

REGENERATION OF THE ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES OF MID WALES

GWYNEDD COUNTY COUNCIL

Firstly, praise must be given to the excellent working relationship between the Welsh Development Agency and local bodies, including Gwynedd Council. There is a special relationship with the area offices and with individual members of staff, and we are grateful for every assistance and co-operation.

The following suggestions and recommendations are made as a positive means of improving the impact on the economy of Rural Wales and adding value to the efforts of the various agencies.

1. The Welsh Rural Development Board had its own culture. It was close to the roots and understood small projects, which very often are the only ones possible in rural areas. It was also a prominent voice for rural arguments. Much of this has continued in the Mid Wales Office, but some of this culture must be shared with the other area offices. This point applies to a number of the points which follow.
2. Although the Development Agency is now a single national body in Wales, it would be advantageous if more emphasis was placed on achieving consistency with regards to priorities, culture and policy (if that is the correct word) between the area offices. This is particularly true of the Gwynedd area, where consistency within the County itself is extremely important. The differences are also important with regard to Objective 1, where the area includes parts of four of the Development Agency's regions.
3. The rural policies need to be examined from the perspective of the West. It is difficult to see whether a set of rural policies exist, and I am not always certain whether the Development Agency as a whole is totally comfortable with rural matters.

When efforts to attract new major businesses to the Western areas are successful, and in all fairness it appears that these efforts have been more successful than ever before, more should be done to integrate these in the local economy, and to distribute the benefits e.g. success came to Bangor recently and we are grateful for it and for the Development Agency's efforts. This is the type of activity that the Development Agency has been famous for throughout the years. We must proceed together into the next millennium and extend the benefits

to areas such as Llŷn and Eifionydd. To achieve this we must adopt a more radical attitude, and perhaps the Development Agency needs to move on to new fields. This is the only way to achieve maximum benefits from Objective 1.

4. Whilst the picture and the performance for the whole of Gwynedd is important, we must be clear as to what the targets are for the Rural/Western areas. We must identify the varying needs and opportunities of the Regions of Wales, illustrate the challenge and set specific sub-targets. There is a danger that the whole of Wales as one unit could flourish statistically, whilst a large proportion of its areas are in reality fail to reach the target

5. This aspect should also reflect itself in the marketing policy of the Development Agency. All bodies marketing outside the boundaries of Wales should do so under one logo or strong Welsh image, rather than under the different logos of the individual bodies. At the same time, we should be prepared to co-operate with other bodies on local marketing campaigns, taking advantage of local strengths and opportunities. Any action on the Development Agency's behalf away from this concept would be extremely disadvantageous to the rural and remote areas.

6. It is felt that there is a concept of "central" and "local" politics developing in Wales. This is seen to some extent in the recent discussions on Objective 1. It is important that the Development Agency keeps itself above this, building on its good working relationship with local bodies, and restating that the emphasis is on output.

7. The Development Agency itself must beware that it does not become over centralised in its policies, its vision, its management and culture. The Agency also, in its economic development role, should encourage other bodies in Wales to devolve. Quality posts are required in the rural communities, and whilst inward investment is often difficult, it could be easier to create such post by relocating jobs from Cardiff or other cities.

8. The Development Agency is one of the premier bodies in the field of regional development in Wales. It is therefore important to have an understanding of the natural powers which affect the pattern of the economy in Wales, particularly the effect of Cardiff and the South East, and that policies are tailored with this in mind.

9. As regards outputs, all the development bodies are driven by hard, short term outputs. It must be remembered that this is not always possible in the rural areas,

and whilst rural projects in a weak economy must compete with urban projects in a stronger economy, the rural cannot win without attention being paid to forming less basic outputs. It must be understood that a great deal needs to be done in rural areas before even attracting the interest of the private sector. Caernarfon is an example of this, where resources were channelled into the town for about 10 years, before the first private investment of any note was secured. The same is true of the areas of Meirionnydd, which are in the same position as Caernarfon was 10 years ago.

10. It is a matter of concern that the Development Agency's budget has been cut, at such a critical time, on the threshold of Objective 1 opportunities. We appeal to the Assembly to look again at this situation with the intention of rectifying matters.

This paper is not intended as a criticism of the Development Agency. In a brief paper such as this, no mention has been made of the specific merits of the Development Agency, the things which we would not wish to change, and there are many of these.

We have concentrated on the points which in our opinion need attention, in order to enable the Development Agency to achieve even more for the Economy of Wales.