005-6 reflected our continued role in:

- **Enthusing** – a wide variety of audiences about the wonder and importance of our environment, and the opportunities it provides for us.
- **Enabling** – a range of individuals, organisations and authorities to learn about our environment, to use it with care and to help manage it for the benefit of people and wildlife.
- **Advising** - government, other agencies and authorities, groups, communities and individuals to ensure wise use of our natural resources.
- **Regulating** – activities which are critical to maintaining a healthy and rich environment.

In 2005-6, we made a significant contribution towards achieving the Assembly Government's strategic outcomes and progressing its Sustainable Development scheme (as illustrated in Appendix 1).

We successfully delivered 23 of our 24 key targets during the year, with significant completion of the 24<sup>th</sup> target (see Appendix 2 for summary of 05-06 targets).

The highlights, and the future challenges, that emerged from our work in 2005-6 are described in the following sections:

# 1. Securing a high quality Welsh environment

## Achievements

- **Biodiversity and the Protected Site Series** – In June 2005 we reported that 49% of Wales' SSSIs were in unfavourable condition. Management Statements have been drafted for nearly 90% of sites and have been discussed with 16% of owner/occupiers. Management plans were completed for the 35% of features in unfavourable condition within Special Areas of Conservation. We secured management regimes at a further 5,000ha of SSSI that will maintain or lead to favourable condition.
- **Tir Gofal** - 356 new agreements were signed, 262 five year reviews were completed and the £24m budget was fully spent in further progressing Wales' flagship agri-environment scheme. This achievement was made whilst also working on the merger plan under which this scheme will transfer into the Assembly Government's direct management during October 2006.
- **Catchment management** - CCW provided financial support and advice to initiate a catchment sensitive pilot project in Bala, with the Assembly and other organisations.
- **Review of consents** - 85% of CCW stage 3 reviews were completed.
- **Environment strategy** – CCW worked with the Assembly and other partners to publish the draft strategy by 1 June 2005, to implement the stakeholder engagement process and to ensure formal publication of the finalised strategy and action plan on 17 May 2006.

## Key challenges for the future

- By March 2007 we will aim to have **management plans** in place for at least 50% of SACs with features identified as being in unfavourable condition.
- By March 2007 we will aim to share draft **Site Management Statements** with owners and occupiers on 80% of SSSIs.
- In partnership with other organisations, and through the spatial planning process, we will develop the concept of **ecological connectivity** in urban and rural areas of Wales. This will provide a strategic context for planning the future management and restoration of habitats, in order to create robust ecosystems that are resilient to climate change.
- We will use our **experimental powers** to develop **new approaches** to helping others to manage and restore habitats for wildlife – and in a way that complements and adds value to existing agri-environment schemes.
- We will develop and begin implementing a plan, in partnership with others to deliver **Action 32 of the Wales Environment Strategy**.

- We will successfully **transfer Tir Gofal** to the Assembly in 2006-7.
- We will advise and support the development of the new **higher-tier agri-environment scheme**.
- We will **report on SAC features** in 2007, in accordance with JNCC timetable.
- We will continue to work with the Environment Agency and the Local Authorities to progress their **review of consents** and complete 100% of CCW's review of its own consents by March 2007.





## 2. Legislation

### Achievements

- **Advice to support policy and strategy development** – we provided advice through representation on c.15 government (and other agency) led stakeholder groups, such as the Wales Spatial Plan Management Board and The Rural Partnership.
- **Emerging legislation** - we provided expert advice on a range of emerging legislation e.g. Marine Bill, the Common Land Bill, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill.
- **Training** - we provided guidance and training to help our own staff and staff from other organisations to understand and implement new legislation e.g. 2 training courses on Strategic Environmental Assessment held across Wales for 30 people.
- **Responding to consultations** - we have responded to approximately 112 legal/policy consultations since December 2005, which include submissions to WAG, Westminster Departments, Local Authorities and other bodies such as the Ministry of Defence. This includes our SEA appraisals.

### Key Challenges for the future

- We will work with WAG to ensure **integrated delivery of RDP measures** in order to help reverse biodiversity decline.
- We will continue to provide advice on development and implementation of **Marine legislation** (primary and secondary) at national (Wales and UK) and international level.
- We will contribute to development of a Wales **fisheries strategy**.



### 3. Access and recreation

#### Achievements

- **Open access** – we led the implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, culminating in the opening-up of a further 275,000 hectares of land to public access. The unit cost per hectare of this project was very significantly less than the comparable project in England.
- **Access to better information** – we supported the establishment of 2 Local Record Centres and initiated a major redesign of the CCW website to ensure it is fit for purpose as an information tool for users.
- **Integrated access** – we led a pilot Integrated Access scheme in the Black Mountains.
- **Access for regeneration** - we supported the Groundwork ‘Loops and Links’ project in Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf; it aims to establish a framework of tourism and recreational routes based on existing access networks to aid social and economic regeneration.
- **Rights of Way improvement Plans** – We provided guidance on the production of Rights of Way improvement Plans on behalf of the Assembly; we are now playing a full and proactive role as a facilitating and consultative body in order to promote their development and implementation.

#### Key Challenges for the future

- **Access to the coast** – In conjunction with the Assembly Government we will plan a work programme for developing access to coast, to commence in April 2007 (4-5 year project) under the management of CCW.
- **Website** – we will launch CCW’s new website in 2006.





## 4. Strategic Partnerships

### Achievements

- **Exemplary projects** – We provided support for the Heads of the Valley, Dyfi Biosphere, and Menai Strait-Conwy Bay landscape scale projects.
- **National Parks** – We provided advice and guidance for production of National Park management plans and played an active role on Park plan development boards.
- **Environmental Crime Partnership** – in partnership with the North Wales Police Force we dealt with 62 cases of environmental crime in 2005-6.
- **Community and Spatial Planning** - we appointed 2 members of staff enable us to increase and improve our level of engagement with Community Strategy partnerships across Wales and earmarked £265K to help local authorities establish Environmental Partnerships. This grant was taken up for the first time in 2005-6 by Rhondda Cynon Taf, Monmouthshire, Powys and Newport. We participated in the establishment of Wales Spatial Planning area groups and have representation at officer and ministerial groups.

### Key challenges for the Future

- We will develop additional **strategic learning partnerships** in order to enhance the skills of the environmental workforce in Wales.
- We will work with partners to align our shared programmes and projects with **structural funding** priorities.
- We will progress, in collaboration with others, a minimum of 3 **landscape scale projects** that are underpinned by integrated rural development principles.
- We will continue to play a role in helping to **progress key WES actions**, both with respect to direct delivery and in undertaking an integrating and enabling role at national, regional and local level. Specifically, we will continue to provide support the work of **Environmental Partnerships** for all Community Strategies.



## 5. Strategic research and investigation

### Achievements

- **Climate change** – we undertook a Climate Change Audit in order to assess our approach and to develop core principles for action. As a result of this we have developed a Climate Change Action Plan.
- **Intertidal survey** – we completed the survey of habitats and species in the intertidal zone around Wales 1600 kms of coastline. This is essential information for the planning of future development and no other country in the world has a comparable data set.
- **Rights of Way** – We reported on research into the current capacity and training needs analysis of rights of way staff to inform ourselves and partners.
- **Disadvantaged groups** – we completed research into factors which prevent disadvantaged groups from engaging in outdoor activities, in order to inform a pilot project in 2006-7.
- **The link between the environment and health** – we undertook qualitative research on the Welsh public's perceptions of the link between the environment and health to guide us in developing future countryside policy.

### Key challenges for the Future

- We will develop a **soil monitoring strategy**, in collaboration with others.
- We will support the **Countryside survey 2007**.
- We will work with the Assembly to establish **baseline data on the state of the Welsh environment**.



## 6. Sustainable development of land and sea

### Achievements

- **Spatial planning** – through our involvement in the Wales Spatial Plan Management Board we played a key role in helping to interpret the Wales Environment Strategy through the community and spatial planning process. This work continues to be a key priority.
- **Natural heritage and development plans** - we worked with the Assembly to develop guidance for integrating natural heritage into the local development plan system. We revised the Local Development Plan Manual and held training events for CCW and local authority staff.
- **Sustainable Development Indicators** – we participated in the Sustainable Development Indicators working group which led to publication of the indicators in October 2006.
- **Advice on land use planning applications** - we provided advice on c.4,000 proposed developments in 2005-6, relating to designated sites and the wider countryside. In some instances, this involved innovative approaches, such as in the case of the Felindre-Tirley High Pressure Gas Pipeline where national Grid's contribution towards backfilling a CCW post enabled us to provide the required level and speed of response and allowed early involvement in scoping and assessment of the most sustainable options for the development.
- **Influencing the wider sustainability agenda** – Our staff play key roles as members and chairs of UK and international networks that deal with biodiversity, air quality and climate change issues, thereby helping Wales and the UK deliver their commitments within the EU. For example, in 2005-6 CCW was instrumental in producing JNCC's response to the UK revision of the Air Quality Strategy and in selecting Critical Load Exceedence (now ratified by UJ Government) as part of Expert Group 4 on Nitrogen Deposition.

### Key challenges for the future

- Dealing with the implementation of the **Habitat Regulations**, particularly in relation to species licensing is likely to have a significant impact on resources
- Implementing the **Environmental Liability Directive** and **Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive** – impact on resources uncertain at present
- In collaboration with others we will develop the **ecosystem approach** for managing terrestrial and marine environments.
- We will develop guidance, in partnership with WLGA and WAG, on how to **integrate sustainable development principles** into the planning system.
- We will work with others to ensure **integration between timeframes and processes**

underpinning the Wales Spatial Plan, Community strategies, national Park and AONB management plans and the implementation of the Structural funds convergence programmes and rural development plans.

- We will ensure that CCW's work programmes and **data sets have a strong spatial dimension** that facilitate collaborative working at national and regional levels.
- We will work with others to establish a **Welsh Climate Change Group** in order to address the need for cross sectoral collaboration to develop climate change adaptation work in Wales.
- We will undertake further work, in collaboration with UK and European agencies, to **reduce levels of atmospheric emissions** and to consider how to develop the Critical Load Exceedence indicator and link it to other sources of nitrogen pollution.



## 7. Health, social justice and equal opportunities

### Achievements

- **Mainstreaming the Welsh Language** - we submitted CCW's Welsh Language mainstreaming policy to the Assembly for approval.
- **Social Justice** - we initiated the development of CCW's Social Justice Action Plan.
- **Grants to disadvantaged groups** - we increased level of support to disadvantaged groups to £600k – an increase of £285k over the level of grant awarded in 2004-5.
- **Grants to improve Health** - we grant aided practical projects that aim to improve the health of the Welsh population e.g. Newtown Food Poverty project, traffic-free routes to schools in Rhyl, the 'Mission Incredible Bike Ride' for the Valleys Kids project, 'Young Green and Keen' project for 35 young people from Cardiff inner city wards.
- **DDA** - we completed work on the 5 priority projects identified as a result of DDA surveys on National Nature Reserves.

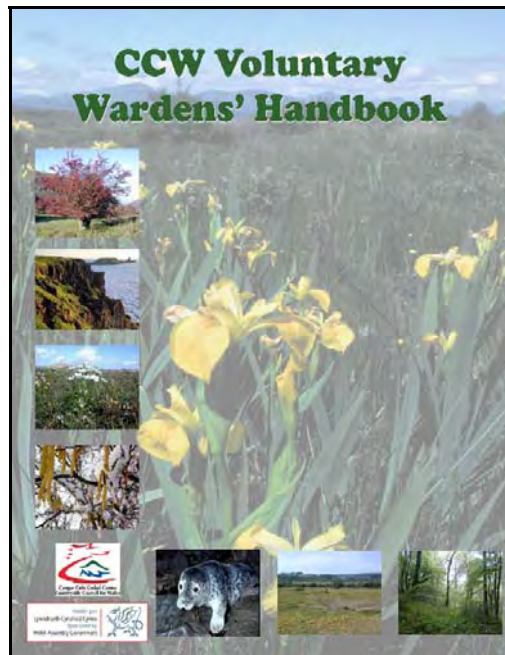


### Key challenges for the future

- We will develop a **model approach to mainstreaming of the Welsh language** across a partnership of public, private and voluntary environmental organisations.
- We will complete and fully implement CCW's **social justice action plan**.
- We will increase the level of engagement with **communities first areas**.
- We will increase our support for projects that provide **health benefits** for the people of Wales.



- We will launch and roll out the **green-space toolkit** to increase the quality and quantity of public green space in Wales (WES action 19).
- We will provide greater opportunities for **volunteering**, both directly and indirectly through providing support to our partners.
- We will increase the level of **public participation** in CCW's decision making by sharing best practice and guidance within and across organisations.





## 8. Environmental management

### Achievements

- **Green Dragon** – we were the first public body in Wales to achieve the highest level (5) of the Assembly’s Green Dragon Environmental Management System for all our sites. We then followed this achieving the internationally-recognised ISO 14001 accreditation.
- **Sustainability** - we published CCW’s Sustainable Code of Conduct in 2005.
- **Renewable energy** - we have sourced electricity, in those offices where we have control over supply, from Bizz Energy’s Green Choice Tariff, which sources electricity from 100% renewables.

### Key challenges for the future

- To maintain and improve on **Green Dragon 5** standards
- To increase the proportion of **sustainably procured goods and services**



## 9. CCW - an efficient, responsible organisation

### Achievements

- **Work-life balance** - We were a finalist in the UK Employer of the Year Awards for our work-life balance policies and practices.
- **Value for Money** - we signed up to Value Wales action plan 'Buy now don't pay later'; we have completed the self-assessment tool and have carried out an initial risk assessment of our suppliers.

### Key challenges for the Future

- We will ensure the organisational has the requisite structure, resources and skills to respond proactively and positively to the challenges of the **Beecham Review**.
- We secure continual **IIP accreditation**.
- We will continue to make **efficiency savings**, in accordance with CCW's Value for Money plan targets.
- We will revise and implement a **Customer Care** plan which takes into account the citizen centred model of delivery of public service.
- We will invest in training on **equality and diversity** issues for all members of staff



## Appendix 1.

An illustration, with reference to activities undertaken in 2005-6, of the way in which CCW contributes to the delivery of the Welsh Assembly Government's sustainable development scheme and its strategic outcomes

SD Scheme Priorities	Examples Of CCW Actions	Assembly Government Strategic Outcomes		
		Jobs and skills	Health	Safe, Strong communities
<b>Diverse skills that responds to sustainable development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c.£350k grant aid given to training establishments and organisations in Wales(e.g. Plas Tanybwlech);</li> <li>Partnership project established to develop a Welsh Professional Institute for Countryside and Conservation Managers;</li> <li>21 Students sponsored as part of CCW's innovative 'Cynllun Noddi Myfyrwyr'.</li> </ul>	√		
<b>Action to tackle poor health and social disadvantage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research undertaken to inform a pilot project in S.Wales which aims to increase the number of socially disadvantaged people engaging in outdoor activity ('Promoting the outdoors as a resource for all')</li> <li>20 Walking the Way to health groups supported across Wales</li> </ul>		√	√
<b>Enhancing pride in the community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>150 volunteers participating in the management of their local National Nature Reserves</li> <li>Involvement of local people in a community archaeological dig on Aber National Nature Reserve</li> <li>Sharing and consulting with landowners over Site Management Statements, to engender a sense of pride in Wales' special sites</li> <li>Working with a community partnership in Abergwyngregyn to convert and refurbish a redundant village building as a community interpretation centre and to develop new , income generating solutions to visitor and traffic management.</li> <li>Phoenix project – a multi agency project, coordinated by CCW, covering 97 nature reserves across Wales. The Objective 1 project commenced in 2005; it is worth 3 million over its 4 year lifespan, with £628k contribution from CCW. 10 full time officers and 7 part time officers are employed to improve site management and encourage local people to enjoy the sites. Volunteer hours will account for £165K over the lifetime of the project</li> </ul>	√	√	√
<b>Promoting biodiversity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CCW support for the development and implementation of new schemes to deliver local action for biodiversity e.g. Natur Gwynedd (3 year grant scheme for landowners, worth £800k, with £150k contribution from</li> </ul>	√	√	

	<p>CCW), PONT (all-Wales grazing network)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marsh Fritillary landscape restoration project launched in Tonyrefail</li> <li>• Continued support, in the form of funding and staff time, for the 4.3 million Objective 1 ‘Rhaglen Tir Eryri’ scheme to improve the condition of Eryri Special Area of Conservation</li> <li>• £25k grant aid to support ARENA Network training to assist organisations to incorporate biodiversity concerns into their environmental management practices</li> </ul>			
<b>Promoting local employment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £1.25 million spent employing 492 contractors to deliver practical works on National Nature Reserves in Wales in 2005-6</li> <li>• CCW grant aid supported 500 posts throughout Wales in 2005-6, contributing £9.7 million towards postholder income, 90% of which was retained in the local economy</li> </ul>	√		√
<b>Minimising waste, energy, water and transport demands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement of Green Dragon Level 5</li> <li>• Publication and implementation of Sustainable Procurement Code of conduct</li> <li>• Procurement of energy supply from sustainable sources for CCW offices</li> </ul>		√	
<b>Strengthening Wales’ cultural identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development funding and staff time provided to support a new cultural landscape initiative in Snowdonia- ‘Bwrlwm Eryri’</li> <li>• Partnership funding and staff time provided to support ‘Herian’ – a multi agency landscape initiative based on conserving and developing South-East Wales industrial archaeological assets</li> <li>• Encouraging the use of Welsh in the environmental sector through student sponsorship and grant aid</li> </ul>	√		√
<b>Creating a place where people want to live rather than bequeathing problems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regeneration of Corus steelworks site; we are working with industry and other partners to create a new multi-function site at Ebbw Vale (hospital, housing, learning campus and wildlife habitats) – an exemplary development to demonstrate SD in practice.</li> <li>• We grant aid community wardens that are responsible for creating safe, clean and valuable environments for people as well as wildlife e.g. Halkyn mountain ranger, Newport Wetlands Ranger</li> </ul>	√	√	√
<b>Promoting equality of opportunity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of CCW’s Social Justice action plan</li> <li>• Grant aid of £630k to create more opportunities for those from disadvantaged communities to gain the benefits from open air recreation</li> </ul>	√	√	√
<b>Promoting openness, partnership and</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community participation exercise initiated by CCW and FC at Newborough, Anglesey to help inform the future management of the area – 2,000 residents involved, 50</li> </ul>	√	√	√

<b>participation</b>	<p>of which have been active members of a liaison partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual publication of ‘popular style’ report to inform the public of the condition and management of Wales’ protected sites</li> </ul>			
<b>Contributing to sustainable development at a global as well as at a local level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCW involvement in interagency and international working groups dealing with Air Pollution, biodiversity and climate change</li> <li>• CCW involvement in interagency expert groups dealing with aspects of policy e.g. Land Use Policy Group, European Regional Policy Group and Marine Policy groups</li> <li>• Active membership of the European Network of Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils</li> <li>• Production of CCW Climate Change Action Plan</li> </ul>		√	

*This report was produced by CCW on 14 October 2006*