



Minutes of the fifth Cross Party Group on Rural Affairs

1st October 2013

Meeting held in seminar room 1, the Pierhead.

‘Sustainable Development and sustainably robust rural communities’

Present:

Chairman:

Llyr Huws Gruffydd – Plaid Cymru (PC)

Secretariat:

Cat Griffith-Williams - The Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW)

Assembly Members

& AMSS:

Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM (PC), Jeff Cuthbert AM (Lab), Antoinette Sandbach AM (Con), Russell George AM (Con), Osian Lewis AMSS (PC), Emyr Williams AMSS (PC), Laura Cranmer AMSS (Con)

In attendance:

Peter Ogden – CPRW, Cat Griffith-Williams – CPRW, Rhys Jones – Royal Mail, Stuart Taylor – Post Office, Natalie Rees – Cynnal Cymru, Irene Evison – CNP, Alex Phillips – WG, Karen Anthony – CLA, Terry Marsden – Sustainable Places Research Institute Cardiff, John Cook – Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Edward Holdaway – Wales Landscape Partnership, Lowri Gwilym – WLGA, Beverley Penney – OSS, Jay Kynch – OSS, Ruth Williams – Landscape Institute, Emily Keenon – National Trust Wales, Jon Cryer – RSPB.

- 1. The meeting commenced at 19:00 later than the stipulated start time of 18:00**

Plenary over ran as AMs were engaged in a debate on the Active Travel (Wales) Bill. AMs had to vote on moving copious amendments.

1.1 Peter Ogden – CPRW welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked attendees for waiting. It was felt that the meeting should commence in absence of the AMs in the hope that they will be in attendance shortly. Peter introduced Richard Tyler from Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.

- 2. Presentation on the Rural Alliances Project by Richard Tyler from Brecon Beacons National Park Authority**

2.1 Richard gave a background to the project. In essence it’s about implementing sustainability locally, especially through the medium of tourism. It has twelve

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partners funded by the EU. They have made links between business and the community with the aim to increase rural vibrancy. He detailed the sub-projects which include, rural vibrancy index, financial engineering and resource efficiency. Richard gave examples of how the project has been successful in the community in particular where a local pub was going to close down but through the Rural Alliance it is now run on a commercial basis.

2.2 Sustainable tourism in the Brecon Beacons is an essential part of sustainable rural development, with the money spent on tourism being spent widely in the local community. Richard outlined his belief that tourism values help protect the environment and detailed the 'Sustainable Destination Partnership' and their own 'Sustainable Tourism Strategy'.

2.3 Richard explained some of the success of the project from Collabor8 (2008-2012) based on sustainability, sense of place and quality to the Rural alliances project (2012-2015) where they have been successful with local food, dark skies initiative and a tourism and marketing strategy for the Brecon Beacons.

3. Llyr Huws Gruffydd, Chair of the CPG on Rural Affairs and Plaid Cymru's Regional Assembly Member for North Wales arrived at the meeting at 19.20 along with other AMs.

3.1 Llyr apologised for his and his colleague's delay, thanked Richard Tyler for his presentation and introduced the Minister.

4. Jeff Cuthbert Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty with an overarching responsibility for Sustainable Development.

4.1 The Minister set out how he intends to ensure SD is the central organising principle throughout all policy and legislation and offered his views on tackling rural poverty. He also stipulated that if there were any questions which he couldn't answer his office would ensure that a written response was provided.

4.2 The Minister outlined his intentions to make a written statement on his plans to develop the Futures Generation Bill, with the intention to leave a Wales we can be proud of to our children and grandchildren. He clarified that there will be requirements on all public bodies, right down to town and community councils, subject to certain criteria which had yet to be fully developed. The Minister made clear that the Bill would mean that public bodies MUST have due 'regard' to the main pillars of SD.

4.2.1 Economy – Sustainable high skilled jobs

4.2.2 Community – How decisions will impact the community. For example selling off areas of recreation and looking at what this means for the community.

4.2.3 Environmental – Bus routes and emissions

4.3 The Minister clarified that it is not the job of the Futures Generations Bill to



specify how to do this but that it would be for Government departments work together to achieve the aims.

4.4 The Minister gave a summary of his future intentions; to appoint a statutory Sustainable Development Commissioner, reporting back at the beginning of every new Assembly term to say how Wales has done against its targets. The position will be supported by associated staffing and administrative costs as well as an advisory committee. The core membership will be written in law with the ability to co-opt other organisations to give opinions and have a voice.

4.5 The Bill is to be presented in the summer of next year. The Minister hopes it will reinforce SD in public life more generally.

5. Q & A. Questions to the Minister and answers

5.1 **Q - Antoinette Sandbach AM (Con)** asked the Minister, 'How will the commissioner deal with conflicts, how will obligations on the public sector be dealt with and what are the overlaps with planning?'. **A - Jeff Cuthbert** answered by saying that public bodies will have comprehensive guidance with core criteria and options relevant to their remit e.g. the health sector. Not all bodies would be concerned with all 3 pillars underpinning the Bill and the Bill would not of itself necessarily introduce new ways of thinking and acting as many of the issues will relate to matters that local authorities already have to resolve, such as effective procurement. He envisaged that once the Bill was in place, there would be a need for a periodic review of evidence to get a sense of how well things were working and draw from lessons learned. On the relationship between the Bill provisions and planning considerations, the Minister explained that he was still in the process of thinking things through and was in discussion with other relevant Ministers about a number of related Bills to check for any potential contradictions.

5.2 **Q - Terry Marsden - Sustainable Places Research Institute Cardiff**, commended the excellent examples of promoting and developing community based SD schemes, specifically referencing the examples from the Rural Alliances Project that Richard Tyler from Brecon Beacons National Park Authority had presented and believes the Bill needs to stimulate these community based projects and approach. **A - Jeff Cuthbert** said that he couldn't see that the Bill would be of detriment to those projects and expected good practice to be cascaded and for local groups to be encouraged to contribute to their own communities.

5.3 **Q - Peter Ogden - Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales CPRW**, stressed the real issues of poverty which exist in rural areas, he doesn't believe it is different to urban areas however it does have different dynamics. **A - Jeff Cuthbert** explained that the Rural Development Plan aimed to address the challenges facing rural communities. He acknowledged Transport as an important issue for those communities, explaining he had an all Wales brief so would need to strike a balance

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in addressing both urban and rural issues with Welsh Government initiatives such as Families First, Flying Start, Communities First and the Integrated Family Support Service all playing an extremely important role in achieving this.

5.4 **Q – Edward Holdaway - Wales Landscape Partnership**, Asked the Minister to please clarify how he anticipates reconciling on the one hand the duty on public bodies to have regard to Sustainable Development as proposed in the Future Generations Bill with the existing duty of National Park Authorities to pursue National Park purposes and the duty of public bodies to have regard to these purposes of National Parks and AONB, under which greater weight on the environment is assumed?. **A – Jeff Cuthbert** said that he would provide a written answer to this question.

5.5 **Q - John Cook – Brecon Beacons National Park Authority**, raised the concern that as a public body all the legislative compliance would hinder their ability to deliver and had further concerns about reporting and integrated reporting mechanisms. **A – Jeff Cuthbert** stressed that the aim was to avoid adding another layer of bureaucracy and that for the most part, many public bodies would only need to ‘tweak’ what they currently do in order to meet requirements. He said that the Bill provided an opportunity to clarify what the reporting mechanisms should be and that the cross party group would be consulted further to provide an opportunity for them to input their views on how things should work in that regard.

5.6 **Q - Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM (PC)**, asked whether the wording ‘consider sustainable development’ rather than ‘deliver sustainable development’ might perhaps give some public bodies too much ‘wriggle room’? **A – Jeff Cuthbert** said that the respective roles of the Commissioner and the Auditor General for Wales would safeguard against noncompliance and that there would be ongoing scrutiny of performance.

5.7 **Q - Beverley Penney – OSS**, Minister do you believe there is a role for the public? **A – Jeff Cuthbert** - explained that a ‘National Conversation’ was to be set up before the Bill took its final form and that he wanted to be as open as possible and to have views from the people of Wales. He was particularly keen for younger people to have their say about issues and the sort of jobs needed for a sustainable Wales. He would give them opportunities to have direct face-to-face conversations about this.

5.8 **Q - Karen Anthony – CLA**, Minister you said about criteria and guidance but SD is often not set in stone therefore are you going to build flexibility into your model. **A – Jeff Cuthbert**, explained that the WG will have to say how they are going to deliver on SD at the beginning of every term, reporting criteria hadn’t yet been decided but it wouldn’t be a tick box exercise. Nothing was in tablets of stone at this stage and the rate of development of technology ought to assist in terms of developing a review and change process.



5.9 **Q - Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM (PC)**, asked the Minister what is the one key outcome of the Bill? **A – The Minister** said that it was about making the future we hand on to the next generations as good for them as it can be. . He set that within the context of his overall portfolio to tackle poverty and provide job opportunities for those in workless households in order to contribute to a strong economy and enhance the wellbeing of Wales. .

5.10 **Jeff Cuthbert Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty leaves at 19.50**

6. Presentation by Rhys Jones – Royal Mail

6.1 Rhys explained that he has amended his presentation and will now give his brief comments as it was getting late. He believed there are three key aspects in delivering sustainably robust rural communities; **access, choice and connectivity**. Privatisation will not impact the universal service in rural areas. The one price goes anywhere, six day a week delivery service will stay the same.

6.2 When you look at **choice** you consider digital exclusion and therefore the impact of the services customers get. Companies are often encouraging people to get on line however not everyone in Wales wants their services this way or has access and knowledge to do this, this is why the Royal Mail is signatory to a new campaign 'Keep Me Posted', www.keepeposted.com . It has 15 signatories and is all about maintaining choice of on / offline communication. Research shows that 61% of customers in rural areas prefer paper statements and 80% of people aged over 65 also prefer paper statements with 49% of people without access to the internet being from the lowest socio-economic groups in society. The campaign ensures customers will still receive paper communication and they won't incur any penalties if they want hard copies.

6.3 Another issue is **access**, there is structural decline of mail which has caused mail centre rationalisation. The Post Office is not for sale however with postal services being in decline delivery offices have had to be merged in rural areas which poses problems for people when a parcel is delivered to a 'local' office when they are out. These 'local' offices could be a far distance from their residence. Royal Mail and the Post Office have a commercial contract which still be in place after private investment into Royal Mail. The inter-business agreement provides a firm foundation for the Post Office's long-term, sustainable future and ensures Royal Mail's customers continue to get access to postal services in Post Office branches nationwide, the UK's biggest retail network. Customers in rural areas will benefit from longer opening hours where post offices are located in local stores – enabling better services for services such as uncollected mail and parcels. Royal Mail will also offer alternative delivery addresses which are within the same postcode sector.

6.4 **Connectivity** is key to Royal Mail's business as nearly half the revenues comes from parcels. Royal Mail are consulting on a change to its parcels format to allow more items to be classed as Small Parcels as this will have a positive impact on

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SME's. If the change is introduced it means over 80% of parcels delivered by Royal Mail will be classed as Small Parcels. The proposed change would mean that parcels up to 350 x 250 x 160mm, which are currently classified as Medium Parcels, would also now be classed as a Small Parcel. This would cover postings up to the size of a large shoebox. Superfast Cymru is and will continue to play a key role in hastening fibre optic broadband and is one to watch.

6.5 The challenge is for all service providers who provide services which are public in nature – whether in public or private sectors – to keep collaborating and innovating to ensure rural economies are well served within the context of a thriving rural economy.

7. Presentation by Stuart Taylor – Post Office

7.1 Stuart opened by saying that the critically important issue is fee free cash, customers can come to any PO to do this. It's all about good access for local customers to get at their cash. PO's are also the largest providers of travel money and sixth largest provider of home phone and broadband. However a key barrier to delivery is accommodation, so there is a need to provide services with partners i.e. through village halls, hair dressers etc. If a community can't sustain bricks and mortar branches then the PO will look at outreach services and provide PO services in other businesses. The PO endeavours to look at creative ways to deliver these services. There have also been examples of this the other way round with community police working out of PO premises. Collaboration, partnership and creativity are all key to sustaining services.

7.2 The PO is Government owned and is to remain so. The medium to long term objective is for the Post Office to become a mutual organisation. A consultation has taken place to ask the public what they feel the purpose of the Post Office is. Stuart observed that any future strategy for the Post Office in rural areas needed to properly reflect the disproportionately more important role that Post Office play in these communities.

7.3 Stuart recognised the support of WG in helping sustain Post Offices by the Post Office Diversification Fund grants and the business rate relief provided to many branches. In recent weeks, the Post Office has met with Jeff Cuthbert's officials to explore how the Credit Union movement in Wales and the PO can work more closely together.

8. Chairmen's closing remarks

8.1 Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM closed the meeting by confirming that he will send the paper 'Unlocking the potential of the Welsh Uplands' which was formed from the discussions of the CPG on Rural Affairs at the Meeting in July to Alun Davies the Minister for Natural Resources and Food. He explained that there are now new rules for the operation for Cross Party Groups and we need to have an AGM for our next meeting to vote on a Chair. The rules state that you need to be clear about the responsibility of secretariat. He said he was very happy with how CPRW had

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delivered as being the current secretariat and asked the attendees to vote that Cat Griffith-Williams, CPRW would continue in the role. The attendees were happy to endorse this decision.

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6. Next steps

6.1 The next meeting of the Group will be the AGM which will take place before Christmas.

At the meeting thereafter, which will now take place in January, as requested by Carl Sargeant's office, will be on the role and importance of planning in rural areas and the progress in respect of the WG's intentions to produce the Planning Reform Bill

The meeting closed at 20.15

Jeff Cuthbert AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref JC/00692/13

Cat Griffith-Williams
Campaign for the Protection for Rural Wales

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23 October 2013

Dear Cat

Thank you for your email of 7 October following my attendance at the Cross Party Group on Rural Affairs. I found my attendance at the meeting and our discussions to be valuable given the context of the Future Generations Bill.

With respect to Edward Holdaway's question, I am aware of the need to ensure there is no conflict between any duty provided for within the Future Generations Bill and the existing purposes and duties of any of the affected organisations to be subject to the Bill. I will ensure this matter is adequately addressed.

The National Parks in Wales who have signed up to the Sustainable Development Charter have already demonstrated their commitment to sustainable development. I intend that the embedding of sustainable development within each of the organisations, through the provisions of the Bill, will support them to deliver their core functions in a way that is integrated and ensures that we all look to the long term. I will ask my officials to keep you apprised of the progress of the Bill.

Sincerely,

Jeff Cuthbert AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

