

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 19 June 2002
Time: 2.00 to 5.15 pm
Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

REPORT BY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

I recently chaired the first informal meeting of the Assembly's cross-party Co-ordinating Group on Sustainable Development. It was well attended by Chairs of Committees and most of the Party Spokespeople on Sustainable Development. The Committee Chairs have agreed a proactive approach to sustainable development and will be considering how best to integrate sustainable development into their agendas.

The bid for the Pan-European regional network on Sustainable Development Network has recently been re-submitted to Brussels and we are hopeful of a positive response.

COUNTRYSIDE

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Consultation on the next 2 sets of regulations - restrictions on access to open country and registered common land, and the voluntary dedication of access land – came to an end at the beginning of June. During April the Forestry Commission in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government organised 2 seminars in Snowdonia National Park and Brecon Beacons National Park with the objective of increasing the awareness of woodland owners, managers and users about the consultation exercises. The seminars and the consultations generally were very well received, and a summary of responses will be forwarded to the Committee as soon as possible.

Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership

The next meeting of the Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership has been organised for 4th July. Included on the agenda is the Partnership approach to offshore renewable energy and a demonstration by the Crown Estate on their developing "Windbase" system – a GIS model that may be helpful in determining the most suitable locations for offshore renewable energy projects.

Land-use planning regime and the Habitats Directive

A consultation paper on legislative proposals for integration of the Land-use planning regime and the Habitats Directive provisions on conservation of European protected species was issued on 10 June 2002. The consultation will take place over the summer months with a 12-week consultation period. Comments are required by 2 September 2002.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Blue Flags

On 31 May, I took part in an event at Porthcawl to announce that, at twenty-six, Wales had won a record number of Blue Flags. The previous record was set in 2000 when twenty-two beaches received this prestigious award.

In addition, seven rural Welsh beaches have successfully taken part in piloting a new rural Blue Flag. A record twenty-six beaches in Wales have also won the Green Coast award this year.

This year's awards represent an excellent achievement for Wales.

PLANNING

Renewable Energy

Following the announcement by the Prime Minister in November 2001 of a fund to facilitate planning for renewable energy, a bid has been submitted to the Department for Trade and Industry for £173,000 over 2 years. We are awaiting a decision from DTI on whether they will be supportive of the bid. In addition to this, minerals planning research monies will be used to further develop work already undertaken by the Countryside Council for Wales on a decision support tool for all forms of renewable energy schemes. This will underpin technical guidance

in the revised draft of Technical Advice Note 8 on *Renewable Energy*.

Flood Risk

The final report of the flood risk and planning research is expected this summer. This has informed the new draft of Technical Advice Note 15 on *Development and Flood Risk*, which I also expect to receive over the next few weeks. Both are likely to be issued in the Autumn.

Waste Planning:

Technical Advice Note 21 on *Waste* issued in November 2001 and proposed establishing regional arrangements for waste planning. The co-ordinating authority has now been agreed in each of the 3 regions and the work to produce Regional Waste Plans by November 2003 is well underway in South East and South West Wales. Denbighshire County Council has been nominated as the lead authority in North Wales.

Minerals Planning

The first draft Minerals Technical Advice Note on *Aggregates* issued for consultation in February and we are now considering the responses received with a view to producing the final document by the end of the year. This will require an enhanced role for the Regional Aggregates Working Parties (RAWPs) and new contracts are currently being considered with the 2 RAWPs. A research contract to establish the methodology to assess aggregates demand and supply has recently commenced to assist with this work.

Marine Aggregates

Draft *Marine Aggregates Dredging Policy* issued for consultation last year and we received over 1200 responses. A research project on the comparative impact assessment of sand and gravel supply options in South East Wales has recently been completed and the dissemination seminar was held on 28th May. The conclusions of the research will be taken into account in producing a final version of *Marine Aggregates Dredging Policy* later this year.

Planning Inspectorate in Wales: Key Performance Targets 2002 - 2003

I have recently approved the key performance targets for the Planning Inspectorate in Wales for 2002 - 2003. As in previous years the targets focus on the timeliness of the planning appeals process and development plan inquiries, and the efficiency and quality of the Inspectorate's work generally. This year for the first year I have also introduced demanding new Ministerial Targets for deciding enforcement appeals. The targets I have set for the Planning Inspectorate for 2002-03 are at Annex A to this Report.

The targets for this year are available in the Inspectorate's Corporate Plan for 2002-03 to 2005-06. The targets and the Inspectorate's performance against last year's targets will be published in the Inspectorate's Annual Report and Accounts, which will be available later this summer.

TRANSPORT

Welsh Affairs Committee

I attended the Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry into transport in Wales on 22 May. I gave evidence alongside David Jamieson, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport.

Bus Legislation

The Bus Quality Partnership Schemes (Existing Facilities) Regulations 2002 will be considered in Plenary on 7 November 2002. The Equalisation of Ages Commencement Order will also be debated in Plenary on the same date.

London to South West and South Wales Multi-modal Study (SWARRMS)

We have arranged for a presentation by the consultants, Halcrow, to the Minister, Assembly Members, Local Authorities, Transport Forum and other interested parties. This will be on 16th July – 6pm in the Bay for Assembly Members and 2pm in the Cathays Park building for others.

Institution of Civil Engineers

On the 15th May I gave the keynote address to the annual conference of the Institution of Civil Engineers.

SUE ESSEX

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

ANNEX A

Planning Inspectorate Targets for 2002 – 2003

The targets for the financial year 2002- 2003 will be as follows:

Target		2002 - 03
Timeliness		
80% of planning appeals by written representations to be decided in (weeks)	Target	16
80% of planning appeals by hearings to be decided in (weeks)	Target	22
80% of planning appeals by inquiries to be decided in (weeks)	Target	30
80% of all enforcement appeals decided by written representations to be decided in (weeks)	Target	32
80% of all enforcement appeals decided by hearing or inquiry to be decided in (weeks)	Target	43
Provide an Inspector for development plan inquiries in x% of cases on the date requested provided the objection period has ended and at least 6 months notice has been given	Target	90%
Deliver x% of Inspectors' reports to local authorities by the timescales agreed under service agreements	Target	90%
Efficiency		
Generate percentage of efficiency improvement in running costs compared to the previous year	Target	3%

Quality		
To satisfy the Advisory Panel on Standards and the Assembly and the DETR, annually and following rigorous monitoring, that the quality of the Inspectorate's work is being maintained at a high standard, with x% of its work free from justified complaint	Target	99%
Information and Guidance		
Complete a survey	Target	To survey customer satisfaction with the Inspectorate's performance and to act upon the results.