

## **ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

**Date:** Wednesday 27 February 2002  
**Time:** 2.00 to 4.30 pm  
**Venue:** Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

### **REPORT BY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT**

#### **COUNTRYSIDE**

##### **Countryside and Rights of Way Act**

The first draft maps of open country and registered common land will be published by the Countryside Council for Wales on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2002.

The area covered by the maps will be the Berwyn Mountain. Draft maps for the rest of Wales will be published on a rolling programme basis during 2002 and 2003.

I attended the launch of the first draft maps in the Berwyn as well as attending a meeting of the Berwyn local access forum on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February in Bala.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

##### **Meeting with European Commission**

On 1 February I had a meeting with Ms Pia Bucella, Head of Unit, Inter-institutional Relations at the Commission's Environment Directorate at the Commission's office in Wales. We discussed the Commission's emerging thinking on governance, with DG Environment looking for ways to ensure that regional and local interest were properly engaged in the formulation of Directives rather than just being involved in implementation.

I subsequently attended a seminar led by Ms Bucella at which the Commission's future environmental work programme was discussed.

## **Inland Waterways – A Regeneration Strategy for Wales**

On 8 February, I met with David Fletcher, Chief Executive of British Waterways, to discuss the development of a 'Regeneration Plan for Inland Waterways in Wales'. This will consider the opportunities associated with re-opening and re-invigorating inland waterways.

Mr Fletcher undertook to prepare a draft framework, which he hopes to submit by the end of April. Any plan will ultimately require the approval of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who have funding and sponsorship responsibilities for British Waterways.

## **Nitrate Vulnerable Zones**

On 28 January I announced the publication by the Assembly Government of a consultation paper seeking views on proposals to extend the coverage in Wales of Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) designated under the EC Nitrates Directive. The proposals would increase the NVZ coverage to about 3% of the land area of Wales.

High levels of nitrates in rivers, groundwaters and coastal waters can cause various problems. For example, they can limit potential new sources of drinking water and can damage valuable habitats. Fortunately in Wales there is little evidence of significant nitrate pollution, but where such pollution is occurring, or it could be if no action is taken, farmers in the designated NVZs in Wales will be required to adopt specific good agricultural practices to reduce the problem.

## **Work in Progress to Produce a Draft Soil Strategy for Wales**

In 1996 the Royal Commission for Environmental Pollution published its 19th report on 'The Sustainable Use of Soils'. It stated that soils in the UK are an important environmental resource and should be given the same high level of protection as the other environmental media, namely air and water. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has since published a Draft Soil Strategy for England in March 2001 for public consultation. The Scottish Executive is also developing a Soil Protection Strategy for Scotland.

A scoping study led by Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Bangor, has started to gather data and views to inform the preparation of a draft Strategy for Wales. The study will collate information about the state of Welsh soil, the pressures on it and current and possible new actions to ensure its sustainable use. The review will report in July 2002.

A draft strategy will then be produced by the Assembly, and presented to the Committee, early in 2003 as a consultation paper. It is anticipated that the Strategy will then be completed

towards the end of 2003.

## **PLANNING**

### **Publication of Consultation Document "*Planning: delivering for Wales*"**

On 31 January I made a statement to Plenary to announce the issue of "*Planning: delivering for Wales*". The document was published for consultation on 1 February.

It sets out a number of proposals, which are intended to update and improve the planning process in Wales. It puts forward ways to improve and speed up preparation of development plans and to improve the way in which development control decisions are made.

Everything in the paper is based on the need for the planning system to be open, fair and transparent, to inspire public and business confidence, to deliver improved quality and speed and to be a positive tool for managing change. I want planning to continue to be a key element in helping us deliver the sustainable development we need to secure wealth, improve health and protect the environment of Wales for our generation and for our children.

"*Planning: delivering for Wales*" proposes to change the development plan system to enable local authorities to prepare local development plans which are more concise and targeted. They should be more quickly produced to provide a consistent, up to date basis for decision making.

For development control and decision making we are proposing to modernise the planning system by

- updating the rules and regulations which control it;
- improving the consistency, clarity and speed of decision making;
- improving access to information; and
- improving the skills and awareness of everyone who works in, or uses the system.

Everyone is affected by planning, and we want a system that responds to our needs effectively and efficiently. We have asked for comments on "*Planning: delivering for Wales*" by 29 April. Every comment made will be carefully considered in helping us decide how the proposals will be taken forward.

### **Planning Obligations**

Planning Obligations are an established way of ensuring that developers contribute to the provision of community infrastructure such as improved access and provision of affordable housing. However, we believe that we need a new approach to ensure that obligations are

used to promote sustainable development and growth for businesses and communities.

Proposals to improve the way in which the system operates are set out a Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions consultation paper *"Planning Obligations: Delivering a Fundamental Change"*.

The paper was issued for consultation in Wales on 1 February, with a request for comments to be submitted by 29 April.

## **Recent Meeting**

On Wednesday 6 February I delivered the keynote speech at the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors' Wales National Conference in Cardiff.

## **Compulsory Purchase**

On 1 February I endorsed the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' consultation paper to improve the operation of the compulsory purchase system in England and Wales.

*"Compulsory Purchase and Compensation: delivering a fundamental change"* sets out proposals to make the system fairer, simpler and more effective. Responses to the consultation are required by 27 March.

## **Consultation Draft Minerals Technical Advice Note (M TAN): Aggregates**

A draft Minerals Technical Advice Note (M TAN) on Aggregates has issued for consultation. This detailed guidance on the technical aspects of the provision of aggregates was promised in Minerals Planning Policy Wales (December 2000).

The advice in this M TAN is far reaching and will provide a more sustainable way of planning for the supply of aggregates in Wales.

The consultation period ends on 13 May after which the Welsh Assembly Government will consider the responses received and the amendments required, with a view to publishing the final version of the document later this year.

## **Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund consultation paper**

A consultation paper has issued on the distribution of the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund in Wales.

The Sustainability Fund with a budget of £1.7 million will be administered separately in Wales with a view to addressing issues and priorities relevant to Wales. The consultation paper seeks comments on the type of schemes that should be supported by the Fund. It is proposed that grant applications will be assessed by a Wales Sustainability Fund Advisory Panel comprising a number of Assembly officials and individuals from other bodies.

## **TRANSPORT**

### **Safe Routes to Schools Initiative**

On 5 February I hosted a Safe Routes to School event at the Assembly. Children from four schools across Wales demonstrated cycling and pedestrian projects that have been funded from the Safe Routes to Schools initiative.

I was joined by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning,

Jane Davidson, Health Minister, Jane Hutt, and Assembly Members.

### **Rail: Wales and Borders Franchise**

The Strategic Rail Authority announced on 30 January that eight companies have pre-qualified as bidders for the new franchise, indicating a strong interest in running rail services in Wales and the Borders.

A preferred bidder will be known in the Autumn and should start operating in the Spring of 2003.

I met Anne Hemmingway, the Wales representative of the Strategic Rail Authority on Tuesday 12 February. We had a useful discussion about the SRA's strategic plan and the Wales and the Borders franchise and how she can help facilitate our interest in achieving the franchise.

### **North-South Rail Service**

Since May 2000, the Assembly Government has provided funding to Wales and Borders

Trains for an additional North-South train service. It runs from Cardiff to Holyhead via Wrexham (07:10 departure) and returns in the afternoon (14:36 departure) and complements the service already in the franchise, the Holyhead to Cardiff via Crewe (05:23 departure) which returns in the evening (17:45 departure) from Cardiff.

In response to representations from Assembly Members, Local Authorities and the general public about the inadequacies of services generally between North and South Wales, Wales and Borders Trains have reviewed the use of our investment. They have put together an alternative timetable, on which they are consulting all Assembly Members and key stakeholders including the North Wales Economic Forum, Mid Wales Partnership, South East Wales Transport Forum, WDA, CBI and the Rail Passenger Committee.

In essence the existing train from Holyhead to Cardiff in the morning would travel via Wrexham instead of Crewe and return at 17:15 not 17:45 again via Wrexham. The other benefits are a higher frequency on the Chester-Wrexham-Shrewsbury route and additional services providing interchange at Shrewsbury from Cardiff to the North. A decision will have to be taken by 9 March and this will be taken in the light of comments received.

In terms of the rail franchise, all bidders would be informed of these proposals and will take account of them in their responses to the SRA. Any changes would not pre-empt the opportunities for bidders to set out their own vision for improvements in North-South services and they will be asked to put forward specific proposals for direct and connecting services between North and South Wales.

### **Free Local Bus Travel – Launch and Publicity**

A publicity campaign has been launched to promote the Assembly's new free local bus travel scheme for pensioners and disabled people. Already, advertisements have appeared on the video screen in Cardiff's Queen Street, and on buses throughout Wales, and are also appearing in local newspapers and specialist and trade journals.

Each local authority has received 500 bilingual leaflets and 100 A3 posters to use in its own offices. A further 20,000 leaflets and 400 A4 posters have been distributed to more than 300 post offices throughout Wales. Further copies of this publicity material, and guidance on the categories of disability, are being sent to GPs and other health care professionals who may be asked by authorities to comment on an application. Multilingual leaflets will be distributed through the Racial Equality network throughout Wales.

Copies of this publicity material and a briefing note are being sent to all Assembly Members, and to Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament representing Welsh constituencies.

Organisations representing pensioners and disabled people have been involved throughout, and are assisting in making sure that as many eligible people as possible know about the scheme.

A television advertising campaign is planned in the run up to the launch, and I am considering proposals for a number of regional events at the beginning of April to mark this occasion throughout Wales.

### **Local Transport Services Grant**

As announced in the budget £7.52m will be available for support for bus services and community transport projects in 2002-03. This is an increase of 19% on the current year. The allocation to each authority is being announced shortly.

### **Vehicle Emissions**

I intend to introduce new subordinate legislation, with the title of *The Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Wales) Regulations 2002*.

The purpose is to extend to local authorities the power to issue fixed penalty notices to motorists failing a test of vehicle emissions in declared Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs); and to drivers leaving engines idling unnecessarily while parked.

I shall consult local authorities, the Police forces and other stakeholders on this legislation and carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment before the Statutory Instrument is drafted.

### **Welsh Transport Forum**

The Forum met on 11 February, when we discussed the rail franchising bidding process, long distance coach provision within Wales, and community transport.

The report on community transport will come to the Committee after the Forum's next meeting in June when recommendations will be agreed.

### **MEETING WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORK IN WALES**

Under the Assembly's Voluntary Sector Scheme Ministers are required to meet with the voluntary sector network in Wales at least twice a year.

I had a useful and informative meeting with voluntary sector representatives on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2001, and a note of our discussions is at Annex 1 of this Report.

**Sue Essex**

**Minister for Environment**

**ANNEX 1**

**MEETING BETWEEN THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND REPRESENTATIVES OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORKS**

**DATE:** Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2001

**VENUE:** Conference Room A, Cardiff Bay

**PRESENT:**

Sue Essex AM - Assembly Minister

**Voluntary Sector Representatives**

Tim Stowe - RSPB

Merfyn Williams - Wales Link

Audrey Williams - Wales Assembly of Women

Mal Williams - Cylch

Judy Ling Wong - Black Environment Network

Jonathan Brown - WCVA

## **Officials**

Martin Evans - Director, Transport Planning Environment Group

Charles Coombs - Sustainable Development Unit

Leon Rees - Countryside Division

Catrin Sully - Transport Planning Environment Group Business Unit

**PURPOSE:** The National Assembly's Voluntary Sector Scheme requires that each Assembly Minister meets representatives of relevant voluntary sector networks at least twice in any calendar year.

## **SYNOPSIS:**

### **Specific actions for Ministers/Officials**

- Current status of the Code of Practice for Voluntary sector funding to be sought from the Voluntary Sector branch and discussed with WCVA – action complete.
- Invitation to be sent to Judy Ling Wong and Audrey Williams to attend the Environment Business Group to discuss equality of opportunity.
- Provide details to the WCVA on the relevant protocol for engaging in dialogue with the organisation Forum For the Future.
- Update on equality work to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

### **Specific action for the Voluntary Sector**

- Views on the Code of Practice for Voluntary sector funding to be put in writing.
- WCVA to firm up proposals for a Sustainable Development Network with costings and discuss further with staff from the Assembly's Sustainable Development Unit.

### **Issues which may inform the Assembly as a whole in developing policy**

- The Voluntary Sector is concerned that core funding is increasingly difficult to secure. It also has concerns about the number of different parts of the Assembly that offer grants and money to them. The inability to ensure long term core funding means strategic and

business planning for many voluntary sector organisations is difficult.

- The Voluntary sector welcomed the introduction by the Assembly of a voluntary code to potential suppliers, which strengthens the bids of companies that are committed to ethical trading, equal opportunities and sustainable development. The sector felt that this approach could be used in other areas of the Assembly's work.

## **ISSUES RAISED**

### **Funding issues**

- The Voluntary Sector would like the Assembly to do more to address the difficulties faced by the sector in obtaining core funding. Funding for projects is more widely available and although this sometimes covers some of the core costs for the duration of the project, funding for business, strategic and long term planning is difficult to obtain.
- The Minister asked the Voluntary sector for their views and comments on the Code of Practice for funding the voluntary sector; these will be compiled and forwarded in writing to the Minister's office.

*ACTION: WCVA to forward comments in a brief paper to the Minister.*

### **Update from the Assembly on progress being made on the Sustainable Development Scheme Action Plan.**

- In October the Assembly's procurement unit introduced a voluntary code of practice, "Winning our business". This details steps that potential suppliers can take to strengthen their bids. The code gives a framework within which potential suppliers can plot where they are as a company in terms of ethical trading, equal opportunities and sustainable development. Companies that improve in these areas will by doing so strengthen their bids for work from the Assembly.
- An Inter-regional Good Practice Network is in the process of being developed with input from the Assembly. It is not clear whether funding has been gained from the EC for this yet, but the partners are meeting to discuss what can be achieved with or without the funding.
- An informal panel has been put together and has met to put together a permanent structure for a Welsh Sustainable Development Forum.
- A working group has been set up to look at the sustainable development indicators. They have only met once as yet, but it is hoped that by the summer of 2002 they will have decided if any more than the 12 existing indicators are needed and if so what they should be.
- Work on an 'ecological footprint' for Wales by the Best Foot Forward organisation has

been produced, the report is so far in draft.

- The Voluntary sector are interested in entering into a dialogue with Forum For the Future.

*ACTION: Charles Coombs to contact the WCVA about relevant protocols for engaging in dialogue with Forum For the Future.*

### **Equal Opportunities Working Group – report from BEN and the relevant Assembly officers on the work of this group.**

- BEN explained the difficulties faced by under represented groups and how important it is for these groups to meet and talk to people from within the Assembly. The minority ethnic community have much to offer and BEN is keen to develop and extend the relationships that have already been formed.
- The Minister reported on the visit of the Disability Rights Commission to the Environment Business Group. The discussion had raised much awareness and had been a positive forum for discussion.

*ACTION: Diary Secretary/Sue Essex AM to invite Audrey Williams (Wales Assembly for Women) and Judy Ling Wong (Black Environment Network) to a future Environment Business Group meeting.*

- The steps being taken to manage diversity within the work of this portfolio were explained. Officials are engaged in community visits and setting up networks in an effort to integrate the Assembly as policy maker and employer into all communities and sections of society.

*ACTION: An update of this work to be an agenda item at the next voluntary sector meeting – Diary Secretary/Sue Essex AM*

### **Enfys – a report from WCVA on the progress of Enfys**

- The Enfys scheme, launched in June 2001 closed the first round of applications in September 2001. 35 organisations submitted projects for consideration, of these 13 grants were awarded.
- A wide range of groups applied and the projects were very diverse. All applications were checked for sustainability, and although not essential match funding is encouraged.

### **A proposal for a Sustainable Development Network for Wales**

- The voluntary sector Sustainable Development Forum has decided to widen its network, and to do this by using IT and the internet. This would involve setting up a website which would act as a portal to other sites but also have some content of its own.
- The WCVA know that the interest and expertise for such a network is there, but do not have the funding needed to take the project forward.

*ACTION: WCVA to firm up proposals and discuss with Charles Coombs from the Sustainable Development Unit.*

### **A proposal for an annual 'State of the Welsh Environment' report**

- The Voluntary Sector referred to the Countryside Council for Wales paper on the Environment, this was thought to be good but it only reported on the work of CCW. The Voluntary sector feel that a more strategic approach to a report like this would allow for a fuller picture.
- The Assembly has limited resources for this type of work, the priorities of the staff are policy making and supporting our partners. Any additional report would need to take consideration of the resources available.
- Environmental Protection Division are already in talks with the Environment Agency, Countryside Council for Wales and the Forestry Commission about the next 'State of the Environment' report and what this should look like.

*ACTION: Follow up discussions at next meeting or at the next Wales Countryside Link meeting.*