

Culture Committee CC 06-03(p.2) Annex B

Date : 26 March 2003

Time : 9:00 – 12:30

Venue: Committee Room 1

Annex B to Minister's Report to Culture Committee 26 March 03

Statement on the Wales Millennium Centre - March 2003

I have promised to keep the Assembly up to date with developments on the Wales Millennium Centre. In view of pressure on plenary time I have agreed to table a written statement on this occasion.

You can readily see the progress of the construction of the Centre. I am delighted to report that the construction remains on programme and on budget.

A Presentation Slate from North Wales was laid by Bryn Terfel on 21st January this year. Penrhyn red slate is the presentation slate. It was quarried at Penrhyn Quarry in Bethesda and prepared and cut at Blaenau Ffestiniog Quarry, Gwynedd.

The 1,000 tonnes of slate being used to cover an area of 2,500 metres squared of the front facings of WMC are all by-product material from the house tiling industry. They come from the Blaenau, Penrhyn and Bethesda quarries in mid Gwynedd and the Corris Quarry near Machynlleth.

The company contracted to lay the slate on the front of the WMC building is GH James CYF – a company of traditional slate craftsmen from Gwynedd.

Other Welsh material includes:

- Welsh hardwoods for the interior balconies from mid Wales
- Architectural glass developed by the architectural glass department at Swansea Institute
- Imprints on the steel columns based on tree-fern fossils found in the coal seams of South Wales

- Welsh artists are creating work for the interior.

There are currently 15 sub contractors on site as well as the main contractor. Of a total of almost 250 people on site, 76% are Welsh or permanently residing in Wales.

Sir Robert MacAlpine is hosting a "topping out" ceremony this Friday, 7th March.

In respect of the areas of risk debated by the Assembly in plenary in January last year, the Capital Allowances scheme is now in place, and outline planning permission has been obtained for an off site car park.

On the Arts Pod discussions continue about a development on that part of the site but matters remain commercially sensitive so I am not able to say more about this at present. I will ensure that this issue is revisited in future statements.

The WMC Company is currently meeting its targets for raising private and charitable funding. I continue to watch this aspect of the WMC's business very closely. Members will recall that the WMC Company must raise a total of £9.6 million from private and charitable sources to complete the development. Officials are also in discussion with WMC officials on the revised Business Plan, and I will ensure that here too an update on progress is provided in a future statement.

Finally I am delighted that the WMC Company has appointed Judith Isherwood as Chief Executive. Judith is currently Director of Performing Arts and acting Chief Executive at the Sydney Opera House, and has an impressive track record in the arts in Australia. She starts work here on Monday March 31st.