

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 17 April 2002
Time: 2.00 to 4.00 pm
Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

REPORT BY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

COUNTRYSIDE

Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill

The Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill has been given a Third Reading in the House of Commons and will now pass to the House of Lords for consideration. This Private Member's Bill would create a new designation for sites of national importance for marine wildlife or geology.

Wales Biodiversity Week August 26th to September 1st 2002

Wales Biodiversity Week, which will take place at the time of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, will highlight the important contribution of local action to biodiversity conservation through a number of events and activities organised locally with the support of the Wales Biodiversity Group.

I would like to encourage all Assembly Members to participate in this initiative in their constituencies. Information is available from the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Facilitator (Julia Korn: *tel:* 01248 385 793, *e-mail:* J.Korn@ccw.gov.uk).

Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership

Wales has 1,600 kilometres of coastline with 70% of it covered by specific environmental designations. At the same time the majority of the population of Wales live in the coastal zone, leading to a range of pressures. To help address these in a co-ordinated way, I have been keen for some time to establish a new partnership of stakeholder interests, which would build on the work of the former Wales Coastal Forum.

The first meeting of the Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership was held in Swansea on the 20th March, which I attended. Key interest groups from the public, private and voluntary

sectors form the new partnership, which is being chaired by Dr Madeleine Harvard. The new Partnership will help inform policy development on the growing range of coastal issues in Wales, and will also have the task of helping to implement the new EC Recommendation on integrated coastal zone management in Wales.

Environment Development Fund (EDF) Review

A contract has been awarded to Entec UK Ltd to undertake a review of the Environment Development Fund, following a tender exercise undertaken by the Countryside Council for Wales. The Review will be managed on a joint basis by the Welsh Assembly Government's Countryside Division and the Countryside Council for Wales and will assess the impact of the scheme against its key objectives in order to inform decisions about its future. It will concentrate largely on the National Park element of the Fund, as this has been up and running since 2000, but it will also look at the AONB element, which started last summer.

The Review timetable involves Entec UK presenting its draft final report to the Countryside Division and the Countryside Council for Wales this summer. I will report the findings back to the Committee.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Local Air Pollution Control

The Welsh Assembly Government has issued its annual revision of the Local Air Pollution Control Scheme. This is a charge to cover the costs of local enforcing authorities in regulating processes which have a 'medium' potential for air pollution and are covered by legislation (Section 8(2) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990).

Following consultation with local authority associations and industry, the schemes specify the scale of fees and charges to take effect from 1 April 2002. The fees and charges have been increased by 1.8%, broadly in line with inflation.

Community Leadership and Climate Change

I am pleased to announce that the Welsh Assembly Government published the guidance document "*Community Leadership and Climate Change*" last week. Produced in conjunction with the Welsh Local Government Association, it is targeted specifically at elected members and Chief Executives and officers of local authorities, and highlights work programmes that can be adopted to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Contaminated Land

The Welsh Assembly Government, in conjunction with the Environment Agency and the WLGA, are supporting two training courses for local government officers engaged on preparing strategies for the remediation of contaminated land. I am pleased to report that nearly all local authorities have started work on this document following the secondary legislation that came into force last year.

Meeting with Glas Cymru

On 1 March, I met with Glas Cymru to discuss progress since the company was established.

Following the meeting I feel that it would be appropriate for the Company to make a presentation to a combined meeting of EPT Committee and ED Committee as well, if possible, to outline the benefits of the Glas Cymru model and to report on progress since its acquisition of Dwr Cymru.

PLANNING

Publication of *Planning Policy Wales*

The publication and launch of *Planning Policy Wales* takes place on 16th April.

The document has been developed in an open and inclusive way:

- it has drawn heavily on the recommendations of the Land Use Planning Forum which was set up to advise me of the changes needed to planning policy;
- this Committee has made an important contribution through its scrutiny of the various drafts; and also
- through public consultation, a number of other organisations and individuals submitted comments on the draft issued in February 2001.

All these contributions were carefully considered and have helped to set the policy.

The publication of *Planning Policy Wales* marks a significant milestone. It has been established following the first review of planning policy by the Welsh Assembly Government, and sets the scene for a more sustainable future for Wales.

TRANSPORT

Trunk Road Forward Programme

On 21 March I published the Welsh Assembly Government's Trunk Road Forward Programme,

the first review of its kind since devolution, and committee members will have received copies, together with an accompanying press release.

The Programme is based on a review of the strategic corridors listed in the Transport Framework, and includes a number of schemes which could commence in the next 6 years.

A479 Talgarth Relief Road

Also on 21 March I announced the preferred route for the Talgarth Relief Road, following extensive public consultation. The preferred (Purple) route is one of three options published, and is the most popular among those who responded to the consultation.

Further survey and design work will now be carried out in due course, and fresh statutory powers will be sought to construct the Relief Road. Representations and objections can be made at the appropriate time and if necessary a further public inquiry will be held.

A40 Travellers Rest, Carmarthen

A new £2.8m grade-separated junction on the A40 west of Carmarthen was opened to traffic in time for the busy Easter bank holiday weekend.

Travel Plans

On February 28 I spoke at a Travel Plan Seminar in Swansea. The event, one of a series held under the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme to promote best practice in travel planning, was well attended with delegates from both public and private organisations.

We are demonstrating our commitment to promote travel plans by providing £150,000 a year for three years to establish a regional travel plan co-ordinator post in each of the five transport regions.

Energy Saving Trust's Transport Action Event

On 12 March I spoke at the Energy Saving Trust's Transport Action Event in City Hall, Cardiff. Under the Transport Action banner, the Trust aims to help reduce vehicle emissions through its PowerShift and CleanUp programmes. The event was well supported by representatives from local authorities and private organisations.

Re-launch of Safety Camera Partnership

On 25 March I re-launched the Safety Camera Partnership at McArthur Glen, near Bridgend. In

the first initiative of its kind in the UK, the South Wales Safety Camera Partnership has formed an extended regional alliance with both the Gwent and Dyfed Powys police force areas.

The original partnership was set up in April 2000 under a piloted government scheme which allowed capital for the purchase of speed and red light cameras and enforcement equipment to be funded from fixed penalty revenue, instead of local authority and police budgets. Since the pilot's inception, fatalities on South Wales roads have fallen by 25% with a 78% reduction in the number of pedestrian fatalities.

Local Transport Services Grant scheme

I have announced allocations to local authorities under the Local Transport Services Grant scheme in 2002-03. Total provision is more than £7.5m, to help authorities subsidise bus services and support community transport projects.

Free travel on local bus services by pensioners and disabled people

I accompanied the First Minister to Penarth and Cardiff on 2 April to launch the new mandatory free scheme, which came into effect on 1 April. Later on 2 April I attended further events in Blackwood and Carmarthen, and on the following day in Wrexham and Llandudno. Other launches took place in Bridgend, in Swansea, and in Newtown.

Our Regulations that were approved in plenary last November will achieve the equalisation of the age of entitlement for men and women at 60 years from April 2003.

Safe Routes to School Initiative

I am due to open the Safe Routes to School scheme at Duffryn High School, near Newport on 17 April. We have funded grant aid to this project of £458,000 up to and including funding announced for this financial year. The scheme aims to give students living in the Gaer, Duffryn and Maesglas areas of Newport a safe route to their school which includes the provision of a new bridge over the River Ebbw.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development Conference 17th April

The Welsh Assembly Government with WWF Cymru and Oxfam Cymru colleagues are co-hosting a major conference at Cardiff City Hall on 17th April to discuss Wales' contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg later in the year.

The First Minister and myself will be addressing the event. At the Conference there will also be keynote speakers from around the world, as well as workshops, seminars, presentations, and exhibitions.

It has created great interest with 380 people indicating so far that they wish to attend; we expect this figure to rise.

Sue Essex
Minister for Environment