

## **ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

**Date:** Wednesday 20 November 2002

**Time:** 9.00 am to 12:00 pm

**Venue:** Committee Room 3/4, National Assembly Building

### **REPORT BY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT**

#### **COUNTRYSIDE**

##### **Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership**

The third meeting of the Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership took place on the 7th of November 2002 in Milford Haven. Chaired by Madeleine Harvard, the main discussion item on the agenda was initial views from the Partnership on how the EC Recommendation on Integrated Coastal Zone Management might be taken forward in Wales.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

##### **Bathing Water Quality**

On 30 October I announced that this year all 75 EC identified **bathing waters** in Wales complied with the EC mandatory standards. This is the first time this has been achieved in Wales.

62 bathing waters also met EC guideline standards this year - again a record. The guideline standards are 20 times more stringent than the mandatory ones and are the water quality standards that beaches must meet to be eligible for a European Blue Flag.

##### **Water Framework Directive**

In October a joint Welsh Assembly Government/DEFRA consultation paper was published on the key issues which will determine how the Water Framework Directive will be transposed and implemented in England and Wales. It confirms the intention that the Assembly will transpose the Directive in Wales.

This is the second in a series of consultation papers (the first being issued last year). It covers issues such as diffuse pollution, water abstraction, the discharge consent system and wetlands. It also confirms that the Environment Agency will be given a central role in implementing the Directive in England and Wales, including new duties to co-ordinate production of river basin management plans.

### **Private Water Supplies Regulations**

The EC Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC) sets out drinking water quality standards for public and private water supplies and describes certain criteria for the sampling and analysis of various microbiological and chemical standards (generally based on the World Health Organisation's 1993 guidelines for drinking water quality). The National Assembly has already transposed the Directive with regard to public water supplies (SI 2001 No.3911 (W.323)) but, along with the rest of the UK, has yet to transpose the requirements of the Directive in respect of private water supplies.

As was the case with public water supplies, the Assembly's transposing regulations are likely to be informed by and to follow closely those that DEFRA will introduce for England. We would expect to produce draft regulations for consultation as soon as possible following those on which DEFRA will go out to consultation. DEFRA's consultation is planned for later this year or early next.

### **The Special Waste Regulations 1996**

At the EPT Committee meeting on 23 October members asked for further information about these regulations.

The Special Waste Regulations 1996 require that special waste be monitored from the moment it is discarded until it reaches its final point of treatment, disposal or recovery. These movements are regulated by the Environment Agency and include an auditable tracking system of special waste consignment notes and inspections to special waste producers and waste management facilities.

The 1996 Regulations were introduced to transpose the requirements of the Hazardous Waste Directive (91/689/EEC) however the Directive was amended in 2001 and the Regulations now need to be revised. The most significant change to the Directive is a revision to the hazardous

waste list (Commission Decisions 2001/119/EC and 2001/118/EC), which details the types of waste that are to be regarded as hazardous waste.

The revised Directive will bring a wider range of wastes into the definition of hazardous waste than at present. Therefore in order to reduce the expected administrative burden on both waste producers and the Agency and in light of operational experience, the existing regime is to be revised.

Under the European Communities (Designation) (No 3) Order 2001, the Assembly was given a designation under the Hazardous Waste Directive and as such it will be for the Assembly to introduce the necessary changes in Wales.

In March 2001, DEFRA carried out a preliminary consultation on proposals to amend the 1996 Regulations. The responses to this consultation are being used to form the basis for the proposals in a second consultation that is currently being produced. As the movements of special waste in Wales are closely linked with those in England, it is essential that the arrangements put in place across Wales and England are both consistent and are introduced within the timescales. We are awaiting final proposals from DEFRA but in view of the Assembly's commitments under the Hazardous Waste Directive, it is likely that following consultation, the amending regulations will need to be introduced using the executive procedure.

## **PLANNING**

### ***Planning: delivering for Wales***

I will make a statement to Plenary on the 27 November outlining the way forward on our proposals for improving the planning system.

The Assembly can deliver much of the programme of change we have set out but some of the proposals will require us to work with the UK Government to introduce primary legislative change. The Queen's speech of the 13 November announced the government's intention to introduce a Planning Bill. I will keep the committee fully informed on progress in my monthly report to Committee.

### **Technical Advice Note - Design**

Technical Advice Note 20 Design was published in October following a lengthy consultation exercise, and copies are now available on the website and from the members library.

## **TRANSPORT**

### **Home Loss Payments**

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2002 we published a consultation paper reviewing the current maximum and minimum thresholds for Home Loss Payments. The exercise is being jointly undertaken by Welsh Assembly Government and the Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). I have written to members of the Committee with details of this consultation: the closing date for responses is 6 January 2003.

### **Review of Community Transport**

On 21 October 2002 I launched the report of the Community Transport Review Group of the Welsh Transport Forum at a conference in Llandrindod Wells. The report's recommendations aim to increasingly mainstream community transport alongside other modes, and promote integration between the community transport, health, education, social services and voluntary sectors. I am establishing a Stakeholders Group including representatives of these sectors, as well as the Community Transport Association, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Assembly, to take forward the recommendations. A copy of the summary report has been circulated to members and will be made available on the intranet and the internet shortly.

### **Confederation of Passenger Transport**

I met representatives of the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) - the bus industry "trade association" - on 30 October 2002. A range of issues of mutual interest was discussed, including the Assembly Government's free concessionary travel scheme, the difficulties the industry is experiencing in recruiting and retaining staff, and further enhancing service standards. Linked to that, I referred to my earlier meeting with the Traffic Commissioner when I endorsed his determination to exercise the full extent of his powers against operators who fail consistently to meet passengers' reasonable expectations.

### **Wales and Borders Franchise**

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) announced changes to their franchising policy on 6 November. It also confirmed that, following consultation with the Assembly, the Wales and Borders rail franchise will be sought on a fifteen year term, and that it will be possible to negotiate changes, particularly affecting performance and quality, at the five and ten year review points which are built into the franchise.

The Assembly continues to keep closely in touch with the SRA on the development of the Wales and Borders rail franchise. Best and final offers are being sought by the SRA from the short-listed bidders:

- Arriva Trains Ltd
- GB Railways Plc/Connex Transport UK Limited
- National Express Group Plc
- Serco Rail/Netherlands Railways

I met representatives of National Express Group on 11 November and GB Railways/Connex Transport UK Limited on 18 November. I will also be having meetings with Arriva Trains and Serco/Netherlands Railways on 25 and 26 November respectively.

The SRA will make a decision on the successful bidders by Spring 2003 with implementation in Autumn 2003.

### **Engagements attended by Minister of Environment**

At Annex A is a list of engagements that I have attended since the EPT Committee meeting on 23 October 2002.

**Sue Essex**

**Minister for Environment**

**ANNEX A**

### **Engagements attended by Minister for Environment**

**UK Noise Association**

- I met with representatives of the UK Noise Association together with Jon Owen Jones,

MP on 4th November to discuss ambient noise concerns and their impact on social exclusion.

### **ICE Conference on Flooding – 31<sup>st</sup> October 2002**

- I provided a keynote speech to open the conference that was organised by the Institution of Civil Engineers in Wales. The conference was held at County Hall, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff.
- The conference focussed on aspects of the management of flood risk and served to continue the debate which was started last November with the publication of the Institution of Civil Engineers' report entitled "Learning to Live with Rivers". The aim is to encourage and assist the development of sensible policies and practices to address some of the local flooding problems in Wales. The conference was well attended and is likely to become an annual event.

### **Wales Waste Forum, 31 October, Cardiff Bay**

- On 31 October I was pleased to chair the first meeting of the Wales Waste Forum following the publication of the new waste strategy for Wales, *Wise about Waste* last June. The Forum brings together a wide range of stakeholders interested in waste including local government, industry, the waste management industry, NGOs, the community and voluntary sector and specialist bodies and interests. The Forum played a key part in developing the new waste strategy for Wales and will play an equally important part in its implementation over the coming years. I expect that it will meet two or perhaps three times a year.

### **Waste and Resources Action Programme, 4 November, Hanover Hotel, Cardiff Bay**

- A key part of the waste strategy is the diversion of recyclable materials from disposal in landfill sites. We have provided local authorities with considerable additional funding (£67 million over 3 years) to help them carry this forward. However to be fully effective we need to ensure that markets exist for the materials that are removed from the waste stream. The Welsh Assembly Government is funding (together with DTI, DEFRA, Scotland and Northern Ireland) the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to develop markets for the use of recycled materials. On 4 November I attended a

conference in Cardiff held by the WRAP to promote their work to Welsh businesses. WRAP can provide expert help and funding to businesses to help them to use recycled materials.

### **LARAC Conference, 5 November, Wales International Arena**

- The UK wide Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC) held its annual conference in Cardiff this year. I spoke to the conference on 5 November. I have already referred to the crucial role of local authorities in increasing the amount of waste recycled. I was very pleased to be able to inform the conference of the developments we are taking forward in Wales and of the aspirations we have for taking Wales forward to becoming one of the best countries in Wales for sustainable waste management.

### **Consortium of Local Authorities in Wales (CLAW) Building of the Year Awards, Newport Hilton**

- On the 31<sup>st</sup> October I attended the CLAW Annual General Meeting Dinner and presented the first CLAW 'Building of the Year' award to Ceredigion County Council for the Food Research Centre at Horeb.
- In my speech I drew upon the theme of working in partnership to change the culture of planning and to make it a positive tool for regeneration. I detailed three key current areas where the Assembly Government is currently working with partners, namely, design, the Wales Spatial Plan and a piece of joint collaborative research into linguistic impact assessments.

### **Wales Environment Awards 2002**

- On the 6<sup>th</sup> November Jane Davidson and I attended the 5<sup>th</sup> annual "Wales Environment Awards" staged by the ARENA Network. The event was held simultaneously at the Copthorne Hotel, Cardiff and St David's Park Hotel, Ewloe, North Wales. The venues were linked by a satellite connection.
- The awards recognise achievement in environmental good practice in the business sector.

## **Official Opening of the Welsh Environment Agency Headquarters**

- I attended the official opening of the Environment Agency's new Welsh headquarters in Newport Road, Cardiff on 30 October.
- The relocation, from St Mellons has been achieved within overall budget and delivered through an innovative Public/Private Partnership using BREEM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method). The new accommodation demonstrated in several ways the Agency's commitment to achieving, wherever possible, the highest environmental standards in its accommodation in Wales. The building incorporates a 24hr Control Centre for Wales, to ensure that environmental incidents are reported and managed, together with a Ground Floor Public Register Suite which gives the Agency the opportunity to increase the public's environmental awareness by being more accessible.

## **European Conference of Town Planners**

- I attended the European Conference of Town Planners' annual conference on 8 November 2002 - World Town Planning Day. The event provided an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to spatial planning as a means to promote sustainable development and local initiatives. Our approach was welcomed by delegates and several useful contacts were made which will assist us in developing our own Plan.