



**Minutes for the Winter meeting of the Sixth Cross Party Group on Rural Affairs
Seminar room 1 & 2, the Pierhead Building, National Assembly for Wales
19th February 2014**

**Annual General Meeting
'Rural Implications of the Planning Bill'**

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),
Russell George AM (Con),
Osian Lewis AMSS (PC),
Laura Cranmer AMSS (Con),
Carl Sargeant AM (L),
Paul Pavia AMSS (Con)

In attendance:

Peter Ogden – CPRW,
Dr Roisin Willmott, RTPI (Cymru),
Alex Phillips – NAW,
Edward Holdaway -Wales Landscape Partnership,
Raoul Brambral Wales Environment Link
Karen Whitfield - Wales Environment Link,
Laura Cropper – RSPB,
James Byrne - WT Wales,
Andrew Stumpf - Glandŵr Cymru,
Dr Ruth Williams - Landscape Institute Wales,
Richard Kirlew - Rural Affairs for the Church in Wales,
Siobhan Wiltshire - Welsh Government, Planning Division,
Chris Lindley - Welsh AONB's,
Greg Pycroft - National Parks Wales,
Malcolm I Harrison - Pub is the Hub,
Russell De' ath, Department for Natural Resources and
Food, Welsh Government ,
Karen Anthony – CLA,
Aneurin Phillips - Snowdonia National Park Authority,
Elaine Davey,
Jay Kynch - The Open Spaces Society,
Jim Wilson - Brecon Beacons Park Society,
Helen Rice - Brecon Beacons National Park Authority



1 Annual General Meeting: Election of the Chair and Secretariat

- 1.1 Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM; the current Chair of the Rural Affairs Cross Party Group, welcomed everybody and opened the meeting
- 1.2 He indicated there was a need for each cross Party Group to hold an AGM, this meeting had been convened to fulfil that purpose. As a standard procedure a Chair had to be elected for the coming year. Attendees were therefore invited to propose nominations for the position of Chair.
- 1.3 Dr Ruth Williams - Landscape Institute Wales nominated Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM. As there were no further nominations it was unanimously agreed by the attendees that Llyr Huws Gruffydd should continue in his role as Chair of the Group.
- 1.4 Llyr also asked for confirmation that Cat Griffith-Williams, CPRW should continue to provide the Secretariat role to the group. Attendees agreed.
- 1.5 Llyr led discussions on ideas for the future work programme of the Group; these included considerations of forthcoming the Rural Development Plan, Marine Planning including the link between land and sea and the Natural Resource Management Plan were all suggested topics.

**2. Presentation by Carl Sargeant AM: Minister for Housing and Regeneration
The Draft Planning Bill: Positive Planning**

- 2.1 The Minister opened his presentation by stressing the importance he placed on listening to the thoughts of others on the detail in Draft Planning Bill and its accompanying documents.
- 2.2 He noted that in his view Planning should be an enabler for the economy of Wales and for society and not seem as an obstacle, hence the title of the consultation document "Positive Planning". His priorities were the provision of adequate are homes which is different to the concept of simply a 'house'.
- 2.3 He posed the question, 'What makes a good Planning Authority and a good plan and what should the benefits of a good Planning system look like to Wales.' He stressed that wherever you are in Wales you should expect the system to be fair and consistent. He believed that Committee systems need to be sensible and that the sad thing about planning is the politics which often seems to over shadow other material issues. He is therefore trying to create a fair and consistent approach to decision making.
- 2.4 The Minister noted that he can't legislate for change, change is a culture, so therefore he is trying to create a process of managing development not



controlling it.

- 2.5 The Minister acknowledged the interaction with various other Bills and their impact on the community, stating that jobs and growth are the key elements which are sought and this will inevitably means change.
- 2.3 Carl Sargeant closed his speech by emphasising that the Bill does not have a policy focus but is about the structure and integrity of the processes which underpin planning. The Bill will provide an enabling powers to do this throughout Wales.

3. Questions to Carl Sargeant AM Minister for Housing and Regeneration

- 3.1 **James Byrne - WT Wales**, *“Minister you touched on positive planning and green infrastructure which is a catalyst for economic development; small investment in green infrastructure will bring economic growth, so how will this be imbedded into the Bill?”*

The Minister responded by saying that he has tried to strip out policy from structure in the Bill. He recognises Green infrastructure has an important role in what should happen but at the moment Green infrastructure is not a matter which is directly under consideration in the context of this Bill. Green infrastructure needs cross governmental work. The Minister indicated that he consults with other Ministers regularly and gave the assurance that green infrastructure will be taken seriously in its appropriate policy context.

- 3.2 **Jay Kynch - The Open Spaces Society**, Highlighted the fact that OSS members were upset that the WG was trying to introduce regulations which would prevent the registration of village greens which are threatened by development. She requested evidence to back up this approach/ decision and said it is a shame that WG was following the approach being promoted by the Westminster Government.

The Minister respectfully did not agree with the OSS views. He believed it was important that communities engage early the planning process, so that land is not allocated when it has local community value or potential legal status as a common.

- 3.3 **Richard Kirlew - Rural Affairs for the Church in Wales** asked the Minister if he agreed that we should try and get young people to stay within rural communities and how can affordable housing be made more available?

Carl Sargeant outlined how he believed small communities could be better shaped and noted that putting regeneration aside, there is a need to find synergies. Rural housing Enablers had an important role to play in this respect and he was also looking at alternative approaches to the provision of



affordable housing as for example was the case in the Thames valley. He extended the offer of further conversations with the Church in Wales about how its land holding could potentially be used as a resource for affordable housing in rural areas.

- 3.4 **Edward Holdaway -Wales Landscape Partnership** asked the Minister what had changed since 2007 to reopen the question of National Parks remaining Planning Authorities. He asked the Minister whether he thought that National Park Authorities should retain their planning functions

The Minister said that he had been asked this question a number of times. In summary he responded by indicating that he believed there are too many Planning Authorities and the existing 25 should be reduced to about 10 across Wales. His logic was based on the premise that at present there is too much variability in performance and he thought this needed to be improved.

Reducing the number of Authorities was in his view advantageous in this respect. He recognised that the planning functions of National Parks was hugely important but could not see why external planners could not undertake the role of planners in a National Park in a credible manner. He believed the key issues which needed to be addressed given there is there is less public money in the system, are the opportunities for reducing delays in decision making whilst avoiding any weakening of services. He still had an open mind however as to what the future fate of National Park Authorities should be in terms of their planning role and he would continue to consider who is best able to deliver the best service and under what circumstances both in National Parks and beyond

- 3.5 **Dr Ruth Williams - Landscape Institute Wales** thanked the Minister for sharing his rationale and demonstrating how he was seeking to link the various elements of the Government agenda together. She asked for clarification about the role he believed that sustainable development would play in linking all of these issues.

The Minister replied by stating that he believed his department's role is delivering the Sustainable Development agenda he inherited from Jane Davidson. He questioned whether he could do this better and had could to the conclusion he could. He went on to clarify that there will be legislation relating to Sustainable Development in the Future Generation's Bill and therefore the path way for change has already begun. He expected the Planning system to create a structural basis for this change through the Bill. He believed Sustainable Development would increasingly become a more legislative tool but considered the Welsh government was on the right journey. He reassured the audience that Jeff Cuthbert constantly liaises with



him on how the two bills will interact.

- 3.6 The Chair thanked the Minister for giving of his time and the opportunity he had taken to present his thoughts to members of the Group

4. Dr Roisin Willmott, Royal Town Planning Institute

- 4.1 Roisin thanked the CPG for the opportunity to speak and explained who the RTPI are and that they have a duty to campaign for a planning system in the wider interest not just in their member's interest. Dr Willmott gave the RTPI's perspective on the content of the Planning Bill and indicated those elements which they supported and those elements which they believed were less satisfactory and had expressed concern about.
- 4.2 The RTPI applauded the evidence based approach that had been taken in drafting the document and supported the general thrust of the proposals and the Minister's support from them.
- 4.3 Roisin turned to the WG proposals and the rural implications. She clarified that the proposals don't cover policy so can't look at rural policy or the implications. Instead we need to look at the structures and frameworks being proposed and test what their implications will be for rural areas. The RTPI supports the WG's evidence based approach however questions the cultural change proposals and stressed that it is essential that it is embedded throughout the proposals.
- 4.4 RTPI support the establishment of a Planning Advisory Improvement Body, from a rural perspective it will be important to ensure that the body considers rural issues in its delivery – both in terms of subject matter and also in the practicalities of delivery.
- 4.5 National Development Framework. RTPI would suggest that it needs to have a stronger lead on other national strategies, e.g. the Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan (WIIP). Natural Resources Management planning should set out spatially the environment resource's to be maintained and enhanced and this should be integrated with the NDF, SDP and LDP's as both variable constraints and of opportunities. The NDF needs to be the place where other national strategies and policies that have spatial implications talk to each other. Transport and connectivity is an essential part of this.
- 4.6 RTPI wholly support the principle of Development Management Hierarchy.
- 4.7 Collaboration, depending on how the Williams Report goes forward may review the longer term need for this element. RTPI would however support collaboration on specialist services as this is working well in north Wales on



waste and minerals for example.

- 4.8 Roisin noted in the light of the previous questions about National Parks, that the RTPI have expressed the view in their response that it would be a retrograde steps to remove Planning powers from the Park Authorities. She believed there was no evidence to indicate that they were not undertaking this role adequately and noted that all the recent studies of planning performance in National Parks indicated this was the case. Roisin agreed with the need for collaborative working with services provided by unitary authorities. However RTPI questioned whether the evidence is there that would justify taking planning responsibilities from the NPAs. RTPI believe that they play an important function and have a national role.
- 4.9 Strategic Development Plans, RTPI believe there is a need for these but they principally have an urban focus. RTPI think that LDPs should follow the same model, no matter if it's an area covered by an SDP. This would be a particular issue for rural parts of authorities which are included within an SDP – so where the rural area is excluded.
- 4.10 Place Plans could have a positive effect in rural settlements.
- 4.11 RTPI commissioned the study on Planning Committees on behalf of the Minister and commends it. Committees provide an essential part of the planning system and Wales has a unique opportunity to lead in the UK in supporting committees for them to be able to deliver for communities and for the wider authority's objective and vision.
- 4.12 To close Roisin praised the incredible amount of positive proposals in the consultation document, the devil is in the detail and importantly how we all take this forward. Used in the right way planning can be a force for good and we should not ignore it.

5. Questions to Roisin Willmott, Royal Town Planning Institute

- 5.1 Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM asked about the RTPI's views on the Strategic Development Plans and how to strike the balance between democratic accountability and experience.
- 5.2 Further discussions centred on the level of scrutiny with the National Development Framework and how to get the general public involved. The issue that local authorities need to value the planning system and for them to be processed appropriately. The need for National Park Authority's to retain their planning functions were supported by various attendees.
- 5.3 The Chairman thanked Dr Willmott for her informed contribution and

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thoughtful perspective on the content of the proposed Bill.

8. Chairmen's closing remarks

8.1 Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM closed the meeting by thanking everyone who had attended for their contributions and trusted that as many as possible would be able to come to the next meeting later in the spring

The meeting ended at 13.40