

Mid Wales 05-00(min)

Minutes of Mid Wales Regional Committee

Date: Friday 20th October, 2000

Time: 10.30 am

Venue : School Hall, Lampeter Secondary School.

Attendance:

Elin Jones, Chair	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
Mick Bates	Liberal Democrat	Montgomeryshire
Nick Bourne	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
Cynog Dafis	Plaid Cymru	Mid and West Wales
Glyn Davies	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
Kirtsy Williams	Liberal Democrat	Brecon & Radnorshire

Committee Secretariat:

Delyth Thomas	Committee Clerk
Brian Duddridge	Deputy Committee Clerk
Gareth Woodhead	Committee Secretariat

Apologies: Delyth Evans

Substitutions: None

Declarations of Interest: None

Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed members of the public to the meeting and thanked Gareth Jones, Headteacher of Lampeter Secondary School for allowing the meeting to take place in the school hall and on an inset day.

Members of the public were reminded that it was a formal meeting of the National Assembly and the normal rules of conduct and behaviour would apply, instantaneous translation facilities were available.

Action from the last meeting

The Chair reported that following the meeting at Ystradgynlais she had written in accordance with Members' wishes to local authorities, voluntary organisations and bodies representing business in mid Wales to try to establish a better liaison with them. The response had been disappointing, the Chair would consider how to take the matter forward. However, it was noted that local authorities would be taking part in the meeting with the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) on economic and community regeneration.

Agenda Item 1: Economic and Community Regeneration in Mid Wales

Paper : MID 05-00(p.1)

.1.1 The Chair registered apologies from Sir David Rowe-Beddow, Chair of the WDA and invited Sian Lloyd-Jones, Managing Director of the Mid Wales Division of the WDA, to deliver her presentation. Ms Lloyd-Jones, introduced her colleagues Karen Latham, Business Development Manager and Sioned Rees, Regional Development Manager. The Chair pointed out that she had previously worked for the WDA and that Glyn Davies was a former Chair of the DBRW

1.2Ms Lloyd-Jones addressed points set out in the tabled paper at Annex 1.

The Mid Wales Division worked in partnership with public, private and voluntary sector bodies identifying customer needs in the fields of business, property and regional development. It focussed on start-up and micro-businesses providing practical support through Business Connect. It emphasised the need for accessible sites and broad based interests with priority to businesses that would add value. Advice was available via a single access point on business planning, grants, specialist advisers and counsellors, training needs and opportunities and on client management systems.

1.3 90% of businesses given assistance were indigenous, any inward investment tended to be from within the UK. Manufacturers for niche market products were encouraged, also those with a sectoral base such as manufacturing, agri-food eg Aeron Valley Cheese, the Burger Company. The Agency was looking at the timber sector; it was also using a thematic approach cutting across different sectors.

1.4 In promoting 'account management' the Agency advocated development of clusters and networks e. g., the Export Association Mid Wales Manufacturing Group. Centres of expertise were being

encouraged e.g., the Aberystwyth Science Park, IGER and the Centre for Alternative Technology.

1.5 Advance premises were very important; since 1989 some 722 factory units had been built offering some 4 million square feet of space of which 484 units had been sold leaving 238 offering about 1 million square feet. Looking to the longer term, Objective 1 funding and the new Property Development Grant would aid investment.

1.6 Sioned Rees advised that strategic planning with partners - with a view to Objective 1 and 2 funding - was in place, incorporating the fields of transport, information technology, tourism and other factors crucial to mid Wales. Initiatives included Leader Plus, community development through regeneration such as the Market Town Initiative, the provision of 'toolkits' geared to local community needs seeking revenue funding and offering access to professional advice e.g. architects. The application of town improvement grants in areas like Blaenau Ffestiniog were helping with job creation.

1.7 The Mid Wales Division was looking into the loss of young people from the area and what could be done to halt this as part of the Llwybro initiative, a key reason for leaving was said to be the lack of access to higher education establishments and a lack of well paid employment. A data base on this was being collated and consultations would be held with careers organisations and universities on how the problem could be addressed.

1.8 The Agency had acted positively when the DBRW had been subsumed into the Mid Wales Division of the WDA; staffing levels currently stood at 90 plus with resourcing of £17.5m programmed for investment in 2000-21 compared with expenditure of £13m for the last year of DBRW. The Division had enhanced powers, more accessible schemes and access to greater expertise. The impact had, in their view, on balance been positive.

1.9 Points raised in discussion included:

- DBRW had been able to focus on depopulation in mid Wales, the Mid Wales Division should continue to address this;
- the importance of continuing with the Llwybro Plan;
- there had been no reference to a working relationship with the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency, did it consult them and was it looking for positive opportunities to share initiatives;
- was the Division mindful of the importance and relationship to the environment of alternative energy;
- was a 'build first' policy for industrial units the best way;
- had there been more investment following subsumation of the DBRW;
- what impact would Objective 1 and 2 have on Agency plans
- Powys was sandwiched between Objective 1 and structural funds used on the English side of the border, what was being done to ensure that it did not lose out;
- how would the 'toolkit' and market town initiatives relate;
- how were community regeneration schemes being monitored, was there a loss of building capacity; and
- where did sustainable development fit in.

1.10 Agency officials felt that there was a very positive and proactive relationship with the Countryside

Council and the Environment Agency, they were working on an energy policy which recognised the environmental need to preserve the landscape. All parties recognised that each had their own agendas and conflict could arise e.g. as with the British Western Softwood (BSW) where the impact on the environment could not be ignored.

1.11 , The building strategy was to be alert to potential demand and to balance advance building with an ability to react quickly to new demand. . There was a need to improve infrastructure services accordingly e.g. information technology (IT) provision, transport improvements etc to match expectations of quality of life. On the prospects for Objective 1 funding, the DBRW had begun to revise its priorities and to move away from investment in the relatively prosperous Severn Valley, however it continued to actively consider the needs of Powys.

1.12 Sustainability was inbuilt into proposals for advance building and landscaping; a programme of evaluation was being developed. Traditional measurements had included the number and speed of jobs being created and the costs involved in establishing and running an enterprise. Other indicators favoured by the private sector included 'soft' measures e.g. the number of networks established and, importantly, efficiency and competitiveness. In addition external evaluations could be commissioned.

The Views of Local Authorities

Papers : MID 05-00 (p.2,p. 3 and p. 4)

Ceredigion County Council

2.1 Cllr Keith Evans, Cabinet Member of Economic Development, Tourism, Europe and Training Committee of Ceredigion County Council referred to his paper. He highlighted the need for further substantial investment all round and in particular for the release of the DERA airfield at Aberporth, which deserved the full support of the WDA and the National Assembly. The only instances where the WDA had attracted significant inward investment had involved Cybercall and Aeron Valley Cheese. There was a need for transparency in regional planning to reflect local needs, the advent of the Council for Education and Training Wales (CETW) would add to the plethora of groups involved in regeneration and should not be allowed further complicate what help was available.

2.2 He pointed out that Ceredigion County Council was to receive from the National Assembly £1m less financial support than was expected. This would have a serious adverse affect on the County Council's ability to invest in employment opportunities in an area highly dependent on tourism and agriculture. . The decline in funding was a particular concern when the Council would be looking to maximise the benefit of Objective 1 funding. There was an over emphasis on urban development to the detriment of rural needs in national plans and startegies. He urged that the Committee consider the need for regional development and release additional funding for west Wales.

Powys County Council

2.3 Cllr John Thompson, Chair of the East Wales and Powys Regeneration Partnerships, highlighted

issues raised in the Powys paper. He emphasised concerns for the loss of the DBRW - an agency dedicated to mid Wales - compounded by the absence of a Powys member on the board of the WDA. Although a good working relationship existed with the WDA, he asked that the National Assembly consider the board membership. The marked decline in the rural economy had not helped local businesses and the situation had not been helped by over-cluttered administrative requirements.

2.4 Graham Davey, Director of Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration for Powys, advocated an holistic approach to community regeneration which needed long term commitment to funding. Avenues of funding needed to be co-ordinated with local authorities at the heart of community strategies. He pointed out that under the terms of the Local Government Act 2000 local authorities were given a new duty to promote economic and social development. He supported the principles of Community First but hoped that this would not lead to another layer of planning administration.

Gwynedd County Council (Meirionydd)

2.5 Dyfrig Siencyn, Vice Chair of the Employment and European Select Committee of Gwynedd, emphasised the need for economic rather than community development in Meirionydd. There was concern in Meirionydd for the DBRW merger with the WDA and the consequential effect on mid Wales but this appeared now to be resolved. The serious recession in the agricultural industry had done nothing to retain young people in the area. Sustainability was rooted in the preservation of the environment and in local communities, there was concern at the lack of progress with Objective 1 initiatives which had resulted in the private sector losing interest in a number of ventures.

2.6 Points raised in discussion included:

- the need to look at planning guidelines as these effected economic development;
- the need for balance between sustainability and environmental, social and economic development;
- the value of further initiatives like that at DERA, Aberporth;
- what support should follow when the market town initiative ceased;
- what specific problems were there with progress on Objective 1 funding;
- that in considering membership of boards such as the WDA it should be possible for the appointing authority to target under-represented rural areas;
- what were the implications for Ceredigion of the financial shortfall identified on, for example, the council tax; and
- where should intervention take place in agriculture.

2.7 Ceredigion representatives felt that it was important for local work opportunities to be found for local people; it was very important to try to encourage other initiatives like DERA by accessing existing government funding as held for example by the Ministry of Defence; some Objective 1 schemes had been subject to delay rather than scheme failure; the £1m deficit in funding was equivalent to a 15% increase in council tax bills or £40 per head, the council had expected additional funding not less. Changes to council tax had a disproportionate effect on middle income earners.

2.8 Powys representatives sought a link between economic development and planning which should be considered as part of the review of planning guidance being undertaken by the National Assembly. The absence of a national energy strategy for Wales made a clear and cohesive approach to sustainability

difficult.

2.9 Meirionydd representatives echoed the need for a balanced approach to planning matters with an emphasis on the appropriateness of each proposal. The views of all concerned would need to be considered and the requirements of the Human Rights Act be taken into account. There had been too much 'hype' over Objective 1 funding with the consequent loss of significant private sector interest and money to the effect that there would be a 50% cut in funding. Focus should be on maximising farmstead income as opposed to farm incomes with the opportunities of diversification being highlighted. The market town initiative would need to continue with some support being withdrawn on gradual basis. It was planned that such initiatives should become self-sustaining within the time scale of the initiative.

2.10 The Mid Wales Division addressed some of these and earlier points; membership of the WDA was a matter for the National Assembly and relied heavily on applications for membership rather than nominations for appointment; the Division were the unit best equipped to tackle the needs of Mid Wales which they recognised linked agriculture very closely to the economy; the education and training needs of young people were central to the prosperity of the region.

The National Assembly - Communities First

Paper : MID 05-00(p.5)

3.1 Barbara Castle stressed that the programme was very much in draft. She highlighted the following points - the initiative was rooted in the work of the national housing and strategy task group of the former Tai Cymru but had progressed to a cross-cutting joined up approach to community development; the need to engage communities in partnership work; the need to incorporate service delivery issues into provision and evaluation; best practice UK and world wide is being directed at the programme.

3.2 The National Assembly had consulted on the initial paper within Wales - over 160 submissions had been received and 21 local authority seminars attended - to establish what home grown lessons could be learnt; officials had talked to such bodies as the Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations, LEADER, Menter Powys, the national parks, farmers groups in Gwynedd etc; a second paper would now issue targeting and indexing groups with local knowledge and experience. It would promote flexibility of approach to community development through, amongst other things, partnership building and vertical integration. Before funding could be considered applicants would need to have a strategy in place that ensured consistent and long-term provision. Local partnerships would boast a broad membership including Members of the National Assembly and local authority members, in addition to representatives of local communities. Each would strive to ensure capacity building for lasting and sustainable change.

3.3 The Chair thanked all contributors for a lively and constructive debate.

Agenda Item 2: Public Presentations

4.1 The following presentations were made:

Subject	Organisation/Speaker	Paper
The problems facing young people in rural areas	Geraint Pugh and Geinor Medi of the sixth form of Lampeter Secondary School	Annex 1
Low flying military aircraft in mid Wales	Gillian Metcalf	Annex 2
Economic regeneration	Prof Peter Midmore, Institute of Rural Studies, University of Wales, Aberystwyth	Annex 3
The case for a new school	Huw Jenkins, Headteacher, Ffynnonbedr Primary School, Lampeter and Janet Evans, Chair of Governors	Annex 4

Agenda Item 4: Minutes of the last Meeting

5.1 The minutes were accepted.

5.2 The next meeting would take place on Friday 1st December at the Urdd Camp, Glanllyn, Bala. The agenda would include scrutiny of Health Improvement Plans.

5.3 The Chair thanked the school for hosting the meeting.

The following annexes are included in the language in which they were received.

Annex 1

Y problemau sy'n wynebu pobl ifanc mewn ardaloedd gwledig

Prynhawn da.

Hoffwn ar y dechrau diolch am y cyfle ich anerch chi heddiw.

Er mwyn penderfynu'r testun ar gyfer ein cyflwyniad ni heddiw, fe wnaethom ofyn i rai o ddisgyblion y chweched dosbarth am eu barn. Er i'r cwynion arferol gael eu codi – problemau gyda byw yng ngefn gwlad, amaethyddiaeth, a phris petrol i'n ceir – y syniad o fyn i'r brifysgol oedd yn poeni'r mwyafrif.

Mae'n wir, mae'r realiti o adael yr ysgol a chamu i'r anadnabyddus yn peri pryder i nifer. Rydym yn y chweched uchaf ar fin cwblhau ein ffurflenni cais UCAS ar gyfer y sefydliad o'n dewis. Gyda chymaint o golegau i ddewis ohonynt, rhaid rhoi ystyriaeth teg i bob dewis.

Ond mae yna un ffactor sy'n dylanwadu ar y dewisiadau – y ddyled ariannol ar ddiwedd y cwrs gradd. Un ffordd o arbed arian yw i astudio'n agosach at adref er mwyn lleihau'r costau teithio. Penderfyniad rhai, hyd yn oed, yw byw garterf a mynd i'r brifysgol lleol, ac arbed talu costau byw.

Dyma, yn ein barn ni, yw gwraidd y problemau mae Prifysgol Llanbedr Pont Steffan wedi ei gael yn ddiweddar. Mae pobl yn llai parod i symud i ran anghysbell o gefn gwlad Cymru i astudio am dair blynedd neu fwy. Eleni, dim ond dau gant a chwe-deg o fyfyrwyr sydd ym Mhrifysgol Llanbedr yn y flwyddyn gyntaf – lleihad o 30 y cant er y llynedd.

Yn ogystal â lleihau poblogaeth y dref, mae hyn yn effeithio ar y niferoedd sydd yma yn yr ysgol. Daw nifer o blant i astudio yma sydd â'u rhieni yn fyfyrwyr yn ddarlithwyr ac staff cyffredinol yn y brifysgol. Mae'r problemau yma'n creu ansicrwydd ymhlith eu teuluoedd ynglyn â'u dyfodol yn yr ardal.

Yn anffodus, mae hefyd yn ergyd i'r economi leol. Mae nifer o fflatiau'r dref yn wag wrth i fyfyrwyr penderfynu aros mewn neuaddau preswyl i arbed arian, ac mae llai yn cael ei wario yn y siopau lleol.

Mae cyfleusterau'r ardal yn ddigon gwael yn barod, ac mae prinder economi cryf yn llesteirio datblygiad. O gael dewis rhwng Llanbed â Chaerdydd, dewis y brifdinas y bydd nifer oherwydd yr atyniadau di-ri sydd ganddi i'w chynnig.

Mae trafniadaeth cyhoeddus yr ardal yn warthus. Medrwch ddal bws rheolaidd i Gaerfyrddin.....os ydych yn medru dod i'r dref i'w ddal yn y lle cyntaf! Dywedir hefyd fod angen gorsaf drên yma unwaith eto er mwyn gwneud y dref yn fwy hygyrch. Yn ôl y "Push Guide to Universities": "Without any major roads, it ain't easy to get places. Allow a day to get anywhere and take a sleeping bag just in case, because it's not worth thinking, 'I can always catch a bus', because you can't because there probably won't be one!". Pa obaith sydd gennym i ddenu myfyrwyr i'r ardal os ydynt yn darllen hyn?

Nid Llambod yw'r unig brifysgol i ddiodeff. Bu cwmp o 10 y cant mewn ceisiadau i addysg uwch yn ystod y flwyddyn ddiwethaf ym mhob rhan o'r Deyrnas Unedig – heblaw yr Alban. Yno, bu cynydd o 20 y cant ymhlith yr Albanwyr a oedd yn ceisio am addysg uwch, ers i'w senedd benderfynu diddymu ffioedd dysgu. Dyma brawf fod hyn yn annog myfyrwyr i geisio addysg uwch.

Y pryder cyfredol yma ynglŷn a'r ffioedd sydd yn ein poeni ni. Pryder sy'n gwneud i nifer ohonom yn y flwyddyn i gael gwaith rhan amser er mwyn cynilio ychydig o arian yn gefn erbyn yr amser yma'r flwyddyn nesaf – ac mewn rhai achosion, fe all hyn gael effaith gwael ar safon ein gwaith ysgol.

Gobeithiwn ein bod wedi rhoi syniad i chi o'r hyn sy'n ein poeni fel chweched dosbarth, ond mae amser yn dechrau ein trechu a rhaid tynnu cwys i dalar. Problemau dibwys yw'r rhain i chi efallai o'u cymharu â diweithdra a thlodi cymoedd y De, ond mae ein dyfodol ni, a dyfodol Llambod yn bwysig iawn.

Diolch yn fawr am wrando

Annex 2

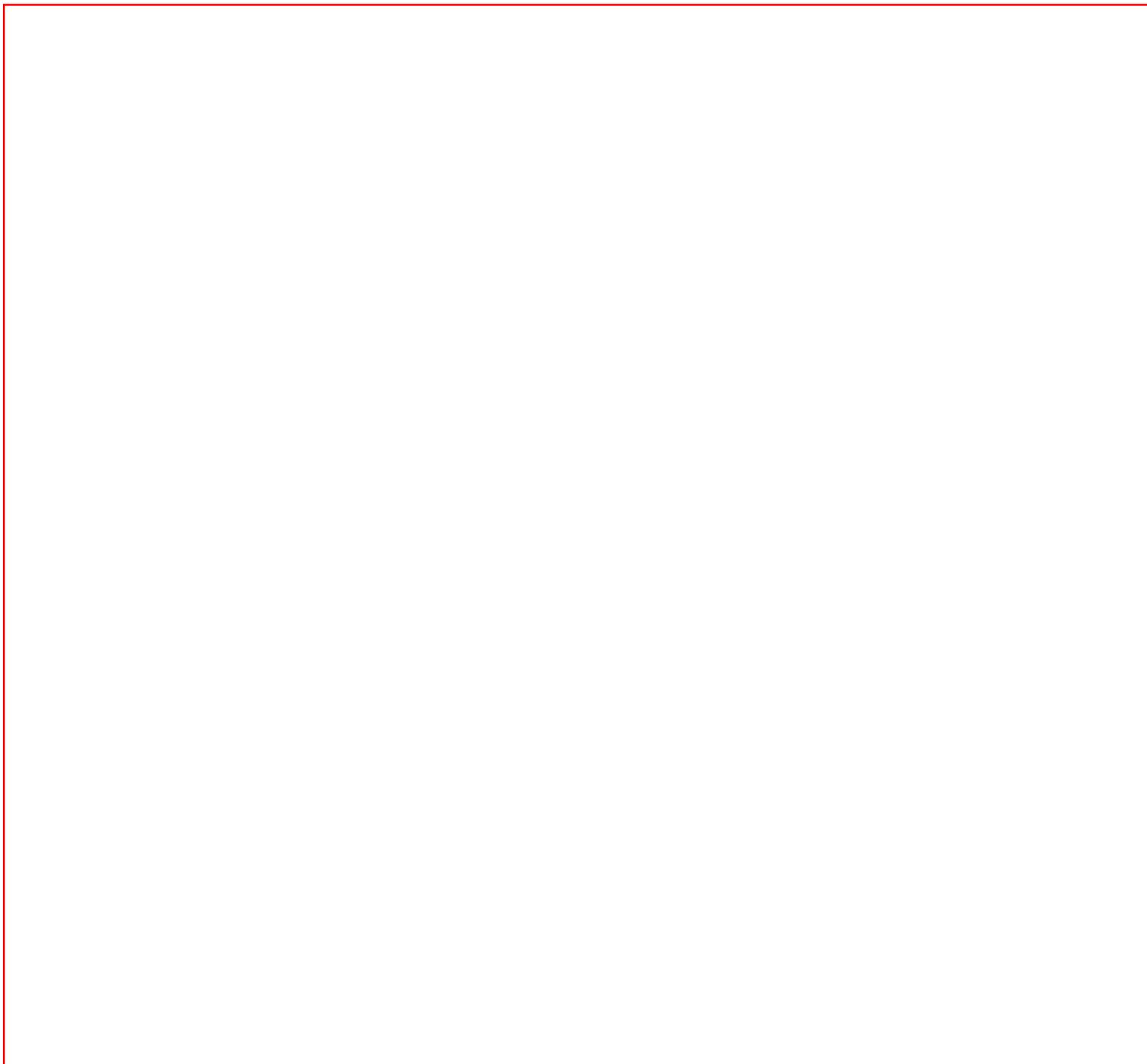




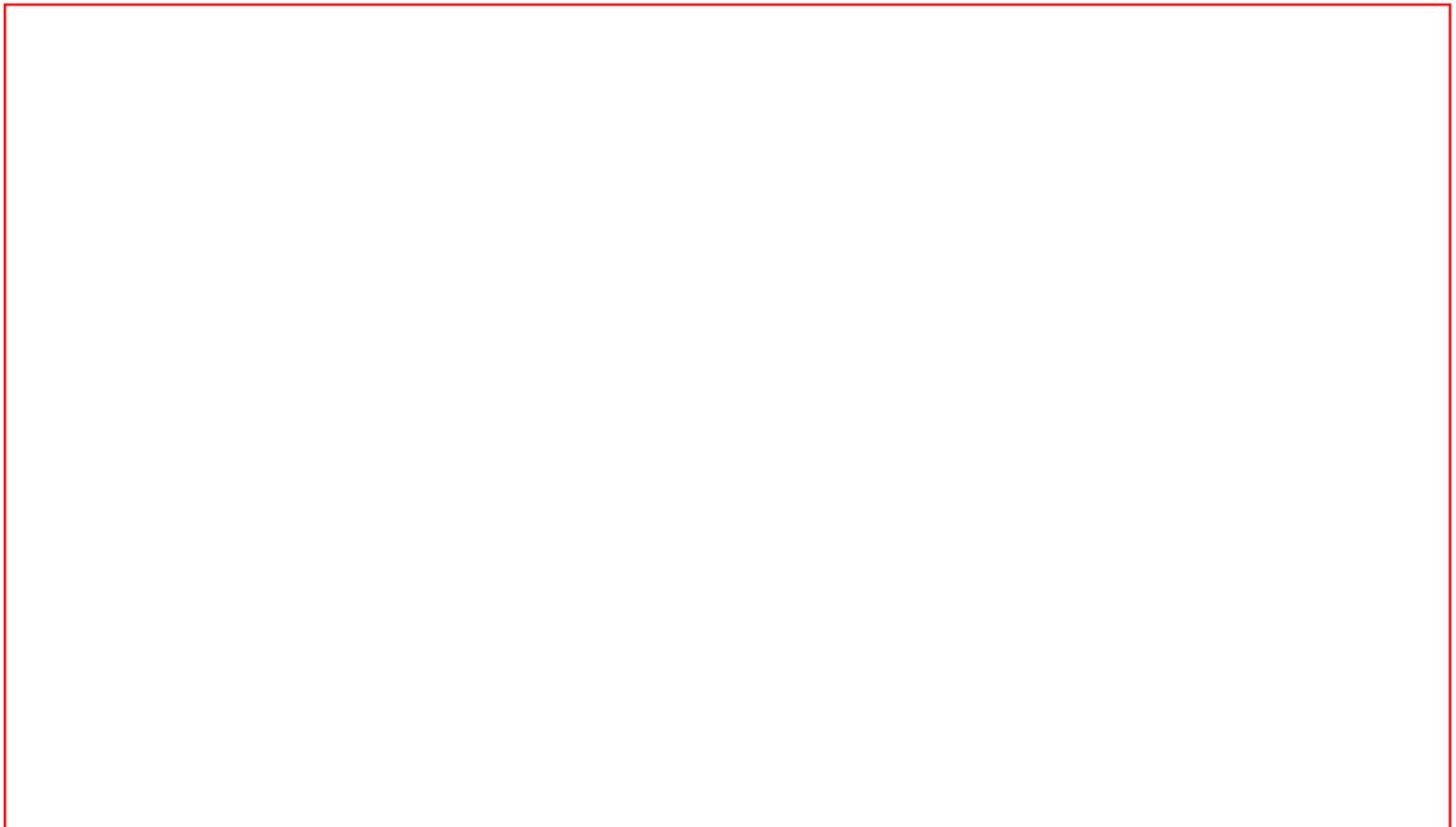














The Development Board for Rural Wales was merged with the Welsh Development Agency and Land Authority for Wales in 1998. This inevitably caused misgivings about how the cause of rural development would continue to be identified and promoted: within the new, enlarged WDA the preponderant focus is urban, and the unique perspective developed by the DBRW over the twenty-one years of its establishment seemed to be in danger of becoming overwhelmed.

Whilst amalgamation allows considerable scale economies, avoiding duplication of the common services required by development agencies, the institutional framework is critical with regard to the way in which those liberated resources are used. The loss of an independent promoter of the interests of rural Wales is played down by the WDA, which claims to have taken up the mantle of champion with equal enthusiasm (prior to merger, both agencies shared the same chairman, and there has always been reciprocal representation on the respective governing structures). However, should a conflict of interest between rural and urban Wales arise, it will be interesting to see if the organisation appeals to an over-riding "national" (that is, majority) interest.

Nevertheless, the potential advantages of having an agency dedicated to rural development issues were not always, in reality, achieved. For instance:

- Its powers covered only a proportion of the area of rural Wales, an ambiguity that for part of its existence it sought to clarify by operating as Mid Wales Development. It had important additional powers to promote social development in the countryside, but until these were transferred to the enlarged WDA, large parts rural Wales were unjustly excluded from such assistance.
- Equally, the statute establishing the DBRW particularly excluded it from providing assistance or support to agriculture. That may have made sense in 1977, when ADAS was in the public sector and provided a channel for policy instruments under the guidance section of FEOGA. During the latter part of its existence, however, retreat by government on both fronts left a vacuum, which the DBRW was too timid to fill; such diffidence limited involvement with agriculture to the fringes of food manufacturing, and prevented the development of an integrated rural development perspective.
- Consequently, throughout the existence of the DBRW, its primary focus of job creation was the stimulation of inward manufacturing investment, as a replacement for agriculture, rather than building on the base it provides. In order to ensure a labour force of adequate size, developments were located in the key settlements of rural Wales, perpetuating urban/rural economic tensions on a smaller scale. One further outcome has been neglect of the area to the west of the Cambrian Mountains, such that even despite successive "western initiatives", its performance has never even begun to equal that of Powys.

Thus although there is a case for a powerful independent agency to represent the rural economic interests of Wales, the former DBRW does not provide (and possibly never has provided) an appropriate model. The region of mid Wales (and similar rural parts of Wales contained in the WDA's other divisions) has a low-density, dispersed settlement pattern, small population centres and a dependency on natural resource-based employment. This makes prosperity difficult to achieve by traditional industrialisation techniques, because they rely on the development of competitiveness: given the

economic disadvantages of peripherality, small scale and lack of access to capital, increases in economic activity rely reliance on low-cost labour, which undermines the multiplier effect that a dynamic economic development process is expected to achieve.

Successful regeneration will rely on accepting the challenge of post-industrial development. Rather than engaging in an unequal contest with metropolitan areas in producing essentially similar types of goods and services, competitive advantage for rural economies can be found in difference and even, in certain cases, uniqueness. That involves encouragement of a cultural shift; both among staff implementing regeneration policies, and also with those promoting their cause. Foremost in the attitudes that need to change is reverence for the objective of the greatest achievable increase in economic activity in the shortest possible time. Instead, the goal of a resilient economy should be substituted, in which the greatest capacity for reinforcement between interdependent activities is taken advantage of. The clearest example is that provided by low impact rural tourism. In this, farmhouse accommodation, good access to the countryside, regular and high quality public transport, active and vibrant community-based culture, the promotion of organically-produced food, and energy sourced from sustainable community projects, combine to form a package constructed around the concept of sustainability (appealing to a small, but growing market of perceptive consumers) immeasurably greater than the sum of its components. It also has the advantage of combining commercial with citizenship concerns, and thereby provides an acceptable means of embedding generally abstract policy objectives in a concrete social context. The difficulty is that it crosses boundaries between a range of agency responsibilities.

Because of the complexity of the institutional framework, partnerships have become increasingly important in rural economic regeneration. At present, there is an urgent need for a leading rural agency. However, the Countryside Council for Wales, although having a statutory requirement to take economic issues into account in promoting sustainable development, has a range of responsibilities that are at once too wide and diverse to allow it to act effectively for the rural economy. The problem with the WDA is that, in the merger to form the enlarged agency, the DBRW was not an equal partner; despite the strengthening of the operational capacity of the Mid Wales division, it still suffers from the deficit of geographical coverage of rural Wales that weakened its predecessor, and it lost its strategic functions (the current small size of the rural policy unit within the WDA is indicative that concern is warranted).

Arguments have been made - by Wales Rural Forum, for example - that there should be a separate development agency dedicated to the whole of rural Wales. That may be unnecessary if the emphasis, and perhaps more importantly the culture, of the WDA itself could be shifted: in effect, to transform its primary role into promoting social development. There are good reasons for suggesting that this might be appropriate in the urban, as well as the rural context. The success accomplished in promoting urban economic development has, in some ways, been disproportionate, as although serious pockets of urban unemployment and disadvantage remain, that part of the economy of Wales shows signs of overheating as a whole. Improving the social infrastructure can unlock endogenous potential, as a precursor to, or at least in parallel with, employment creation, ensuring a more evenly spread prosperity, and have the advantage that a satisfactory compromise could be produced without a further round of institutional upheaval.

Annex 4

Ysgol Ffynnonbedr



The way forward

A new school for Lampeter

The governors would like to note the following:-

- There are almost 300 children on the Ffynnonbedr site
- Dangerous steps
- Safety problems
- Restricted play area
- An old building - dampness
- No suitable location for a central library
- No staffroom for the junior teachers
- Parking problems

- Traffic dangers - particularly behind the school at the beginning and end of each day
- No playing field by the school - two roads must be crossed to reach it

The Inspectors noted

- Safety problems on site
- No appropriate place for library
- No space for independent work
- Not enough classrooms
- Lack of junior staffroom

The governors feel that it is not fair to place on their shoulders the responsibility for the safety and education of pupils in a situation such as the one that exists in Ffynnonbedr.

Ceredigion County Council has noted that 'the provision of a new school for Ffynnonbedr' is a part of its School Organisation Plan and capital programme. However, the implementation of such a plan still appears rather indefinite in terms of commitment and time scale

We would like to note that we have been striving for a new school at Lampeter over many years. We are glad to know that things now appear to be developing. There is a real need for a new school here. We hope that we see it reach fruition.

J Evans

(Chairperson of Governors)