

## **Mid Wales Regional Committee MID 04-01(p.5b)**

**Date:** Friday 2 November 2001

**Time:** 10.30am to 1.00pm

**Venue:** Village Hall, Aberporth

### **Submission by Cllr Dai Lloyd Evans, Leader, Cyngor Sir Ceredigion County Council**

1. Firstly, I would like to thank the Regional Committee of the Assembly for including this item on your agenda for today. The lack of adequate water supply is a pressing issue not only for the development of the West Wales Strategic Site in Aberporth but for the whole of the County and West Wales in general. The debate is long overdue and I hope the submissions you have received and the team approach in our presentations today will open the eyes and minds of everyone concerned in securing the critical investment needed for the prosperity of West Wales.
2. Cyngor Sir Ceredigion County Council prides itself in promoting the economic, social and environmental well being of the local community. The County Council has six corporate objectives which set the scene and focus for the authority's actions in promoting the well being of the local community. The "Water resources deficit" – as recognised by Dŵr Cymru, is likely to frustrate the County Council in achieving some of the key aims in our Corporate Strategy, it will also impact greatly I would have thought upon whether the National Assembly can fulfil obligations and targets for the region as set in its own Corporate Strategy "BetterWales.com". The Assembly's "BetterWales.com" Strategy talks about creating wealth, investing in our future, providing new and better facilities and creating a new vision for Wales. It is difficult to imagine how the strategies and the action plans contained in the Assembly's own Strategy "BetterWales.com" can be achieved under these constraints in water supply resources. The National Economic Development Strategy (NEDS), Farming for the Future, Ceredigion Tourism Growth Area and Rural Recovery Action Plan are applaudable strategies and action plans but the grants and support they offer are all futile without the requisite investment in basic infrastructures which allow developments to take place.
3. The Objective 1 programme is with us for only a short period to 2007, it is the opportunity to turn the local economy around and improve investment, wealth creation and job opportunities in West Wales. Ceredigion County Council, partner organisations and local community groups, have ideas on how to improve the performance of the local economy but all these

schemes are placed in jeopardy by the lack of one of the most basic and fundamental needs of the community - water.

4. The authority has already started to plan for the future of the County through the preparation of the draft Unitary Development Plan which sets the scene, allocates land and identifies planning policies for the development and growth of the County. It is noteworthy to quote some of the consultation responses which have arisen as a result of concern in existing water supply/ demand deficit, I would like to quote from two objection letters firstly, that of Welsh Water:

"D•r Cymru Welsh Water has no option other than to object to all development as being premature, other than specific sites identified in the existing Local Plan, this embargo on all new development proposals will include all proposals for development within existing boundaries..... and would preclude all unidentified development even of single houses.... No additional individual sites or non domestic demands could be accepted."

The second quotation is from the Environment Agency response which

states;

"Clearly actions need to be taken to redress the balance between supply and demand. Without such actions the supply zone cannot meet the demand for water. Any further development, such as those proposed in Aberporth, will hasten the onset of shortages."

**The team presenting to you here today recognises that this is an unacceptable situation to be in. How did we arrive in such a predicament?**

5. We should remember that outside Cardiff, Ceredigion has been the fastest growing County in the whole of Wales for the last 10 years with a 7.8% growth in population. If this present trend continues, there could be a further 5,000 to 6,500 dwellings and new consumers of water supply over the next 15 years. It will be necessary to provide a range of high quality employment sites and premises to sustain this level of growth and to support a viable and sustainable local community. The Unitary Development Plan will allocate land and provide a criteria based planning policy to help promote development throughout the county. However, the implication of current water deficit constraints and the subsequent objections to the UDP means that many sites will not be developed because as we all know, developers who are in search of expansion or new investment will redirect their enquiries elsewhere when it becomes apparent there may be planning and infrastructure constraints to their proposals.
6. You will hear later in the presentation by D•r Cymru about longer term options to overcome this unacceptable situation. However, if funding is not available for these options, I believe that the local community, the development agencies and the private sector in Ceredigion,

North Carmarthenshire and in North Pembrokeshire could miss an important window of opportunity presented to us under the Objective 1 programme. Ofwat is the watchdog with responsibility to oversee the investment and the pricing policies of the water companies. The responses the County Council has received from Dŏr Cymru and Ofwat indicate that closer dialogue and shared goals are required between the regulatory body and service provider, and indeed, I understand that discussion between the two organisations are taking place as we speak. However, it is imperative that this dialogue results in a practical way forward and that Ofwat can approve plans to enable longer term options to become a reality. It is not clear whether Ofwat has accountability to the National Assembly as well as to national Government in Westminster and I would invite the Assembly to consider how our devolved Government in Wales engages with Ofwat in its consumer protection bodies role.

7. The term water deficit has become a statement of fact and with increasing consumption, new development and likely additional controls on abstraction from the river Teifi we see water supply becoming one of the most important issues for the economic, social and environmental well being of the community of Ceredigion. The implementation of the Corporate Strategies of the County Council and the Assembly's own strategy BetterWales.com could be hindered as a consequence of the lack of water supply to the region.
8. The Aberporth development is a prime example of how one could possibly make a significant step change in the performance of the local economy. The County Council has granted outline consent for Phase I development and will shortly be considering the merits of the current application for the remainder of the site and the airfield development. It would be inappropriate for me at this stage to comment on the details and merits of this application prior to the Planning Committee receiving the final reports from officers. However, it would be remiss of me not to mention that proposals and enquiries for business growth and investment (in particular the processing of local farm and food products) are being hampered by the lack of water supply to the region.
9. Even if we take into account the various initiatives in water conservation measures and careful management of demand/ supply, water consumption will inevitably increase over the years to come and there can be only one answer to this unsatisfactory situation, and that answer is the augmentation of water supply to the whole of the Mid/ South Ceredigion supply zone.
10. I would like to urge the Assembly to give serious consideration to the consequences of this investment not taking place and to press for capital investment to take place as a matter of great urgency for the social, economic and for the environmental well being of this part of Ceredigion.