

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 9 January 2002

Time: 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly for Wales

Attendance:

EPT Committee Members:

Richard Edwards, Chair

Preseli Pembrokeshire

Eleanor Burnham

North Wales

David Davies

Monmouth

Geraint Davies

Rhondda

Sue Essex, Minister for Environment

Cardiff North

Helen Mary Jones

Llanelli

Val Lloyd

Swansea East

Tom Middlehurst

Alyn and Deeside

Karen Sinclair

Clwyd South

Rhodri Glyn Thomas

Carmarthen East and Dinefwr

Officials:

Denzil Jones (item 2)

Head of Transport Policy Division

Kay Powell (item 2)

Head of Planning Division

Gerry Quarrell (item 2)

Countryside Division

June Milligan (item 3)	Head of Countryside Division (also Chair of the Wales Biodiversity Group)
Nicola Donlon (item 3)	Countryside Division
Lyn Owen (item 4)	Planning Division

In Attendance:

Representing the Wales Biodiversity Group:

Nigel Ajax-Lewis	Wildlife Trusts Wales and Wales Wildlife and Countryside Link
David Keast	Powys County Council and WLGA
David Parker	Countryside Council for Wales
Tony Prater	RSPB Cymru and Wales Wildlife and Countryside Link

Secretariat:

Siwan Davies	Committee Clerk
Vaughan Watkin	Deputy Committee Clerk

Opening Remarks from Chair

1. The Chair welcomed members, officials and members of the public to the meeting and wished everyone a happy New Year.

0.2 The Committee was informed that Planning Decision Committee (PDC) 2001/8 had met earlier in the day, and the Chair thanked Val Lloyd and Eleanor Burnham for making themselves available. Any Members who had not undertaken training were reminded to do so as soon as possible, so that they could sit on future PDCs.

0.3 Responses to the Investigator's report on the Nantygwyddon landfill site were due by 10 January and would be considered at the meeting on 23 January. Consideration of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations was scheduled for 6 February, with a plenary slot scheduled for March. The Committee agreed that the Investigation Resource Centre at

Pentre be kept open on a request basis until the Committee had reported to plenary.

Item 1: Apologies, substitutions and declaration of interests

1.1 The Chair invited members to declare any interests under Standing Order 4.5, which were as follows:

- Geraint Davies - Member of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council;
- Val Lloyd - Member of Swansea City Council.

Item 2: Report from the Minister for the Environment – EPT-01-02 (p 1)

2.1 In addition to the items in her written report, the Minister announced that the European Commission had approved the Welsh bid for European funding under the Innovative Action programme, worth €4 million, that would allow Wales to forge ahead with its sustainable development agenda. A copy of the Minister's statement is attached at the annex.

2.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Innovative Action programme – the Committee welcomed the announcement, and echoed the Minister's praise for officials and those organisations supporting the bid. A decision was awaited on the other bid to support sustainable development networks. Wales was leading Europe on sustainable development, and Members felt that raising public awareness of the National Assembly's achievements was crucial. A series of marketing and promotion events about sustainability in Wales would be taken forward by the Minister and First Minister;
- UK Safety Bill – plenary had remitted the Bill for the Committee's consideration, and a draft was expected to be published in the next session of the UK Parliament. The Committee was content with the proposed measures for the Safety Bill set out in annex C of the Minister's report;
- Transport Grant – the Minister would be announcing allocations on 22 January. Members flagged up the need for funding in certain areas, and asked for flexibility across projects to ensure full spend of the grant;
- Rail – Members expressed concern that the current disputes between Train Operating Companies (TOCs) and the Trade Unions may extend to Wales. The Minister did not expect services in Wales to be affected, but would raise the issue with the TOCs;

- Planning our future – the Minister would shortly issue a consultation paper on the future of the planning system in Wales. In view of the wide interest in this issue she intended to launch this via a statement to plenary. The Committee would play an active role in considering the way forward following consultation, giving particular attention to appropriate means of safeguarding public consultation and ensuring that objectors' views are considered fully;
- CROW Mapping Regulations – it was confirmed that during the second stage of the mapping process appeals could only be made against inclusion, rather than non-inclusion of land. However, the first stage of the process enabled representations for the inclusion of land by interested parties and others;
- EC Regulation on refrigerators – the Minister would correspond with Members regarding concerns about incineration, and availability of mobile units capable of dismantling unwanted refrigerators safely.

Item 3: Biodiversity in Wales – EPT-01-02 (p 2)

3.1 The Minister explained that the report would form the basis of a consultation paper on biodiversity later in the year. The Chair and members of the Wales Biodiversity Group (WBG) explained their roles on the Group and identified the main challenges ahead, as set out in their report.

3.2 The Committee commended the WBG report and the intention to develop a distinctive Welsh programme. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Local action – this had improved, but remained patchy. All local authorities now had biodiversity partnerships and some had officers dealing with biodiversity issues. An annual survey was conducted by the Local Issues Advisory Group (a sub-group of WBG) and results would be made available to the Committee;
- Broadening WBG membership – the Committee suggested that ELWa and the Federation of Small Businesses be brought into the Group's work to help mainstream biodiversity in education and business. The Committee flagged up the need for the national curriculum to include biodiversity, and for action to address the limited numbers involved in biodiversity in the higher education sector;
- Costs – Members appreciated that the cost of implementing the various biodiversity action plans was difficult to quantify, but felt that further work was needed at UK and Wales level to ensure that adequate resources were available;
- Economic benefits – schemes were in place to deliver the economic benefits of

biodiversity, e.g. by linking nature reserves with tourism;

- Planning guidance – the forthcoming *Planning Policy Wales* included strengthened guidance on protecting and enhancing biodiversity;
- Conflict between species – Members raised the difficulty of preserving the diversity of both predatory and hunted species within local areas.

3.3 The Chair indicated that the Committee planned to undertake further work on biodiversity later in the year, and would aim to complement the work of the WBG.

Item 4: Review of the Welsh Language – EPT-01-02 (p 3)

4.1 Introducing the paper as Chair of the Culture Committee, Rhodri Glyn Thomas explained that the review had arisen from the National Assembly's commitment to a bilingual Wales, and was looking at how best to deliver this.

2. The Minister summarised the main developments since the review had started, most notably the strengthening of planning guidance in respect of the Welsh language via Technical Advice Note (Wales) 20 and the forthcoming revised *Planning Policy Wales*, which emphasised the sustainability of local communities. Discussions were ongoing with local planning authorities about applying the guidance through their Unitary Development Plans. Further research had also been commissioned.

4.3 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Leadership – Members considered that the National Assembly should provide leadership to local government and other agencies in respect of the Welsh language;
- Sustaining communities – the Committee welcomed the strengthening of planning guidance and considered that, as many of the issues affecting the sustainability of Welsh speaking communities were relevant to many other communities in Wales, the focus should be on sustaining communities generally;
- Transport – the Committee's report on the *Policy Review of Public Transport* had flagged up the need to develop a public transport system that was integrated, accessible and affordable to all people in Wales. Public transport was a key means of sustaining local communities, by providing access to employment, welfare and leisure activities, thus limiting the need for outward migration from communities;
- Review of planning process – the Committee would ensure that Welsh language issues

were addressed in the forthcoming review;

- Information - Members welcomed the research already commissioned by the Minister on the impact of the strengthened guidance on the Welsh language, but stressed the overall need for more information, particularly at a local level. The Committee also welcomed the Minister's commitment to review the guidance again, if research suggested this was necessary.

4.3 The Chair emphasised that the Committee had given due regard to the Welsh language in its deliberations, and would continue to do so in all aspects of its work, where relevant, in particular the review of the planning system. He would write to Rhodri Glyn Thomas setting out the Committee's formal response to the review.

Item 5: Detailed Work Programme - Spring 2002 - EPT-01-02 (p 4)

5.1 The Chair invited the Committee to agree the detailed work programme and seek Business Committee's approval to hold an extra meeting on Thursday 31 January.

5.2 Members were concerned about the impact of Thursday afternoon meetings on travelling to constituencies in the winter months, particularly for North Wales Members. It was suggested that all substantive items for 31 January be taken on 27 February, with the exception of the draft strategic work programme. Members also suggested that Welsh TOCs be invited to a future meeting that term.

5.3 The Committee agreed the work programme, subject to the above amendments, and would seek Business Committee's agreement to meet briefly on 31 January.

Item 6: Minutes of the meeting 28 November - EPT-17-01 (min)

6.1 The committee adopted the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November.

Date of next meeting

7.1 The next meeting of the committee would be at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 23 January 2002 at the National Assembly for Wales.

Committee Secretariat January 2002

Wales secures €4 million for sustainable development

Approval of the Welsh bid for European funding under the Innovative Action programme will allow Wales to forge ahead with its sustainable development agenda, **Minister for Environment Sue Essex** announced today (**Wednesday 9 January**).

The European Commission Innovative Action scheme invited bids for experimental projects incorporating a number of themes, including the promotion of regional identity and sustainable development, particularly in the areas of innovation and technology.

Following extensive consultation, the Welsh Assembly Government submitted plans for a €4 million, two-year programme to create a regional laboratory that can test and demonstrate the way towards a sustainable knowledge based economy in Wales.

Welcoming news of the successful bid, Ms Essex said: "Approval of this programme by the European Commission reflects the Welsh position of being in the vanguard of regions effectively driving the sustainable development agenda forward.

"We can now proceed with four projects which will encourage economic development based on knowledge and technological innovation, exploitation of the information society serving regional development, and promotion of sustainable development and regional identity.

"The projects build extensively on experience and partnerships already established in Wales under the Wales Regional Technology Plan and Information Society programmes, and the Countryside Council for Wales' award-winning *LANDMAP* geographical information system.

"These innovative actions will help achieve the vision of a sustainable Wales described in our sustainable development strategy and in the national economic development strategy *A Winning Wales*."

Further details of the projects being funded under Innovative Actions will be available at its formal launch later this month.

Notes:

- **The decision to submit a bid for funding under the European Regional Development Fund Regional Programme of Innovative Actions was made during the plenary session of 16 November 2000**
- **Queries other than media queries should be directed to Programme Manager**

Steve Davies on telephone number (029) 2082 5031, or by email at steve.davies@wales.gsi.gov.uk

(9 January, 2002)