



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru  
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau  
The Petitions Committee**

**Dydd Mawrth, 19 Ionawr 2010  
Tuesday, 19 January 2010**

**Cynnwys**  
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Election of a New Permanent Chair

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,  
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.  
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Andrew R.T. Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Val Lloyd	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Christine Chapman) Labour (substitute for Christine Chapman)

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Anna Heslop	Swyddog Ymgyrchoedd, Coed Cadw Campaigns Officer, The Woodland Trust
Jerry Langford	Cyfarwyddwr Cymru, Coed Cadw Director for Wales, The Woodland Trust

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol**  
**National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Joanest Jackson	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Andrew Minnis	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Naomi Stocks	Clerc Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.15 a.m.*  
*The meeting began at 9.15 a.m.*

**Ethol Cadeirydd Dros Dro**  
**Election of a Temporary Chair**

[1] **Ms Stocks:** Good morning. As you may be aware, there have been changes to the committee membership, as agreed in Plenary on Tuesday, 12 January. As a result, the committee does not have a Chair for this meeting. Therefore, in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.19, I call for nominations for a temporary Chair for the duration of today's meeting.

[2] **Bethan Jenkins:** I nominate Val Lloyd.

[3] **Ms Stocks:** Are there any further nominations? I see that there are not. I therefore declare that Val Lloyd has been duly appointed temporary Chair of the Petitions Committee for today's meeting, and I invite her to take the Chair's seat.

[4] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you very much for appointing me Chair for this meeting.

*Penodwyd Val Lloyd yn Gadeirydd dros dro.*  
*Val Lloyd was appointed temporary Chair.*

9.16 a.m.

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon  
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[5] **Val Lloyd:** Before we move to our first item, which is an evidence session from Coed Cadw, and before we bring the petitioners in, I will just let you know that we have received apologies from Christine Chapman, who is a new member of the committee, and I am substituting for her this morning. She was not expecting to be made a member of this committee, and so she is away with an arm of the Committee on European and External Affairs. I remind everybody to turn off their mobile telephone equipment. We can use English or Welsh for our business. You can amplify the audio on channel 0 of the headsets and hear the simultaneous translation on channel 1. We are not expecting any testing of the fire alarm, so, if you hear it, it is for real and you should use the doors indicated by the ushers.

9.17 a.m.

**Sesiwn Dystiolaeth: P-03-234 Mae ar Gymru Angen Mwy o Goed Brodorol—  
Tystiolaeth gan Coed Cadw  
Evidence Session: P-03-234 Wales Needs More Native Trees—Evidence from the  
Woodland Trust**

[6] **Val Lloyd:** I now welcome our petitioners this morning. We have Anna Heslop, the campaigns officer for Coed Cadw, and Jerry Langford, the director and the lead petitioner. You are very welcome. I shall run through the procedure. You have up to 15 minutes. You may use that time as you will to present your case, and, after 15 minutes, we will move into the questioning from Members, again for up to 15 minutes.

[7] **Ms Heslop:** First of all, thank you very much for seeing us this morning. It is very kind. I am Anna Heslop, campaigns officer at Coed Cadw, the Welsh part of the Woodland Trust, which is a national woodland conservation charity, and Jerry is the director for Wales.

[8] The headline aim of our petition is to achieve the doubling of native woodland cover by 2050, and there are various reasons why we are looking for that. However, to achieve it, we would like to see adequate resourcing for Forestry Commission Wales, so that it is able to deliver grants that are practical and increase its tree-planting targets. We would also like to see the Glastir scheme, which I know the Minister is considering at the moment, providing practical support to farmers for tree planting.

[9] We would like to see a continuation of the very successful Plant! scheme that the Assembly Government has been running. We have found that to be a fantastic scheme. It gives young people a real sense of place in the environment and gives families encouragement to go out and enjoy woodland. We would also like local authorities to be encouraged to plant trees, whether in partnership with Coed Cadw, for example, or on their own land. We would also like to make sure that we continue to protect our existing woodland through the planning process. We are quite lucky here in Wales in that we have a slightly better system than England has, but we would like to see that continued and strengthened.

[10] So, there are different types of woodland planting and there are different types of people who benefit. There are massive benefits for people. In education terms, children get outdoors and get into woodland. We have some fantastic schemes that get children out of the classroom, and it is really beneficial for them to get out there and see bugs and build dens and do all sorts of things like that. There are huge health and wellbeing benefits to getting people out walking and enjoying the outdoors. Particularly in urban areas, having small woodlands on people's doorsteps is hugely beneficial for that. It also has community benefits, sustainable community benefits in those sorts of communities, because it provides a focus for the

community to get out there and enjoy the woodland. There are economic benefits, too. In tourism terms, there are economic benefits to improving the look of Wales's environment. We are lucky to live in a very beautiful country but, in our opinion, trees make it more beautiful and greener. Albeit on a very small scale, wood, and particularly native wood, also represents a fantastic renewable and viable local energy source for the future.

9.20 a.m.

[11] There is also carbon sequestration—for business, planting trees can have carbon sequestration benefits. Then there are the environmental factors. Native woodland is fantastic for biodiversity. It is also very good for agriculture. There are examples that we have included in our paper, such as the Pontbren scheme, where farmers have been able to plant trees on land that they were not using for other things, or they can plant shelter belts to provide shelter for animals. It can be very helpful in the agricultural context, as well as for flooding and water quality. In some areas, it can be very beneficial to plant trees to prevent flooding; in other areas, it is very beneficial for the water quality to plant trees near rivers.

[12] The question that then arises is what does it mean? How do we go about doubling native woodland cover? It could be as few as 66 trees per farm per year—that is one of the calculations we have managed to work out. It sounds like a lot when you think that is 40 years' worth, but the trees that you plant do not equate to mature trees, and you have to plant more than you will get at the end, so we are not talking about covering farms in trees. You can also plant trees in urban areas, as well, so we are happy to count every tree, whether it is in a back garden or in a community woodland.

[13] In the illustrative figures that we have put in the document, it works out as 2,200 ha per year. Given what Forestry Commission Wales is currently achieving, that sounds like a big jump. Its current target is 500 ha per year and it thinks that it managed 300 ha last year, although the Minister, in her letter to you, said that she felt that she was on target to meet the 1,500 ha target over three years. So, it sounds like a very big jump, but according to the woodland restocking figures for the year to March 2009 for Scotland—and I appreciate that Scotland has a bigger land area—it planted 2,300 ha of native broadleaved woodland and, in England, it was 2,100 ha. I appreciate that the land area is different, but I have not heard anybody saying, 'Gosh, that is an awful lot of trees that you have planted in the last year; it seems a bit much'. In Scotland and England, there have not been any problems, so we think that, at that scale, if England can manage 2,100 ha, then 2,200 ha is entirely achievable in Wales.

[14] A draft report has appeared in our inbox since we wrote this paper—and I stress that it is a draft. The land use and climate change group have been circulating it for comments from interested parties. The land use and climate change group is a sub-group of the Climate Change Commission for Wales, chaired by the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing. It is looking in detail at land use strategies to abate carbon. Their current draft has a rate that is 10 times the current planting: 5,000 ha of new woodland per year. Our ask of 2,200 ha is dwarfed by that. I stress that it is in draft form, so we do not know whether that will be the final figure, but that is what it is looking at at the moment.

[15] So, it is eminently possible to achieve and we are not talking about huge swathes of plantation; we are talking about woodland where it has the most benefit. It has benefits for all sorts of different people, as I have said. It could be sheltered grazing, it could be wood fuel on farms, it could be local initiatives, land reclamation or regeneration, or small forests around hospitals and schools, which can be used by patients to have a walk in as they are recuperating, or used by pupils for shelter at the end of the rugby pitch. It is possible to do this all over Wales for the benefit of people and the environment in numerous different ways.

[16] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you very much. Mr Langford, do you have anything to add?

[17] **Mr Langford:** I would re-emphasise that, in terms of how we achieve this, we are suggesting a salami-slicing approach. There are lots of different strategies, but it can only happen through individual decisions by landowners who will have many different motivations. Therefore, contributions towards this aspiration can come in many different ways and from many different directions. We think that many of the contributions will be in very small-scale planting—individual trees, small groups of trees, hedgerows, orchards. There are lots of options for lots of different purposes, and we welcome and encourage them all. A lot of that smaller-scale planting will come in below the radar in terms of the Forestry Commission's own targets, which means that there is a significant contribution that is not in the form of plantations in the traditional forestry sense, although, of course, there is a role for plantations in some circumstances.

[18] We would very much like to encourage an overview that welcomes all sorts of planting for all sorts of purposes, but perhaps particularly picking out the opportunity for firewood, or wood fuel, particularly in rural areas where the main fuel is heating oil at the moment. It seems to me that there is a significant opportunity for landowners to look to self-sufficiency in heating fuel and, for some, there will be new commercial opportunities in larger-scale production of wood fuel. That is just one example of one use. There are lots of different avenues to take and we welcome other ideas, as I am sure that we do not have them all.

[19] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you both very much. We will move to some questions now. I shall just jot the time down, so that I am fair to everybody. I will ask the first question. Why do you have concerns that the target to plant 1,500 ha by 2012 may not be met?

[20] **Ms Heslop:** We very much welcome that target—I do not know whether Jerry wants to say anything else—but the planting that has gone on so far does not seem to be meeting it. There will have to be an increase over the next two years to meet it, because they have not split it up into a third each year. Our concern is not that the target will not be met, but that it ought to be bigger and that we ought to be doing more. If we are only managing 300 ha a year, that is worrying for us.

[21] **Mr Langford:** We have a lot of contact with the Forestry Commission and have been talking to it in some detail about this. I applaud its efforts to look at the whole approach, because we both believe that new thinking is required not only to reach that target, but to go beyond it. I very much welcome the fact that the commission has just invited comments on a new, simple grants scheme, which I think will be a great help. As Anna says, I am confident that the current target will be met and that there are changes afoot that will take us in the right direction. However, we would very much like to see an increase in the ambition there.

[22] **Val Lloyd:** In your supporting information, you highlighted that the other UK jurisdictions are making far more progress on this issue than Wales is. Do you know why that is and are there any lessons that Wales can learn?

9.30 p.m.

[23] **Mr Langford:** There are significant differences in circumstance. For example, in Scotland, the pattern of landownership is very different, so the solutions that work in Scotland are not going to be appropriate in Wales, and the same is true in England, where there are significant differences in agricultural ownership. The difference that we should consider is one of aspiration rather than of mechanism. In Scotland, there has been a very proactive commitment to a significant expansion in the forest industries, effectively, which was expressed through a desire to see a significant increase in woodland cover. It is that ambition for the woodland and forestry sector that we would like to endorse.

[24] **Michael German:** I will turn to some of the financial incentives that you need in order to help people plant in greater numbers. To deal with the Better Woodlands for Wales grant scheme first, how effective do you think that is for the larger landholdings in Wales?

[25] **Mr Langford:** The indications that we have seen are that it is quite effective for large schemes. Financially, it is quite attractive if you have a substantial proposal and have the resources required to prepare a proposal on that scale, because there is a significant amount of work involved in preparing Better Woodlands for Wales applications. There is expert help available to do that through the scheme, but, even so, it does require a significant commitment from the landowner, or the land manager. The indications that we have seen, including the extent to which we participated in the scheme ourselves, is that it is quite an attractive and helpful grant scheme for sizable projects. The limitations are very much more at the lower end.

[26] **Michael German:** So, conversely, it is the smaller landholdings that have had trouble accessing this grant. Is that due to the complexity of the grant?

[27] **Mr Langford:** Yes, it is partly the complexity of the grant. The amount of work that is involved in preparing applications means that for the agent planners who are paid by the Forestry Commission to prepare applications, it is marginally viable in terms of the time it takes and the return they get. There is the slowness as well, because it can take 12 months or longer to go from wanting to do it to getting a scheme approved. This is why the Forestry Commission is now looking at the 'first steps' alternative to support those smaller schemes. We have been experimenting over the last two seasons by offering a very simple, basic incentive scheme direct to landowners, and we have found that there is a lot of latent interest—many landowners will respond very positively to a straightforward, simple contribution, even if it is not delivering anything like full cost. There is a desire to do something and a desire to have some help, but, more than anything else, to keep it simple, so we are very pleased to see the 'first steps' proposal.

[28] **Bethan Jenkins:** My question relates to smaller woodlands. You have touched upon this already in terms of simplifying the grants, but what do you believe the barriers are in accessing the scheme? Are farmers put off by the prospect of having to go through the bureaucracy of funding? You mentioned the need for more funding for the Forestry Commission, so do you see an enhanced role for the Forestry Commission if it had more funding?

[29] **Ms Heslop:** At the smaller end of the grant scheme, there are minimum limits to what you can do, so if you just want to plant a few trees in a hedgerow, the grant scheme is not going to help you. You have to plant a minimum acreage in order to get grants, and, in speaking to farmers, we found that that put some of them off. The overwhelming response that we get is, 'I don't want the bureaucracy, it's going to take forever and it's not worth it'. I think that it is a combination of the two: if you only want to do a small amount, or you want to do it in a certain way that does not fit within the scheme, then, basically, you do not get the grant.

[30] **Mr Langford:** Central to this is the agri-environment scheme and the future for that. How this all fits in with Glastir is going to be crucial, particularly at the small-scale planting end. One of the practical difficulties is, of course, fencing costs, with the vast majority of farms in Wales being stock farms. If tree planting requires major rearrangement of fencing, there are significant costs involved, but, more fundamental is how it all fits in with the cross-compliance and other requirements of the agri-environment schemes. That is a complex area that not many people fully understand, even if there are ways through it. That is one reason why we say that the role of Glastir is crucial, because, if Glastir is seen as erecting cross-

compliance and other administrative barriers, it will be very off-putting.

[31] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I declare an interest as a participant in the Better Woodlands for Wales scheme and in Tir Gofal, which means that I identify entirely with your sentiments on the complexity of the application process. I disagree with you about the resource that goes to the consultant who draws that up because I know exactly what our consultant had, therefore I take issue with you on that.

[32] **Mr Langford:** They do very well out of large schemes, I think. If you have a 0.5 ha planting scheme, they say that it is not really worth their while, or that is what they tell us.

[33] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** To return to the petition, which is about welcoming the Forestry Commission's incentives to date and widening the aspiration to meet your goal of a substantial increase, in old money, you are talking about nearly 5,000 acres, or, listening to what the Minister for environment said, 12,000 acres, which I as a farmer find alarming. People have focused on farmers providing the raw resource, if you like, of land to provide the acreage, or the hectareage, but there is a whole array of landowners out there. Anna, you kindly mentioned trees around rugby pitches, for example, acting as windbreaks. It is about providing a mix and a balance, so that everyone benefits from having woodlands in their locality. Breaking it down into Welsh Assembly Government landholdings—which, obviously, is the Forestry Commission—and those of local authorities, farmers and landowners, and charities like your good selves, how do you see your aspiration of an increase in the hectareage being achieved by all four participants, or do you see it as solely the role of the Government, via the Forestry Commission, to drive this on the back of incentivising farmers to plant trees?

[34] **Ms Heslop:** We do not see this as the role of Government on the back of incentivising farmers to plant trees. We are looking for that breakdown including all sorts of different places, and woodland brings its greatest benefits when it benefits all sorts of different people. Woodland on a farm is not necessarily going to benefit people in an urban setting, because they would not be able to access that farm or they would have to travel to get to it. The community woodland is the biggest thing for them. There is a big mix. Most of Wales's land is agricultural, which is why we focused on that in the paper, but those schemes that involve planting trees around hospitals or the local leisure centre are equally important, and, for people and communities, are possibly more important.

[35] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** How realistic is it to expect those kinds of schemes to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting the goals that you subscribe to via your petition, or, indeed, that the Assembly Government might subscribe to? They are quite limited schemes, even though they might have far better access points than some less-favoured land in Snowdonia or somewhere like that.

[36] **Mr Langford:** We have attempted to start putting some figures to the different contributions that can come from different sorts of landowners, and those are in a table in the paper. As Anna says, farmers inevitably come out at the top of the list because something like 80 per cent of the land in Wales is in farming. We just crudely estimated the scale of contribution, whether it might be in hundreds of hectares per year or tens of hectares per year. Enclosed land is the only one that we noted in potentially thousands of hectares. Therefore, there is a jump down when you look at the other, non-farming land. As you said, the landowners include: the Government; local authorities, who are, in many cases, significant landowners in their own right; corporate land holdings; and utility companies, for example, which we are keen to talk to. Individually, I do not think any of them can make a contribution with the same potential as the farming landowners, but, collectively, there is a significant result to be sought. Certainly, we as an organisation would be interested in working in partnership with local authorities in particular, where we think there are lots of opportunities,



and with corporate and Government department land holdings. There are opportunities to bring in non-Government funding, which is another area in which we feel we have a role. So, I think that there are significant opportunities outside the farming community, and we do need to put some effort into realising those.

9.40 a.m.

[37] **Ms Heslop:** Some of those gains can be delivered by things like planning policy—it is not necessarily grants; it can be delivered in other ways.

[38] **Val Lloyd:** We have less than a minute left. Mike, would you like to come in?

[39] **Michael German:** To look at Glastir for a moment, as it is going to be a key deliverer of funding, what practical things would you like to see included in that programme? You mentioned funding costs and simpler bureaucracy, but I have not yet heard of anyone being able to reduce the bureaucracy of European programmes. Give me the top three practical things that you would like to see in Glastir that would make a difference.

[40] **Mr Langford:** One idea that we have already floated through axis 3 at a county level was enquiring as to whether we can create a project where, effectively, we give packs of trees to landowners as a sort of taster pack so that they can plant them where they want on their land without running into difficulties with the regulations that are associated with the agriculture sector. That is one thing that we are exploring at the moment and we will be interested to hear back from the axis 3 groups as to whether they think that that is an allowable approach.

[41] **Michael German:** Do you know whether it is allowable?

[42] **Mr Langford:** We do not, at the moment. My understanding is that we hope it should be, but I am not sure, no. I am not an expert in that. If we can enable landowners to plant limited numbers of trees where they want, without having to map in great detail and report in great detail and be very restricted, that would be a great step forward. Apart from the direct benefit, we hope that it might encourage them to look at the larger incentive schemes available. It would be a way in. On support for wood pasture, which is a very distinctive and historic part of the Welsh rural environment—fields with trees in, which have come and gone across the centuries—it is very difficult to create that sort of landscape and habitat from new in the situation we are in at the moment, but some way that allows landowners to do that would be a very interesting development.

[43] **Val Lloyd:** I am afraid I shall have to draw you to a close—we have used up all our time and a little more. Mr Langford and Ms Heslop, thank you for your presentation and answering of questions. If you would retire to the public gallery, we will continue with other business until you are settled and then we will return to this item so that you can hear what we have to say.

9.45 a.m.

### **Deisebau Newydd New Petitions**

[44] **Val Lloyd:** The first new petition, on page 40, is P-03-247 to save Hedd Wyn's home. This was raised by Mr Underdown, and calls on the National Assembly to urge the Government to recognise the cultural and historical significance of that property. As part of the committee's procedure, I have already written on your behalf to the Minister for Heritage and I am awaiting a reply. Are there any comments?

[45] **Bethan Jenkins:** The only thing that I would like to say is—we may get this from the Minister’s letter—that we should find out whether it is listed. That may be something that we could find out via Cadw. If it is not listed, like the Vulcan, then perhaps we can look at that avenue for development.

[46] **Val Lloyd:** That sounds like a sensible approach. Is everybody in agreement?

[47] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** Yes, I agree entirely. In the intervening period, could the clerk and her team look at the petition on the Vulcan to see whether there are any similarities? We did an extensive piece of work on the Vulcan, and there might be similarities that could be incorporated into an informed opinion on this matter.

[48] **Val Lloyd:** Are we all in agreement? I see that we are. Thank you.

[49] The next one is P-03-261 on local solutions to Newtown traffic congestion. This asks us to urge the Welsh Government to defer a decision on the proposed bypass until it has developed and trialled a set of sustainable measures. It was raised by Mr Saady, and collected 37 signatures. I have written to the Deputy First Minister, as our protocol allows.

[50] **Michael German:** May I also suggest that we ask the Enterprise and Learning Committee, which has done a witness session with the Minister and taken some ideas and evidence about the traffic proposals for Wales—I think that it is called the regional transport plan—if it has a view on this issue?

[51] **Val Lloyd:** Is everyone content? I see that you are. Thank you.

[52] I will take one more; I think that the petitioners are nearly settled in the gallery. This is P-03-264, on help to stop the alarming loss of wildlife and habitats. It was submitted by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Cymru and, before we start, I declare as an interest as a member of the RSPB. I have written to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing.

[53] **Bethan Jenkins:** We were talking before committee about the fact that the Minister has released a statement on biodiversity over the weekend. It may be interesting to refer that statement to the petitioners to see whether it will go some way to addressing what the petition is calling for.

[54] **Michael German:** If there is a mismatch between what the petitioners want and what the Government is proposing, it might be sensible to have the petitioners in. This is one petition where we could take evidence, to see what the differences are.

[55] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. It would be very interesting to see what responses we get.

[56] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** Could I also suggest that, while we have written to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, there is a role here for the Minister for Rural Affairs, given what we have heard on a previous petition this morning about Glastir, and the ability of Glastir—along with its predecessor, Tir Gofal—to create habitat and to conserve the countryside? There is almost a dual mandate here. I am sure that Jane Davidson leads on this, but the Minister for Rural Affairs would have a large input into the creation of a joined-up approach, to develop in a more sustainable way.

[57] **Val Lloyd:** I think that is a very good idea.

[58] **Michael German:** I think that she has some of the financial tools.

[59] **Val Lloyd:** That is even better.

9.49 a.m.

### **Trafod Tystiolaeth Discussion of Evidence**

[60] **Val Lloyd:** We will return now to the petition from Coed Cadw. I open it up to everybody for discussion about what you wish to do. I should remind everybody that we have asked the Forestry Commission to our next meeting to give evidence. Do you think that it would be wise to wait until we have heard from the Forestry Commission, or do you want to initiate anything now?

[61] **Michael German:** It seems that there are some key questions that we need to pose to the Forestry Commission, and probably refer back to the Government. The thing about issues concerning trees is that they are like the Titanic; it takes a very long time to move and make a change. However, if you have set a target, and you have not started on that target, it will make it increasingly difficult to reach it later on. So, we need to get some understanding from the Forestry Commission, and perhaps from the Minister, as to how they intend to reach the target and what their short-term targets are. We know that they have targets for 2012, but how are they going to achieve them, and how is it going to work? In this respect, given that the Forestry Commission is now really an agency of the Welsh Assembly Government—its independence is limited—it seems to me that, if there are questions that come out of today where the answers required are factual and will need a Minister to answer, we may need to refer those to the Minister.

9.50 a.m.

[62] **Val Lloyd:** Do you want us to write to the Forestry Commission?

[63] **Michael German:** Yes, in advance of the meeting. I think that that would be helpful.

[64] The other issue that was raised was axis 3 of the rural development plan. Although there is a bottom-up approach to ideas, what is the policy framework that lies behind that, which would allow the sorts of initiatives that we have talked about this morning to come into effect? Is the regime permissive enough to allow those things to happen, like giving trees away to groups?

[65] **Val Lloyd:** They sounded like good ideas, did they not?

[66] **Michael German:** Yes.

[67] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** I just hope that, if they are going to give the trees away, they also provide fencing equipment. As was touched upon in the evidence, there is an ongoing knock-on effect. An example in agricultural terms is cross compliance, which is the set of regulations that farmers and landowners have to comply with to activate the drawing down of moneys. It would be premature to judge what the Forestry Commission will say when it gives us evidence in a fortnight's time. However, there are a few things that I found very interesting from the evidence-gathering session. The first was the Minister's thoughts on the ability, through the new mechanism, to shape any part of Glastir to meet the projected targets for native woodlands. Secondly, above all and most probably the closest to my heart, there is the bureaucracy around so many application forms, which Mike touched on.

[68] **Michael German:** It is not unique.

[69] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** Exactly. To date, I do not think anyone has devised a scheme that comes without a massive trail of bureaucracy and, from personal experience, a massive trail of cost as well. The cost is not necessarily picked up by the landowner, but picked up by Government. That is a very interesting angle to tackle, because it is about the supply of information to people that allows them to participate in the schemes.

[70] Finally, it is also about creating the actual target that the Welsh Assembly Government wants to meet. We have heard about three or four different targets here today. The only target that counts is what is in the blueprint from the Welsh Assembly Government, because that is what will be funded. We heard of one figure, nearly 12,000 acres, another figure—the aspiration of the petitioners—of about 5,000 acres, and then we have this 1,500 ha target, and it is debatable whether we will meet even that. After the Forestry Commission, there might be a case for the committee to question the Minister on this, to see the direction of travel. There is going to be quite a bit of dramatic structural change in the support that agriculture and the rural community will receive from one type of conservation grant—Tir Gofal or Tir Cynnal, for example—into Glastir. It is important that these benchmarks are put down now, so that they go into the melting pot.

[71] **Val Lloyd:** We have to be careful to limit our discussion to this specific petition. So, should we wait until we have heard what the Forestry Commission has to say?

[72] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** I would not want to prejudge what the Forestry Commission has to say.

[73] **Val Lloyd:** So, afterwards then, when we have that on record.

[74] **Michael German:** The Committee on European and External Affairs did a review of the common agricultural policy, and the issue of bureaucracy is not just a rural one. It is the whole structure of European funds. If we are going to address that issue, the Forestry Commission is the wrong target—we need to address it to the lead Minister for Europe, who I believe is the First Minister. I know that there has been an ongoing debate and activity into trying to reduce the Europe-funded regimes, and their level of bureaucracy. It might be useful first to go back to the Committee on European and External Affairs to ask for its evidence on that matter that is relevant to this and then, after we have heard the Forestry Commission, it may well be that we have to go to other Ministers as well.

[75] **Val Lloyd:** A fair number of things have come out of that.

[76] **Bethan Jenkins:** I want to ask about something that Anna said about the sub-group of the Climate Change Commission for Wales, and the evidence that is starting to materialise from that. Would it be worth while to contact them to get that evidence? We could ask to see the draft proposals that they have as they would be useful to frame the discussion.

[77] Also, I know that we have the forest schools initiative, and I wondered whether there is any scope in contacting the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning. I have visited a few forest schools in my area and they use the resources to play and so forth, but is there more of a role for forest schools in participating in this community development of planting trees? Perhaps education is not being looked at as closely as the Welsh Assembly Government could look at it.

[78] **Val Lloyd:** That is a splendid point. We have raised three distinct areas, which have all added to the whole. The clerks have noted all that down. We can proceed on some of them before we see the Forestry Commission, and on others after we see the Forestry Commission at our next committee meeting.

[79] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I would briefly like to pick up the point that Mike made, referring back to Europe and the First Minister. I would short circuit that to get a view, maybe even before our meeting on bureaucracy. The Minister for Rural Affairs—whose ministry funds Better Woodlands for Wales, I believe—set up a ‘red tape review’, to look at bureaucracy in agricultural support schemes. It might be worth us trying to find out what work, if any, the sub-committee, committee or working group—whatever it is—has done on the bureaucracy around the Better Woodlands for Wales scheme. If we have that information, it might be a line of questioning that we could pursue with the Forestry Commission. We could see if any action has been taken on the current schemes to simplify them and to make them more accessible, rather than waiting for the new schemes to come in. Maybe we could nudge the Government and say, ‘There’s a piece of work to be done here.’

[80] **Michael German:** It is all tied up in a lot of trees in Greece, by the way. [*Laughter.*]

[81] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** Or the lack of them.

[82] **Val Lloyd:** There are quite a lot of things in that which discussion that are worthwhile, and the clerks have noted it all down, so that we can move forward. That particular petition has huge ramifications, which we have already started to tease out.

9.58 a.m.

### **Deisebau Newydd: Parhad New Petitions: Continued**

[83] **Val Lloyd:** We now return to new petitions. The next new petition is P-03-270, from Action for Children which calls on the Assembly—I am sorry, but I have missed one petition out in my enthusiasm to move on. I apologise. It is no reflection on the petition that I have missed out—it is an important petition. Petition P-03-267 calls on the Assembly to urge the Assembly Government to publish the blood borne viral hepatitis action plan for Wales as a matter of urgency. This petition was raised by the Hepatitis C Trust. I have written on your behalf, as agreed, to the Minister for Health and Social Services and I am awaiting a reply. Is there any other action that you would care to take at this stage?

[84] **Michael German:** This is a very clear request, and we will either get a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ answer from the Minister. If we get a ‘no’ we might do something about it, but if it is a ‘yes’ then we may have dealt with the petition in double-quick time.

[85] **Val Lloyd:** We now move on to petition P-03-270 from Action for Children, which calls on the Assembly to urge the Welsh Assembly Government to provide more work-based learning provision that better meets the needs of more vulnerable young people. There is more to it, but that encapsulates it at this stage. I have written, on your behalf, to the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning. Is there any other action that you wish to take at this stage?

[86] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that we are waiting for a response. However, I have had quite a lot of messages in my inbox from constituents about the lack of accessibility to appropriate training providers. The case studies here are strong enough for us to talk to some of these young people because the financial implications—the child poverty agenda—is directly linked to this. I would like us to talk to some of these young people about their difficulties in a future Petitions Committee meeting.

[87] **Michael German:** The Public Accounts Committee received the report on vulnerable

children, which has an element that could be looked at in this respect. It came from four inspectorates—Estyn, the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales, the Wales Audit Office and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales—and it was the first joint report of its kind in Wales. It would be worth the clerk having a look at it to see whether there is anything in that report that we need to probe for further evidence.

10.00 a.m.

[88] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** In an attempt to speed the flow of information—and I stand to be corrected—is it the Deputy Minister who would have responsibility for this, rather than the Minister? Am I correct?

[89] **Michael German:** The Minister has to answer.

[90] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I am just looking to expedite the answer.

[91] **Naomi Stocks:** We clarified that with the committee business unit, and it does need to go the Minister as opposed to the Deputy Minister.

[92] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have one other point. Is it worth us trying to contact some of the main training providers in Wales because the issue that I had was that some training providers were not accessible across the whole of Wales. They were only in certain areas or pockets of regions. Perhaps it would be possible for the clerk's team to look through some of those main training providers, so that we could get a background of what is provided and where.

[93] **Val Lloyd:** The next petition is P-03-271 on business rates in Narberth. The business ratepayers in Narberth are calling upon us to:

[94] 'urge the Welsh Assembly Government to conduct an impact assessment on how businesses in the town will be affected by the changes in rateable values.'

[95] They have provided a wealth of supporting information, including some helpful tables. I have written to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, but I have not yet had a reply. Is there any other action that we want to take at this stage?

[96] **Michael German:** Has the Enterprise and Learning Committee looked at business rates in general? This is a matter of general concern in many parts of Wales, and I was wondering whether it has done any work on it.

[97] **Val Lloyd:** I do not know. Does anyone here sit on that committee?

[98] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We did some work on that when we scrutinised the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, did we not?

[99] **Val Lloyd:** Yes.

[100] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** It was quite some time ago, when Brian Gibbons was in the role. On this petition, we need to collate the Minister's response, made during the Christmas recess, because he made a statement on business rate relief and the Measure that he would put forward. That is in addition to his formal response to the committee in relation to this petition. There is a weight of evidence here that shows a serious level of concern, and a serious level of economic hardship, which could put many companies out of business. In order to balance the petition, we need to hear what the Minister has to say, and what support he is able to put in place and, on the basis of that, we will be able to move forward.

[101] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, he did make a statement on some measures to alleviate difficulties, but I did not look at it in relation to the petition. I do not know whether anybody else did.

[102] We now move on to petition P-03-273, on the transportation of wind turbines in mid Wales. It calls on us to urge the Welsh Assembly Government:

[103] ‘to issue guidance to Local Planning Authorities to ensure that communities are properly consulted on wind farm developments, that impact on road infrastructure is properly assessed’.

[104] Then it goes on to the broader effects of traffic disruption.

[105] This petition was raised by Welshpool Town Council. I have written to the Deputy First Minister and the Minister for the Economy and Transport on this issue. In the first instance it will have crossed boundaries, but that was our first letter.

[106] **Michael German:** It is about planning. Why have we not asked Jane Davidson to respond as well, because it is about planning guidance, is it not? The wording of the petition is

[107] ‘We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to issue guidance to Local Planning Authorities’.

[108] That is her baby—or rather, her responsibility.

[109] **Val Lloyd:** It depends on the size of the planning application, does it not?

[110] **Michael German:** Yes. We are unlikely to get 500 MW of wind power onshore. That much would probably swamp us all. However, I think that we ought to ask Jane Davidson to respond as well.

[111] **Val Lloyd:** That is fine. Is there any other action that you wish to take?

[112] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I agree with what Mike has just said, but the petition also goes on to mention road congestion, the impact on road infrastructure and the inability of that infrastructure to cope. We must find out from the Deputy First Minister what role, if any, his department might have in the consultation process over such developments.

[113] **Bethan Jenkins:** Has the Sustainability Committee done anything on wind farms and renewable energy?

[114] **Michael German:** I think that it has looked at the planning aspects of renewable energy. Planning guidance is a well-trodden path. There has been a big discussion about it. It will be worth bringing it before the committee again.

[115] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, and we will write to the Minister.

10.05 a.m.

### **Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates to Previous Petitions**

[116] **Val Lloyd:** The first update is on P-03-100 entitled Open our Tesco Junction. We have had a reply from the Deputy First Minister. He has also copied us into correspondence that he

sent to the clerk of Ceredigion County Council, telling us that the junction is going to reopen with a traffic signal control junction.

[117] **Michael German:** Hooray.

[118] **Val Lloyd:** That is a piece of work that has been very well done. It was worthwhile. Are we agreed that we close that petition? I see that we are.

[119] **Michael German:** Do we seek congratulations from the petitioner?

[120] **Bethan Jenkins:** He happens to be a Lib Dem. *[Laughter.]*

[121] **Val Lloyd:** The next update is on petition P-03-124, on Cysgliad, which calls on us to:

[122] ‘request that the Welsh Assembly Government makes available, for free download, the Windows version of the Cysgliad Welsh dictionary/thesaurus.’

[123] **Bethan Jenkins:** The issue is that the Welsh Language Board was not providing the financial support, which would allow Canolfan Bedwyr to fund this. It would be worth our while to contact the Welsh Language Board to ask whether further funding is available and, if not, why not. If funding is not available, we could ask the Welsh Language Board whether it will consider such a scheme itself.

[124] **Michael German:** Could I add a little rider to that? Could it also investigate whether providing Cysgliad in Apple, as well as Windows, format is possible? I ask that because Apple has increased its market share in Wales to something like a quarter.

[125] **Val Lloyd:** I thought that Canolfan Bedwyr had done that. That was how it started off, with a Mac.

[126] **Michael German:** Fine.

[127] **Bethan Jenkins:** It says here that a free version has been released recently for Mac computers.

[128] **Michael German:** Thank you.

[129] **Val Lloyd:** The next update is on petition P-03-150 on national cancer standards.

[130] We have received a letter from the Minister for Health and Social Services and I think that we should write to her again, asking her to provide us with details of the findings of the report, as well as a summary of the progress made by the NHS since April, alongside any actions that she intends to take.

[131] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** Agreed.

[132] **Val Lloyd:** Now for Andrew’s favourite petition—P-03-153 on body piercing. *[Laughter.]*

[133] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** We did not have the visit, did we?

[134] **Michael German:** We called for a site visit, but we were let down.

[135] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** We have a new clerk’s team now, which might want to do it.



[136] **Michael German:** There was a minute of this which noted that we requested a site visit.

[137] **Val Lloyd:** We will have a new Chair at the next meeting: a new Chair, a new clerk and a new team. I will have to be a substitute if anyone cannot go. *[Laughter.]*

[138] To be serious, we have had a reply from the Minister informing us of the establishment of a task and finish group, which he anticipates will complete its work early this year.

[139] **Michael German:** When?

[140] **Val Lloyd:** It says in early 2010, which could be January or it could be later.

[141] **Michael German:** Can we pursue the date of completion and the report itself from the task and finish group?

[142] **Val Lloyd:** That sounds reasonable. Are there any further comments?

[143] **Michael German:** In the meantime we could have a site visit. *[Laughter.]*

[144] **Val Lloyd:** We will move on to petition P-03-156 on sleep apnoea. Again, we have had a letter from the Minister about implementation. We have moved on, if you remember, to respiratory directives, which would cover the issues raised by the original petitioners. The Minister tells us that the National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare is undertaking an audit of progress and LHBs were required to submit their responses by 30 September last year. So, perhaps this will be out soon. It usually takes up to six months after the responses have been received for them to be reviewed. Shall we write to the Minister, asking her for details of the development work required by each LHB and the time frame for delivery?

10.10 a.m.

[145] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[146] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The important thing is the time frame. Invariably, we seem to get quite a lot of letters back saying that this or that work is ongoing. What we want is to be able to tell petitioners roughly when they can expect something.

[147] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. That is agreed. The next petition is P-03-162, Road Safety in Llanspyddid. We have had a letter from the Deputy First Minister. He writes:

[148] 'I was pleased to announce the launch of revised guidance for setting local speed limits on 5 November 2009. We will be reviewing all trunk road speed limits in Wales over the next five years and are developing a programme of investigations to start next financial year.'

[149] Should we write to him for further details, asking what criteria he is using to prioritise investigations? How soon will a decision be taken on Llanspyddid? How soon after the decision will work begin? Should we try to pin him down a little bit? I see that you agree. Thank you. It falls into the category that Mike referred to. We get letters from Ministers saying that things will happen, but time frames are not always included.

[150] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** He is talking about five years.

[151] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, but one has to be realistic.

[152] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I appreciate that but, from a petitioner's perspective, if your piece of trunk road is to be done at the start of that period it is not so bad, but if it is at the end then it is rather dispiriting.

[153] **Val Lloyd:** It certainly is.

[154] **Michael German:** Am I reading this wrong? I am just looking through Ieuan Wyn Jones's letters. If we start with February 2009, he writes:

[155] 'a review of safety through Llanspyddid has been included in the next round of funding and the work will be programmed to start early in the next financial year.'

[156] That would have been 2009-10. That is a review of safety through Llanspyddid. In the next one, on 7 April, he writes:

[157] 'The review will be carried out once the new speed limit guidance has been published. This is currently expected to be within the next few months.'

[158] Then there is the final one, in December, discussing the launch of the revised guidance, which was referred to in the previous letter. However, the review is not mentioned. So, on 7 April, we were told that he would carry out the review that he told us about in February once the speed guidance has been published. The speed limit guidance has been published, but we have not had the review.

[159] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It says, 'over the next five years'.

[160] **Michael German:** No, the review of Llanspyddid.

[161] **Val Lloyd:** It says, 'We will be reviewing'.

[162] **Michael German:** The Llanspyddid review, we were told by the Minister in April 2009, will be carried out once the revised guidance on setting local speed limits was published. It has now been published, and therefore we now need to know—going back to the February 2009 letter—when the review of safety will be carried out.

[163] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, because in the letter from February, he is specific about Llanspyddid, but he is more general in the most recent letter.

[164] **Michael German:** Yes.

[165] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Mike. Well spotted.

[166] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** When we query the Minister, could we also ask him about his line here about the investigation into the financial aspect of this work? Obviously, there is a financial complication as well. Does he believe that the resources will be made available to allow the regulations that he launched in early November to be implemented?

[167] **Val Lloyd:** Yes.

[168] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Very often, a need is identified but, sadly—

[169] **Val Lloyd:** There is no money.

[170] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Yes, because it is a resource-intensive measure.

[171] **Val Lloyd:** We move on to P-03-181, Pernicious Anaemia.

[172] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is on the books, I think, that the petitioners have contacted pharmaceutical companies, as suggested by the Minister, and we should just keep tabs on it.

[173] **Val Lloyd:** Well, if we ask the petitioner to keep us up to date with that, it will be very helpful.

[174] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes.

[175] **Val Lloyd:** We move on to P-03-182, European Funding. I almost dread to do this. Mike, I am sure that you will have some comments on this petition, from Mr Price. We have had a response from the petitioner.

[176] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** There is an extensive piece of work going to be undertaken, is there not, by the Enterprise and Learning Committee, into structural funding? The letter from the Chair of the committee seems to confirm that, and I think that, from previous correspondence on another petition, there has been an issue around the investigative nature of the committee when it looked into the Welsh economy, as it was thought that the investigation would also look into structural funding. I believe that Gareth Jones, the Chair, refers to it as a major investigation, so, hopefully, it will not be a short, sharp rapporteur group or one or two meetings, and will go some way to addressing the petitioner's concerns on structural funding.

[177] **Val Lloyd:** We could write to the Chair of the Enterprise and Learning Committee to ask for the petitioner to be informed of the terms of reference once they are agreed, or for him to let us have those so that we can pass them on, whichever is preferable, and that we are also kept informed of progress. Does anyone here sit on that committee? I see that no-one does.

[178] We now move onto P-03-207, on support for the unemployed in Monmouth.

[179] **Michael German:** Chair, the committee, with regard to this petition, has played a role in ensuring that the elephant is being moved up the hill, albeit very slowly. There are signs that Jobcentre Plus is now talking to the local community, which is an improvement, but I think that we should keep up the pressure. We should write to Jobcentre Plus to tell it about the positive impact of what it has done already and to continue to ask for face-to-face services as the resources become available. We should also ask the petitioner to tell us whether there are any further developments as the elephant moves slowly up the hill.

[180] **Val Lloyd:** That sounds fine. Is everyone in agreement with that?

[181] **Michael German:** I would not use those words in the minutes, though.

[182] **Val Lloyd:** No, I took that as read. It seems that everyone is in agreement with that action. There does seem to be progress, albeit that it is somewhat slow.

[183] The next petition is P-03-221, on improving NHS chiropody treatment.

[184] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Another scoping or task-and-finish exercise seems to be underway on this issue.

[185] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, there is a scoping exercise of the available services.

[186] **Michael German:** There could have been a task and finish group.

[187] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Pretty soon we will run out of titles. [*Laughter.*] To be fair, if the scoping exercise is being undertaken, we need it to run its course, but to let the Minister for Health and Social Services know that we are watching and waiting for a response as quickly as possible.

[188] **Val Lloyd:** The Minister tells us that it was instigated at her request, so, there may be some significance in that.

[189] **Michael German:** Do we know when it will be finished?

[190] **Val Lloyd:** No, that is not stated, but it is rarely stated when a scoping exercise is to finish.

[191] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Could we ascertain this information?

[192] **Bethan Jenkins:** It states in the Minister's letter to the Chair that

[193] 'the final draft of the report is planned for March'.

[194] Is that something else? I thought that it was referring to the same thing.

[195] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, it is. The letter states that a meeting with the stakeholder group to discuss the final draft is being planned for March. So, we can assume that the final draft—

[196] **Michael German:** That refers to the final draft of the scoping study, not the study itself. It would be useful to know, once they have got to the end of the scoping study, which will be around March or April, when the study itself will be completed.

[197] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The key word there is 'planned', because planning often goes awry. I am thinking about the wheelchair services report, which, as the Chair knows, was due some considerable time ago but which is still awaited.

[198] **Val Lloyd:** This is an initial draft report on the provision. The scoping exercise will just look at what is available, will it not? I do not know how it will be taken forward and whether they are looking for parity or not. Perhaps we could also think about this in the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee, Andrew.

[199] The next petition is P-03-227, on the access road in Llanmaes.

[200] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** There is a detailed letter from the petitioner on the points in the response of the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport and his officials. While the planning process has been allowed to take its course—I think that planning permission was granted at the end of September for the entire project—it would be good to get a response from the Minister's officials to the pertinent points put in the letter from Llanmaes community council. This is an issue of design and of where the road should be located, and the powerful points put by the petitioners deserve a response from the Minister and his officials.

10.20 a.m.

[201] **Val Lloyd:** Is everyone in agreement? I see that you are. We now have two related petitions, P-03-238, Pollution of the Burry Inlet, and P-03-241, Save Our Sewers, which is the *Llanelli Star* petition. We usually take them together because of their similar nature.

[202] **Bethan Jenkins:** We have an indication that there will be an investigation into cockle

mortality, so it would be good to have an update on the key findings of the report. Information on the Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water scheme mentions additional capacity and storage of storm sewage, so perhaps we could have an update on those two issues.

[203] **Michael German:** Could we also write to the petitioners?

[204] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, to keep them up to date. I think that those two actions will be useful.

[205] We will now move to petition P-03-243, Withdraw from the West Cheshire/North-east Wales Sub-regional Strategy. Before we start on this, Members will have been copied into correspondence that I undertook during the Christmas recess in conjunction with the clerks. That is not on record, so I would like to put on record what was said in the correspondence. I point out that standard practice has been followed in relation to the invitation issued to the Mersey Dee Alliance. Committee members will be aware that it is normal practice for some decisions to be made outside the committee and then reported to it. On that basis, I sanctioned inviting the alliance to our meeting in Wrexham, because I knew that you would think, as I did, that we had a responsibility to hear all sides of the issue, as we always do, and I thought it would be useful to take evidence from the Mersey Dee Alliance because it is a partnership between all of the local authorities covered by the west Cheshire/north-east Wales sub-regional strategy, along with the Welsh Assembly Government and Merseytravel. The strategy provides a framework for planning by the Mersey Dee Alliance, which will impact on the areas covered by the strategy.

[206] Other issues that were raised in that correspondence, in line with the Petition Committee's procedures, were queries about the giving of oral evidence. I indicated to the petitioners that our standard practice, as was the case this morning, is that we allow presenters 15 minutes in which to speak. However, for some reason, they thought that it would be a round-table discussion. I had to inform them of our procedures—I sent them a copy of our protocols regarding that. They queried the meeting in Wrexham, but that was a decision that we made at the last meeting, or at the one before that, given that it would be more helpful for the petitioners, because of where they live and because it is our practice to hold meetings outside Cardiff. We did not hold a meeting outside Cardiff last term, as we thought it would be useful to hold one this term. We wanted to ask them to give evidence because that petition had a large number of signatures, so there was clearly strength of feeling behind it and it was important for us to take evidence. We have to plan for things such as that some time in advance. Hopefully, holding that meeting in Wrexham, where the meeting will be open to everyone, will be an advantage. I wanted to put that on record, because it was discussed in the correspondence, which you were copied into.

[207] **Michael German:** To add to that, Chair, I think that you are absolutely right—this is a matter of natural justice and the basis of our justice system in these islands. We ensure that people have the right to be heard and the right to listen and we ensure the right for every side of the argument to be portrayed. You are absolutely right in your approach. Are we certain that we will get all sides to present to us in Wrexham?

[208] **Val Lloyd:** I will have to take some evidence on that, if you pardon the phrase.

[209] **Ms Stocks:** We have had verbal confirmation from the Mersey Dee Alliance and we are awaiting confirmation from the petitioners.

[210] **Bethan Jenkins:** May I ask a question on the process? Was it indicated in the letter to the petitioners that there was the possibility that other organisations would be asked to give evidence at the same time or at a different juncture on this issue?

[211] **Ms Stocks:** When we sent the invitation to both groups, we indicated that we had also

invited the other organisation.

[212] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I concur with the Chair's comments on this. The format that we have always had in the Petitions Committee, since it was established, has been to invite as broad a range of opinion as possible. There are whole arguments to look at, and there are two sides—and often three—to arguments that organisations want to put forward. I am not sure where the assertion on the round table came from, because I do not think that, to date, we have ever had a round-table format in the Petitions Committee. As someone who is not familiar with the area, I want to get as broad a picture as possible, so I welcome the opportunity to go to Wrexham to get a broad picture of what is going on. It is clear from the nature and size of the petition that there are issues about which the petitioners feel deeply and strongly, but there is another side to why this situation has developed. It would be a sad day if this committee limited its investigative nature or its inquiries to just one avenue of investigation when looking into an issue. That is emphasised by the evidence that we heard today from the Woodland Trust. When we are up in Wrexham, we will hear from the Forestry Commission, which will put forward the authority's version, as it were, as to why or how it will meet the targets.

[213] **Bethan Jenkins:** The petitioners are saying that the Welsh Assembly Government is the body that would be responsible for this issue. That is why we should ask the Welsh Assembly Government whether an official or Minister can give evidence to us. I can understand some of their concerns as they are asking for something specific in respect of the Government, but we are then taking evidence from another group.

[214] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It might be the desire of the committee at the next stage, once we have taken evidence in Wrexham, to have the Government in.

[215] **Michael German:** Bethan is right. We need to make a commitment that we will take evidence from the Welsh Assembly Government. It is a petition about the actions of the Welsh Assembly Government, so we should take evidence from it. That is the fairness side of it.

[216] **Val Lloyd:** I had not ruled that out. As we were going north, so to speak, it was opportune to hear from the Mersey Dee Alliance in that meeting in Wrexham. As you know, we progress—we would not necessarily leave it at that; we take it forward. Thank you for your comments, and I am pleased that you see it in that way. The issue of the round-table discussion came from the petitioners. I do not know whether they were aware of our protocol. They called it a round-table discussion, which was their perception of it. That is why I sent them our protocol so that they could see that it was no such thing, and that their evidence would be listened to and discussed, in the same way as with evidence from anyone else.

[217] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sometimes we go out as individuals or as smaller groupings to take evidence for a wider investigation. That would perhaps have facilitated having some sort of round-table discussion as opposed to a formal meeting of the Petitions Committee.

[218] **Val Lloyd:** It was clearly a misunderstanding. I thought that, by sending the protocol, they would see that it was a standard way forward.

[219] **Michael German:** I want to be absolutely clear that we will seek to take evidence from Jane Hutt. If we are to do so, at some stage, we ought to make it clear to the petitioners that this is a process and not simply a one-off, and that we will be seeking to take evidence from—

[220] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, that will now be on record. We can write to them to say that that is a consideration for the process as it proceeds.

[221] **Michael German:** I would be anxious that the petitioners did not withdraw from giving evidence to us on a false premise.

[222] **Val Lloyd:** I hope that they do not withdraw; I want to hear what they have to say.

[223] **Michael German:** I hope so too, and that is why I am saying that this is an exhaustive process; we will not leave it at what we hear on the day. We should make that clear to the petitioners.

[224] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you, Mike. That is what we had to discuss today regarding that petition. So, we will invite the Welsh Assembly Government to give evidence. Should we take any other action at this stage?

10.30 a.m.

[225] **Bethan Jenkins:** We should wait until we hear the evidence. Their opposition to what is happening is quite stark, but we should not do anything else until we hear from the petitioners.

[226] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you. We move on to the next petition, namely P-03-244 on the local authority register of road safety schemes. Shall we write to the Welsh Local Government Association asking how the information on these schemes is made public, and what improvements might be made to inform residents? It is about signposting information, really, as ever. I see that we are in agreement.

[227] The next petition is P-03-246 on abandoning the 50 mph speed limit on the M4 at Newport.

[228] **Michael German:** I think that we should write to Traffic Wales to ask what the result of the 50 mph speed limit has been. However, to be fair, this has always been regarded as a temporary measure. I would like to know when 'temporary' comes to an end. We could ask the Deputy First Minister when he intends to implement the full speed limit. Do we have that information from him?

[229] **Val Lloyd:** He says that the variable speed limit is scheduled to be operational by the autumn of this year.

[230] **Michael German:** It might also be useful to know how the variable speed limit will work. Will the limit be 70 mph sometimes? I have been on the M4 around Newport when I have been the only car within sight. On those occasions, you think that 70 mph is quite reasonable, whereas at other times you are lucky if you can get to 20 mph.

[231] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is very much like the M25 scenario, where a variable speed limit is introduced at peak times of the day.

[232] **Michael German:** Will the speed limit be variable from 70 mph downwards, or will it only be variable between 30 mph and 50 mph?

[233] **Val Lloyd:** I thought that the variable speed limit system would give an indication of what traffic conditions were like on that particular stretch of road, in my ignorance, and it would adjust the speed limit accordingly.

[234] **Michael German:** However, will the speed limit be adjustable between 30 mph and 50 mph, 30 mph and 70 mph, or whatever? What is the range of variability that it intends to introduce?

[235] **Bethan Jenkins:** Would the petitioners have an issue if the limit was 50 mph within the VSL, because the whole point of the petition was to protest against the 50 mph limit? So, if the VSL is going to be consistently at 50 mph most of the time, would the petitioners still have an issue? This may be retrospective, but it would also be interesting to find out how the Government advertised that it was an interim measure, because the petition is protesting against a temporary measure. That may be something that only I want to know.

[236] **Val Lloyd:** 'Temporary' has been a long time.

[237] **Michael German:** There is no indication that this is a temporary scheme.

[238] **Bethan Jenkins:** We can ask how that has come about, and how it was advertised.

[239] **Val Lloyd:** There are quite a lot of things there; thank you.

[240] The next petition is P-03-254 on third party representations at planning meetings.

[241] **Bethan Jenkins:** We have received some evidence from different councils about what they do in their local areas, but it would be good to get a holistic view from the WLGA as to how many councils provide an opportunity for third parties to speak at local planning authority meetings. I would like to know what motivates some councils to do it, and why other councils do not, because it would seem to make common sense that, if people had an opinion that was contrary to the planning decision, they would be able to voice those opinions. If they cannot voice those opinions by giving evidence as third parties, how do they do it? That is the action that I would like to see happening.

[242] **Michael German:** I absolutely agree with that. The last paragraph of the Minister's letter to us mentions the legal requirement of the notification of planning applications. Would the Minister consider something less than the legal requirement of notification on local authorities, such as a set of good practice guidelines, which would be helpful?

[243] **Val Lloyd:** Are those planning guidelines not already in place? Do they include third party representation?

[244] **Michael German:** I do not know how much information they can provide, and how much openness there is. Perhaps the WLGA has good practice guidelines. I do not know; we need to find out.

[245] **Val Lloyd:** It would be interesting to find out. I would have thought that there would be such guidance, but we could find that out.

[246] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We are fully supportive of the WLGA's point of view, but it is in the ambit of the local authority as to how it chooses to exercise that participation. There are obviously good models out there where this works well, and other models where the alternative has perhaps worked even better. I doubt whether there is an ideal system, and it is one of those things where you think 'How far down the road of interference do we go?' because, ultimately, it is a local authority issue, and is for the councillors to decide, and if local people want to change that, then they can vote accordingly in their local elections.

[247] **Val Lloyd:** That is a very good point.

[248] **Bethan Jenkins:** Just thinking off the top of my head about councils, I know that they have strategies to include citizens in discussions around planning, but is the voice of citizens coming through? Is there anything in local authorities' plans to ensure that citizen



engagement is prioritised, and does that come into the planning process?

[249] **Val Lloyd:** Anyone can object to a planning application, and objections are taken into account. It is usual practice to write up those objections in the papers provided for the planning meeting. It is the question of who comes to talk to the planning committee that is difficult, because it is often contentious, and that is what we want to get at. Citizens' rights are involved.

[250] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I appreciate our remit, but just for information, could the Members' research service provide a briefing on how other parts of the United Kingdom go about this? Perhaps I am going too far in taking an example from popular television, but a recent storyline in *Coronation Street* was based on a planning application, and highlighted the very model that is proposed here, whereby an objector speaks to the planning committee. We often ask petitioners to supply information and show how something could be done, but I am sure that this example from *Coronation Street* was not entirely fictitious—I would suggest that it was taken from a real-life experience. It would be good to see how other parts of the United Kingdom have progressed this. I stand by my original point: that I happen to think it is the local authority's role to determine how to deal with it, and if there is a consensus that it is dealing poorly with it, then people should vote locally to change that. However, there is no harm in trying to get a picture of what is going on across the UK.

[251] **Val Lloyd:** Some local authorities allow people to speak, but obviously, they have to limit the time, as I know from experience; but it is patchy.

[252] Our final petition this morning is P-03-262 from the Wales Peace Institute.

[253] **Michael German:** May I declare that my name appears on the list of sponsors—as will the names of other members of this committee.

[254] **Bethan Jenkins:** In the future.

[255] **Michael German:** I do not think that there is a financial issue here.

[256] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I will look at it on my own, then, Chair.

[257] **Michael German:** The Chair's name is not on the list.

[258] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** No, but the new Chair's name will be.

[259] **Val Lloyd:** How about inviting the petitioner to give evidence at a suitable meeting? Not the next one—I think that we will be quite busy at the next one.

[260] **Bethan Jenkins:** My name is on it, but I understand from the petitioners—I do not know whether this has been communicated to you—that they would prefer to have the Flemish Peace Institute give evidence here, as opposed to the petitioners, because I know that they can fund that. That is information that I have as a supporter of the petition, but it is up to the other members of the committee to decide whether that would be the best course of action, or whether we would insist on the lead petitioners coming in first.

[261] **Michael German:** Would the Flemish institute be prepared to come here?

[262] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, and I believe that the petitioners would say that that was their preference, rather than coming in themselves.

[263] **Val Lloyd:** However, that is for us to decide, rather than the petitioners. We must do

what we think is best for the committee. The three examples given here are interesting, I thought, and I would like to hear from the three of them—or I think that the committee would.

[264] **Michael German:** How about a site visit? [*Laughter.*]

10.40 a.m.

[265] **Val Lloyd:** I am not sure that we could justify a site visit. Video-conferencing works well, and so I will leave that as a matter for consideration. If the Flemish people are happy to come here to give evidence, I do not have a problem with that. What are Members' views on the order in which people should give evidence? I am not opposed to what Bethan is saying, but I think that it would be more in order for us to hear from the lead petitioner first. However, it is entirely up to the committee—

[266] **Bethan Jenkins:** Could we not have them together?

[267] **Michael German:** Would it not be possible to do it on the same day?

[268] **Val Lloyd:** That would be better.

[269] **Bethan Jenkins:** There could be a session with two of the Flemish people and a session with the petitioner.

[270] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We often have back-to-back evidence sessions on petitions and, as we are trying to get the whole picture, a back-to-back session would be more productive and provide us with more information. I think that I heard from Bethan that they could pick up the tab for coming over, but if that were to fall to public expenditure, we should probably insist on video-conferencing, rather than calling the witnesses in. Am I right to say that if we send the invitation, we reimburse witnesses' travel expenses? So, if it is possible that the visit could be paid for not out of public funds, we should invite them here, but if that is not possible, we should use video-conferencing.

[271] **Val Lloyd:** We will leave that to be sorted by the clerk. We are all agreed that we would like to have evidence and for it to be comparative evidence. However way it is done is almost immaterial, but we would like to get that evidence. I concur with your point about the public purse.

10.41 a.m.

### **Ethol Cadeirydd Parhaol Newydd Election of a New Permanent Chair**

[272] **Val Lloyd:** We will move to our final item for today, which is the election of a new permanent Chair. As you know, I am here as a substitute today, and so I invite nominations from committee members.

[273] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I nominate Christine Chapman.

[274] **Val Lloyd:** Does anyone second that nomination?

[275] **Michael German:** Yes, I do.

[276] **Val Lloyd:** I see that there are no other nominations and so Christine Chapman is duly elected Chair of the Petitions Committee.

*Penodwyd Christine Chapman yn Gadeirydd.  
Christine Chapman was appointed Chair.*

[277] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Before the meeting closes, I want to put on record my gratitude, and I am sure that of other Members, to you as Chair of the committee since its inception—from May 2007 until the current time.

[278] **Michael German:** When we undertook the review of Standing Orders, you spotted that it would be a good idea and put yourself in pole position to launch the petitions process, which has become a significant part of the work of the National Assembly for Wales. You have seen it develop and mature, and so you are handing on a ship that is in very good shape.

[279] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you for those kind words. I am sorry to leave, but life must move on. Thank you very much, and I wish the committee good luck.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10.42 a.m.  
The meeting ended at 10.42 a.m.*