

Mid Wales Regional Committee

Note of key issues raised at the Sustainable Development Roadshow

Date: Friday 4th February
Time: 10.00 am
Venue: Coleg Powys, Newtown

Attendance:

Glyn Davies, Chair	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
Cynog Dafis	Plaid Cymru	Mid and West Wales
Elin Jones	Plaid Cymru	Ceredigion
Mick Bates	Liberal Democrat	Montgomeryshire
Nick Bourne	Conservative	Mid and West Wales

Committee Secretariat:

Delyth Thomas	Committee Clerk
Brian Duddridge	Deputy Committee Clerk

Apologies:

Alun Michael	Labour	Mid and West Wales
Kirsty Williams	Liberal Democrat	Brecon & Radnorshire

Substitutions: None

Declarations of Interest: None

Opening Remarks

1.2 The Chair thanked Coleg Powys for the use of their facilities and the Centre for Alternative Technology for their display in the reception area. He also congratulated the Centre for Alternative Technology for receiving a Prince's Trust Award for their work. He welcomed members of the public to the meeting.

1.3 The Chair reminded all those present that the Roadshow was a formal meeting of the National Assembly and that the standing orders and Presiding Officer guidance would apply to its proceedings. He introduced the meeting by explaining that the National Assembly had a duty under Section 121 of the Governance of Wales Act 1988 to make a scheme setting out how it would promote sustainable development when exercising its functions. The Assembly was consulting before making a scheme, the consultation documents had been published on January 26th. He explained that as part of the wider consultation it was decided that each of the four Regional Committees would host a 'Roadshow' in its region to hear at first hand the views of organisations and of the public.

1.4 At the end of the consultation period there would be a debate in plenary leading to the adoption, by the Assembly, of the scheme which would be kept under review and an annual report published.

Presentations by Organisations

2.1 The Chair expressed delight at the number of responses to the invitation to make oral presentations to the Committee. Presenters would be invited forward in the order set out in the running order at Annex 1. The written presentations submitted by organisations had been collated into a paper which would be published to the Internet at www.wales.gov.uk/committee/business.

2.2 Members raised the following points during discussion with the presenters:

Tourism

- **how would sustainability in the tourism industry be achieved given its seasonal nature ?**
- what could be done to reduce the dependency of tourists on the car when holidaying in Mid Wales?

Farming

- was there a future for organic farming as set out within the Rural Development Plan given the pressure on costs?
- should the kite mark scheme be re-introduced to promote Welsh lamb and beef?
- whether food technology had sufficient status within the national curriculum;

Economic/Environment

- there was no specific mention within Objective 1 and the Strategic Plan about energy creation and the treatment of waste, how did organisations envisage progress in both

these areas?

- were measures to increase prosperity through Objective 1 consistent with sustainable development?
- What could be done to improve the public perception of windfarms as an alternative to other traditional forms of energy?
- how could organisations evaluate the impact of the Market Towns Initiative on their attempts to promote regeneration?
- how important was it to move away from short term funding. Especially for voluntary organisations?
- Should a centrally funded research strategy be established to support the sustainable development strategy in Wales?

Employment/Training/Education

- in developing initiatives to retain qualified young people in rural areas how would organisations measure success?
- how would organisations ensure a cultural dimension to their initiatives?
- how could migration to south east Wales from other parts of Wales be halted, or at least what could be done to attract people back to the more rural areas of Wales?

Other issues

- there was a need for organisations to promote best practice in local community consultation processes and to help focus on community opinion rather than that of individuals or large national organisations - how could this be done and what was the National Assembly's role in it?;
- should the National Assembly set up a Committee to co-ordinate and monitor its Sustainable Development Strategy?

2.3 The presenters responses were limited by time but the key points were:

Tourism

- A national event strategy was being developed to fully utilise the scope for extending the holiday season over the full year; short break holidays were being successfully marketed. 85% of visitors to Mid Wales used the car to get there, realistically there was limited scope for reducing this. A study had been started supported by the Wales Tourist Board and some local Authorities and towns to look into ways of promoting travel by rail using park and ride schemes, and travel by bus. Cycle hire at rail stations was also being looked at. This study was due to be reported upon in the spring.

Farming

- There was concern that the pricing policy of the large multiples was likely to reduce the profit margin in organic farming. Realistically this meant that there was limited potential for the organic farming sector to develop beyond the 10% target set for it. 80% of organic food was imported, there was a need to develop and support local outlets and to ensure that imported organic products was being produced to the same standard that was applied in Wales?
- The Powys Food Futures initiative would be providing a report in the near future on the potential of marketing locally produced goods. This would contribute greatly to sustainability in that reduced transport mileage.
- The food miles project was considered worthwhile but in need of greater input at local level.
- It was suggested that the National Assembly should help ensure a quality assurance scheme ie a kite mark, for Welsh lamb and beef produce. The original scheme was likely to be relaunched following a feasibility study by the Welsh Development Agency.
- The study of food featured significantly in Design and Technology but it was unfortunate that the subject was not compulsory at Key Stage 4.

Economic/Environment

- A strategic approach was needed to the development of alternative forms of energy creation eg windfarms and also the opportunities offered by biomass, taking local needs and objections into account.
- There would be a need to develop a way of recording and monitoring outward migration and return. Such data would be a significant indicator in measuring the success of a sustainable development initiatives which enhanced economic and business growth in a local community . It could also be possible to build in factors that measured social and cultural developments and events particularly at local grass roots level.
- There could be a consistency of prosperity between Objective 1 and Sustainable Development if local organisations and individuals were the focus of properly funded initiatives. .
- The Market Town Initiative was felt to be effective but it's impact restricted by its three year funding limit.

Employment/Training/Education

- On the question of 'migration', teaching / information packs had been sent to primary schools in the Brecon Beacons area, similarly one organisation had been working with local authorities and produced a pack for schools for use within the curriculum.
- It was generally agreed that a partnership approach with education providers, and other important providers perhaps from farming, was very important.
- Distance learning should feature as a way of empowering local people.

Other Issues

- Local community consultation in Scotland adopted a strategic approach to 'listening' set out in their publication 'Listening to Communities Budget'. Speakers supported the adoption of best practice - as used by organisations and individuals alike - and support for local communities in the context of sustainable development.
- There was support for the proposal that the National Assembly should establish a Committee to co-ordinate the sustainable development strategy.
- Annual funding should be at least for three years and simpler processes that allowed better access to funding should be introduced so that local organisations and individuals would be encouraged apply.
- A task force was suggested as one means of devising and promoting a centrally funded research strategy. It should include economic, social, farming and environmental interests and experience.

2.4 The Chair thanked presenters for their contributions to the meeting and reminded everyone that the closing date for responses to the consultation was 25 April 2000

Public Presentations

3.1 Four presenters addressed the Committee.

- Mr C B Thomas, Beeches, Montgomery spoke about tourism and sustainable development in rural areas.
- Mr P Barrett - Brown, The Central, Princes Street, Montgomery spoke about the co-operation of the Welsh Development Agency in the process of determining sustainable development.
- Mr H Davies of the Forestry Commission spoke about the management of woodlands and their role in delivering a sustainable countryside.

- Julia Harrington, Wales & Borderlands at Mold spoke about listening matter as a process involving people in developing ideas and solutions.

Close

The Chair thanked all presenters for their contributions.

He reminded Members that the next meeting would be held on March 10th at Ysgol-y-Moelwyn, Blaenau Ffestiniog.

The meeting closed at 12.45 p.m.