

**Mid 03-01(min)**

**Meeting of the Mid Wales Regional Committee**

**Date:** Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2001

**Time:** 10.30am

**Venue:** Community Hall, Llanidloes

**Attendance:**

<b>Cynog Dafis, Temporary Chair</b>	Plaid Cymru	Mid and West Wales
<b>Glyn Davies</b>	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
<b>Delyth Evans</b>	Labour	Mid and West Wales

**Committee Secretariat:**

<b>Julia Annand</b>	Committee Clerk
<b>Stephen Thomas</b>	Deputy Committee Clerk
<b>Sian Wilkins</b>	Deputy Clerk, Economic Development Committee
<b>Judith Yorston</b>	Secretariat Support

**Apologies:**

<b>Elin Jones, Chair</b>	Plaid Cymru	Ceredigion
<b>Kirsty Williams</b>	Liberal Democrat	Brecon and Radnorshire
<b>Mick Bates</b>	Liberal Democrat	Montgomeryshire

<b>Nick Bourne</b>	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
--------------------	--------------	--------------------

**Substitutions:** None

**Declarations of Interest :** None

### **Election of temporary chair**

In the absence of the Chair, Elin Jones, the Committee elected Cynog Dafis to sit as temporary chair under Standing Order 8.17.

### **Agenda Item 1: Mid Wales Regional Committee's Annual Report and Forward Work Programme**

The Committee agreed on the text of the factual annual report (paper 1a) which would now be discussed in a plenary session in the autumn.

Members also agreed the work programme for the next two meetings as set out in paper 1b. However, Glyn Davies commented that the Committee needed to keep a close eye on issues surrounding the regeneration of the rural economy ahead of a possible Committee discussion next spring.

### **Item 2: Discussion session on renewable energy issues**

The temporary Chair explained that the purpose of this meeting was to concentrate on the wind power and conservation aspects of renewable energy; the Committee was not specifically looking at the economic side although information gained from today's meeting will be passed to the Economic Development Committee (of which Glyn Davies AM is a member), who are scheduled to begin a review of renewables in the autumn.

Organisation:

### **Ceredigion County Council**

Representatives:

Cllr Alun Lloyd-Jones

Tim Ball

The following points were made in presentation:

- The respective roles of central government, the Assembly and local authorities in respect of energy provision needed to be clarified.
  - Mr Ball was a strong supporter of the principle of subsidiarity ie the determination of policy at the level closest to home.
  - Mr Ball also expressed surprise that the Department of Trade and Industry was responsible for approving applications for wind farms as small as 50mgw.
  - In respect of onshore wind energy, the imposition of targets will assist developers and focus the debate but can lead to local resentment.
  - Proactive wind search policies can disrupt the property market.
  - There needs to be a proper demarcation between the Assembly's technical advice and its formal policy guidance.
  - The proposals for a spatial planning framework were widely welcomed as were the proposals to revise Technical Advice Note 8.
  - Policies in respect of offshore wind energy should be balanced and would need to take into account the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in Wales.
  - Ceredigion County Council have done much work in the field of biomass and view this as a useful source of locally generated power.
  - The Council is considering the introduction of Biomass to power its main headquarters in Aberaeron and for school and community use.
  - Regarding tidal power, Mr Ball commented that he would be surprised if research was not being undertaken at present, especially given the presence of SACs around coasts of Wales.
  - The current building and planning regulations could do much more to encourage the use of solar power.
- 
- Cllr Alun Lloyd-Jones added that Ceredigion County Council was hoping to extend solar clubs, formed in partnership with Ymlaen, for small and medium enterprises that are involved in the tourist industry. He added that there was a need to look very seriously at renewable energy targets, as far as wind farms were concerned. In his view, had meaningful targets already been in place, Ceredigion would probably have exceeded them. The issue of target-setting was one that needed to be looked at seriously, because in his view, some local authorities, were shouldering a greater load than others.

Organisation:

**Powys County Council**

Representative:

Andy Bull, Head of Environmental Policy

The main points of the presentation were as follows:

- The debate over renewable energy developments has largely concentrated on the large-scale and electricity, there is, however, huge scope for the utilisation of renewable energy at the domestic level. Mid Wales can show the rest of the UK the way forward at the domestic level.
- There is a common misconception that solar water heating is ineffective in Wales for climactic reasons. Nevertheless, a good modern system will make a significant contribution to water heating requirements. "Solar Clubs" have been very effectively established in Ceredigion and the Dyfi Valley and it is proposed to widen this concept out to the remainder of Powys.
- In respect of solar electricity production, electricity can be generated by photovoltaic cells or modules (PVs). A new Housing Association Development in Machynlleth will have a PV roof and there will be quite a concentration of PV in the Dyfi Valley.
- The Council should always consider the PV option in circumstances where a new supply is needed for a low power use. PV systems will continue to come down in price if the market becomes sufficiently robust to justify modern high production manufacturing facilities.
- Passive solar space heating is all about good building design. It is crucial that careful consideration is given to glazing, its area and aspect during building design.
- Small-scale hydropower was a widespread feature of rural Wales until the National Grid encouraged the abandonment of most of the sites. The Dyfi Eco Valley Partnership has been working on the development of community-owned small-scale hydro schemes for three years but has yet to see the first project completed. The process has been slower than anticipated and the abstraction license issue has played a major part in the process.
- Wind turbine generators can operate at a very small-scale and hardly be noticeable in the wider landscape. They can, in combination with PV systems, provide good small power demand solutions to off-grid locations.
- As far as biomass is concerned, whilst there are opportunities for the utilisation of a variety of biomass products at large or small-scale, by far the greatest opportunity in Wales is the utilisation of the existing hardwood and softwood forest and woodland resources.
- It is important that the energy issue is seen in an holistic way. A concentration solely on the production of energy is not going to lead to the sort of changes that are necessary if society is to seriously address climate change issues.
- Powys County Council is convinced that renewable energy holds huge potential for the economy of Mid Wales. It has the resource and the population that is willing to embrace renewable energy, but it needs more help. The Environment Agency Wales could help on the hydro front.

The following comments were made in the question and answer session:

- Mr Bull felt that building houses with solar panels was a step too far at the moment, but planning regulations should allow for south facing roofs to be built.
- Ceredigion County Council's prime objective was to promote the efficient use of energy and when deciding upon planning applications, members will need to decide if the application is energy efficient.

Organisation:

## **Countryside Council for Wales**

Representatives:

John Taylor

Dr Peter Minto

The following points were made in presentation:

Mr Taylor stated that CCW had a vested interest in climate change and that the organisation had responsibility for species and habitats sensitive to environmental changes. He cited the Snowdon Lily as an example of a species that will die out if the climate continues to change.

The main points of his presentation were as follows:

- The seas around Wales are very important and there is a heavy concentration of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in these seas.
- There is a gross misunderstanding of climate change.
- CCW saw the 'chocolate box' image of the Welsh landscape as an asset to the country and one which should be preserved. The drop in visitor numbers to Wales as a result of the Foot and Mouth outbreak showed the extent to which people come to Wales to visit the countryside. The landscape is a major source of income for thousands of Welsh businesses.
- On 17 July CCW would be publishing a report for Assembly Members which aims to estimate the value of environmental economy and this sector has shown consistent growth.
- On the issue of wind farms, Mr Taylor said that Wales needed a national strategic context in order to decide individual strategies. He stated that the debate often gets divided into two sides, the NIMBYs versus the Developers, and that there was a real need to develop the debate within a strategic context, rather than treating each proposal as a test case.
- CCW wanted to ensure that developments at sea did not damage the fragile seascapes that currently exist.

The following comments were made in a question and answer session.

- In a response to a question posed by Cynog Dafis about renewable energy targets, Mr Taylor highlighted the importance of using energy management to reduce the demand for energy. He stated that a range of policies would help bring about this decrease in demand.

Organisation:

**British Wind Energy**

Representative:

Peter Hinson

The following points were made in presentation:

- A 60% reduction in fossil fuel use is required to stabilise the current climate changes. Current energy consumption stands at 3 tonnes of oil per year on a per capita basis.
- Wind power is the greatest contributor of renewable energy in Britain. Germany is the greatest user of wind power in Europe with an installed capacity of 6,500 megawatts. Spain and Denmark both produce 2,500 megawatts and Britain produces 213 megawatts.
- In Denmark and Germany, 20,000 jobs are directly related to the installation and manufacture of wind power equipment.
- BWEA maintain that Wales could contribute 8% of Britain's wind energy which equates to 190 large turbines producing 219 megawatts.
- 18 areas have been announced as potential sites for off shore wind farms by DTI. Three are off the coast of Wales in North Hoyle, Rhyl Flats and Scarweather sands. The consenting process for these plans may be a long time.
- On the subject of attitudes to renewable energy, Mr Hinson stated that the central government has provided strong support but that media reporting is variable.
- BWEA would like to see the National Assembly to set a headline target for the use of wind energy and to consider using the Scottish format for energy use and regional decision making.

Organisation

**Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)**

Representative:

Dr Ian Taylor, Consultancy Co-ordinator

Dr Taylor began his presentation by giving some background about the Centre. It is one of Mid Wales' biggest tourist attractions and is the birthplace of other environmental businesses such as Dulas, Ecogen and Aber Instruments. The following comments were made in presentation:

- Dr Taylor believes that the Strategic Study for the Assembly is too conservative and that the Assembly should be more ambitious.
- Plans for offshore wind farms in the rest of Europe are on larger scales to those in Britain even though the sea is Britain's biggest resource. CAT is in favour of offshore wind energy.
- A feasibility study was recently carried out by CAT for Gwynedd County Council into the potential for ecological housing.
- In terms of biomass energy, CAT believe that Welsh timber resources are not being used to their full potential as the residues from constructional use could be used for biomass.
- Although Wales does not have as high wave energy levels as the West Coast of Scotland, the seas off south west Wales are good. Milford Haven was cited as a well positioned location for future marine renewable energy projects.
- To conclude, Dr Taylor urged the Assembly to think about renewable energy on a larger scale and to be more ambitious with its targets.

The following points were made in a question and answer session:

- In a response to Delyth Evans' question about the preference between the use of on or offshore wind power, both Dr Taylor and Peter Hinson stated that a balance of both sources of energy is preferable.
- Dr Taylor agreed with Glyn Davies' view that the debate about renewable energy is often avoided and has resulted in projects being delayed. He said that there is a responsibility on a range of bodies to be more positive about the issue of renewable energy. Peter Hinson said that there is a need for strong leadership and a higher level of understanding about future plans.
- Cynog Dafis asked if the Environment Agency's national targets for wind power use were realistic, sufficient and achievable. Peter Hinson replied that they looked achievable and provide a good basis for debate. Dr Taylor felt that the targets should be more ambitious.

Organisation:

## **Environment Agency (EA)**

Representative:

Peter Wilkinson

The following points were made in presentation:

- The Agency's present role in energy is primarily, but not solely, to regulate the environmental impact of individual sites or facilities. It regulates large combustion plants, incinerators, nuclear power stations and hydroelectric stations in respect of their water power. The Agency's powers are limited to ensuring that these generating stations meet the limits and principles set out in the legislation on an individual basis.
- With regard to renewable techniques such as wind farms, wave and tidal techniques, EA's powers are only consultative with regard to planning applications.
- The purpose behind the Agency's regulatory duties is the protection of the environment and the prevention of harm. This can best be met with respect to energy generation by a significant shift to renewable forms of energy.
- The Agency does not consider landfill gas or energy from municipal waste to be within the definition of a renewable energy source.
- The Agency believes that renewable energy has the potential to provide truly sustainable energy for society, and that any potential negative impact can be avoided through a well managed approach to the expansion of renewable energy that ensures the sensitive siting and operation of renewable energy schemes.
- The exploitation of renewable energy involves harvesting the natural energy flows in the environment which are very diffuse compared to the high density of energy contained in fossil fuels.
- The development of renewable energy will force the issue of how and where electricity is being produced and the corresponding environmental and social costs.
- The environmental impact of renewable energy that appears to cause most concern is its visual impact upon the landscape. This is particularly the case for onshore wind turbines that are otherwise environmentally benign in operation.
- Wind farms do not affect the nature or use of the land as extensively as many other forms of development.
- In respect of offshore wind farms, EA have recommended that a Welsh Sustainable Energy Agency be established to provide an advisory service to facilitate applications, broker partnerships, help local community groups and to create a climate whereby renewable energy can flourish.



- The EA supports the UK Government and Assembly's target to supply 10% of UK electricity from renewable sources by 2010 and recognises that wind power, energy crops and forestry products will be the most important renewables for achieving the 10% target.

Organisation:

## **Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW)**

Representative:

Merfyn Williams

The following points were made in presentation:

- The CPRW fully supports the Assembly's emphasis on developing Renewable Energy (RE) and welcomes the research work now being done that will provide acknowledged foundations for the future.
- It is disappointing that a number have not had the attention they deserve in terms of Research and Development. This imbalance should be corrected as a matter of priority.
- RE technologies are decentralised and there is no better example of this than solar energy. Fuel cell technology is another area which hasn't had the attention it deserves.
- Biomass has potential but not through utilising it in large scale plants as illustrated by the case in Newbridge-on-Wye.
- Apart from the sun, the greatest potential for RE comes from water, and the wave and tidal forces of the restless sea in particular. There are immense opportunities to harness huge amounts of predictable RE here, but substantial investment is needed.
- With all the potential to hand, CPRW does not agree with the wide-scale erection of windpower stations on the uplands and coasts of Wales. The land-take in terms of the visual impact of moving machines is substantial and, with more proliferation, is already cumulative over vast areas.
- The present programme of developing wind energy is in conflict with conserving Wales's environmental and economic assets; this has been acknowledged by the Wales Tourist Board.
- Unjustified pre-occupation with one form of RE would extend the already damaged landscapes of parts of mid-Wales across huge areas, turning the country into an extensive wind factory.
- Under the leadership of the Assembly, we can create a country that will be mature enough to include the quality of its beauty in its environmental equation. That in itself would be a major contribution from Wales to the issue of world sustainability.

The following points were made in the subsequent question and answer session:

- In reply to a challenge from Glyn Davies that CPRW opposed most developments, Mr Williams said that this was not the case and that the organisation's principles remained the same since its establishment in 1928. CPRW wish to create harmony between the people and the environment of Mid-Wales.
- Mr Wilkinson said that the Environment Agency were not opposed to alternative technologies, but many were still in their development agency and were not yet at a point where there they could be exploited on a large scale. The design of the turbines restricts the potential of wind energy and there are risks involved in placing too much emphasis on the potential of wind energy.

The Chair concluded the session by saying that there was a general feeling that a national Energy Strategy should be developed and that appropriate targets should be set.

### **Item 3: Public Presentations**

Mr Martin Wright

The following points were made in presentation:

- There is not a straight choice between wind power and nuclear power as sources of energy.
- Mr Wright emphasised that he was not against renewable energy, but he objected to covering the landscape in wind farms, which went beyond the intentions of planning regulations.
- There are other ways of meeting the country's energy needs and there's a growing political consensus in favour of rejecting the exploitation of the uplands.
- Mr Wright did not agree with Ceredigion County Council's decision to approve the construction of a power station at Cefn-Croes. He viewed the decision as a travesty of local democracy and urged the Assembly to become involved in the matter.
- Mr Wright also urged the Assembly to debate the place of landscape in Wales's national culture.

Dr Lance Mytton, Conservation of Upland Montgomeryshire

The following points were made in presentation:

- The last 18 months have seen the membership of the Conservation of Upland Montgomeryshire Group grow from 50 to more than 100 members.
- Dr Mytton was concerned at the on-going threat of wind farm developments. He felt that current renewable energy strategies were badly thought out.
- Statistics refute claims that on-shore wind energy makes a significant contribution to the

nation's energy needs.

- Mid Wales's land use economy needs to move from its current low value dependency into high value enterprise.
- The long-term development of wind energy is incompatible with the development and promotion of the Mid Wales tourist industry.

Mr Jon Isherwood, National Assembly's Sustainable Energy Group (NASEG)

The following points were made in presentation:

- NASEG's aims are to raise awareness and increase dialogue about sustainable energy; to assist in the development of a sustainable energy policy and strategy and to maximise the opportunities and potential for sustainable energy.
- Its wide membership includes representatives from local authorities, universities, architects and industrialists, while its core sponsors include the National Assembly, Powergen, Dulas Ltd, Welsh Water and National Wind Power.
- The latest IPC predictions on climate change view the human impact to be much greater than previous assessments.
- The British government has a strong commitment to renewable energy in all forms and the National Assembly has a statutory remit for sustainability, but there needs to be a global commitment to combating climate change.
- Statistics show that between 1991-5, there was a substantial increase in carbon monoxide emissions in Wales. NASEG are exploring solutions to help combat this.
- Mr Isherwood encouraged all Assembly members to use NASEG as a discussion and information forum.

Mr Colin Humphrey

The following comments were made in presentation:

- Nuclear energy, is the most important type of renewable energy although most people prefer not to recognise it as such. A quarter of UK electricity comes from nuclear energy, half of which will be closed by 2015. Unless we decide soon to replace it there is no possibility of continuing the reduction in fossil fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from power generation.
- In Wales the output of Wylfa nuclear power station, on Anglesey, is nearly 40% of Wales' electricity needs. Wylfa is due to operate for at least another 15 years but how do you replace it when its decommissioned, except with more nuclear? Allowing for the intermittent nature of wind we would need about 40 giant windfarms like the one proposed at Cefn Croes just to replace Wylfa.

- For all practical purposes modern nuclear power stations in the West are completely safe. We should support replacement nuclear power provided that it is demonstrably safe now and in the future. It will have a high cost, especially in decommissioning and safe disposal but that's a cost we can bear. If we reject nuclear we will fail to produce a realistic energy strategy, and we'll go on damaging our landscape.
- Other appropriate renewable energy solutions should be pursued, but so far wind is the only technology that's actually received a lot of support.
- The policymakers should be devoting as much effort to containing the growth of energy consumption as they are to promoting renewable energy capacity, but they're not, so Wales's renewable energy programme won't even keep pace with electricity growth let alone begin to replace fossil fuels.

The Chair thanked the presenters for contributing to an extremely useful debate. He felt that everyone would benefit by having more opportunities of this nature.

#### **Item 4: Minutes of the meeting of 18 May**

##### **MID-02-01(min)**

These were agreed without amendment.

#### **Item 5: Election of new Chair**

Delyth Evans AM was elected Chair for the 2001/2 session.

#### **Committee Secretariat July 2001**