

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 18 December 2002
Time: 9.15 am to 12.00 pm
Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

REPORT BY MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

COUNTRYSIDE

Launch of the Bridgend Local Biodiversity Action Plan and announcement of the Section 74 CROW Act 2000 - List of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biological Diversity

On Thursday 28 November I attended the Kenfig Nature Reserve at Bridgend to formally launch the publication of the Bridgend Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

During the Launch, I also announced the publication of the List of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biological Diversity and the provision of additional funds to the National Museum and Galleries of Wales to support training on species listed under Section 74.

About 50 people including civil dignitaries, officers of the Welsh Assembly Government and Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies and members of the voluntary sector partnerships attended the event.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ministerial Quarterly Meeting with Environment Agency Wales

I held a regular quarterly meeting with Environment Agency Wales on 27 November.

A range of issues were discussed in the light of, and arising from, the Agency's recent activities and performance in Wales. These included planning and the Agency's performance in responding to planning applications and its involvement in planning and authorisation processes more generally, health and environmental issues in relation particularly to waste disposal options, and actions being taken by the Agency in relation to contaminated land sites in Wales. We also discussed the Agency's aspirations linked to the forthcoming review of water prices.

Future funding for the Agency in Wales was discussed in the light of the Assembly's budget settlement

Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) stakeholder Meeting in Cardiff

On 4 November I spoke at the WRAP stakeholder conference in Cardiff. As indicated by their presentation to the Wales Waste Forum in October, WRAP's work offers great potential for Welsh businesses to expand in recycling materials from the waste stream and in using recycled materials to make new products. Within Wales WRAP's work is enhanced by the work of the Wales Environment Trust through its Creating Welsh Markets for Recyclate (CWMRe) initiative which works with companies in Wales to promote the use of recycled materials.

Opening the new recycling facility for Cae Post, at Trewern, Powys

I was very pleased to reopen the new recycling centre at Cae Post, Trewern, Powys on 14 November. Cae Post is a good example of the joint arrangements between the voluntary sector and local authorities that we want to see develop. The training and employment opportunities that it offers to people with learning difficulties are also examples of the social benefits that we want to see arise as part of the waste strategy."

Keep Wales Tidy, 30th anniversary conference, Cardiff

I spoke at Keep Wales Tidy's 30th anniversary conference in Cardiff on 19 November. KWT has played a central role in keeping litter and related issues in the public mind. Its educational experience are now being used as part of the Waste awareness Wales campaign that will support the implementation of the waste strategy.

PLANNING

Planning: delivering for Wales (PdW)

In Plenary of the 26 November I outlined the way forward for *Planning: delivering for Wales*. I shall be meeting the Welsh Local Government Association on the 16 December to discuss their key role in the delivery of improvements to the planning system in Wales.

The Wales Planning Forum will meet in January to outline the involvement of the Planning Forum in aspects of the PdW programme.

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill

The Bill was introduced on the 4 December with a planned Second Reading in the House of Commons on the 17 December.

The Bill is scheduled for Committee Stage on 9 January 2003 with a view to clearing committee by the end of January.

Position Statement – Sand and Gravel Supply in South-East Wales

The Position Statement on Sand and Gravel supply in South-East Wales is to be debated at the meeting of Plenary on 18 December and will issue immediately after the debate.

The Position Statement will announce how the Assembly intends to guide decisions that need to be taken in relation to the provision of fine aggregates in South East Wales until draft policy documents – draft Marine Aggregates Dredging Policy and draft Minerals Technical Advice Note Aggregates – are finalised next year.

The Position Statement sets the context for the Government View on the renewal of the dredging licence for Nash Banks which I shall also be issuing later on 18 December.

TRANSPORT

Road Safety Awards

On 22 November I presented the Wales Road Safety Awards at the Village Hotel, Cardiff

organised by the Road Safety Council of Wales. The Awards recognise those who have contributed to the improvement and promotion of road safety in Wales over the last 12 months. There were representatives from a wide range of organisations, including many dedicated individuals, both from schools and the wider community.

Slower Speeds for Safer Streets Launch

On 3 December I announced £1.5million for local authorities for this year to help reduce speeds in the most vulnerable areas in Wales. The funding is given under the new 'Slower Speeds for Safer Streets' initiative which I launched at Albert Road School, Penarth. This school was chosen because the Vale of Glamorgan Council has recently created a 20mph zone around the school, funded by the Assembly's road safety grant.

The additional funding will help local authorities make a start on implementing slower speed initiatives in areas around schools, libraries, leisure centres and hospitals as well as residential neighbourhoods. The launch received good coverage in the press and TV.

Christmas Drink Drive Campaign Launch

On 5 December, I launched the Christmas campaign against drinking and driving at the Village Hotel, Cardiff. This was a joint launch between the Assembly and the four Welsh Police Forces. The campaign advert highlights the excuses people give for drinking and driving – 'I can handle my drink' 'I've had a big meal' 'I won't get stopped'. In addition, I also presented prizes to the winners and runners up of the children and young people's competition to design a drink drive poster. It was very encouraging to see the designs from the children and hear their views on drinking and driving.

Newport Transport Friendly Bus

These vehicles are the first six of eighteen new Scania-built 'OmniCity' super low floor single deck buses, which will be progressively introduced onto services by Newport Transport between now and summer 2004. The vehicles represent an investment of £2.25 million. The vehicles fully comply with Disability Discrimination Act requirements and are designed for passenger comfort and accessibility. They are the most environmentally friendly buses in Wales and probably in the UK.

Network Rail

The Assembly Government has been appointed as a public member of Network Rail. There are 84 public members in total and 51 are private individuals. There are 10 public sector organisations. Additionally there are 31 industry members. Network Rail is a company limited by guarantee, run along commercial lines but with no shareholders. Its board of directors has

sole responsibility for the running and management of the Company and for strategy, financing and decision making. The members' role is to hold the Board accountable for that management. Members will review the performance of Network Rail against its targets and ensure high levels of corporate governance. The day to day operation and management of the business will be the responsibility of the Board. An extraordinary meeting is being held on 17 December 2002.

Strategic Rail Authority

The Secretary of State for Transport, after consultation with the Assembly Government, has appointed Ms Janet Lewis-Jones as a member of the board of the SRA. She is currently a member of the British Waterways Board and a Postal Services Commissioner.

Rail Franchise Wales and Borders : I have met all four bidders.

Transport Grant

Details of the Transport Grant bids for 2003-04 are in the attached Annex A.

HERITAGE

Reviews of The Ancient Monuments Board for Wales (AMB) and The Historic Buildings Council for Wales (HBC)

On 4 December we discussed the historic environment and mention was made of the quinquennial review undertaken earlier this year by Martin Rolph. He also undertook the smaller tasks of reviewing two statutory bodies that advise Cadw, namely The Ancient Monuments Board for Wales and the Historic Buildings Council for Wales.

I have sent the draft reports he has produced to Members under cover of notes from me inviting colleagues to consider the contents, and if they have any comments to let me have them in the next month.

You will see that key recommendations include the general one that these bodies should continue to exist in broadly their current forms, but with a transformed basis which brings control over their overall functions and existence within the control of the Assembly, which appoints and funds them.

Sustainable Development

"Sustainable Business Wales"

A consultation has taken place on "Sustainable Business Wales". A draft action plan that is about increased support to Welsh businesses so that Wales can meet both its environmental and economic development objectives within the Welsh Assembly Government's sustainable development duty.

There was unanimous support for the draft action plan, with many of the respondents especially supporting the idea of a well co-ordinated, coherent, holistic approach which avoids a plethora of new initiatives.

The final action plan will assist in the challenges and opportunities for business as identified in the Waste Strategy. A copy of the draft action plan can be found at: <http://www.businessenvironment.wales.gov.uk>.

VISIT TO OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS

On Friday 6 December I visited the Office for National Statistics in Newport. It gave me great pleasure to present officials there with a certificate recognising their efforts and achievements in developing and implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS), accredited to the International Standard ISO 14001.

Sue Essex

Minister for Environment

TRANSPORT GRANT BIDS 2003-04

1. This paper is presented to the Committee for information. It reports the position on my consideration of the bids received from Local Authorities for capital funding in 2003-04
2. On 15 May 2002 the Committee considered paper EPT-09-02 (min) concerning the categories of project which should be invited to bid for Transport Grant Support in 2003-04. These were agreed.

New capital projects arising from the draft regional bus strategies

Where there were related revenue implications, tapered support will be available to accepted projects, subject to their being part of Quality Bus Partnership developments.

Bids were invited for capital projects arising from the draft regional bus strategies, which were submitted, to the Assembly in mid June 2002. Bidders were asked to make clear in their bids how they will contribute towards enhancing accessibility and enabling modal shift, through improvements in service availability, reliability, journey times, integration with other modes, improvements in safety and security, improved accessibility for the mobility impaired and/or improvements in quality. Improving security is a key issue and projects involving developments particularly at bus stations are encouraged. Discussions are underway with Crime Concern about introducing an accreditation scheme for bus travel in Wales. The sufficiency of work to

develop Quality Bus Partnerships with operators will be assessed on a case by case basis

New projects reflecting the emerging Walking and Cycling Strategy and compatible with Road Safety Strategy

New projects reflecting the emerging Walking and Cycling Strategy and compatible with Road Safety Strategy, delivering improvements in provision for walking and cycling, including creation of routes to bus stations, railway stations, town centres and other major trip destinations.

Walking and cycling offer accessible, convenient, healthy and environmentally friendly ways of making local journeys. Bidders were asked to demonstrate how the proposed projects would encourage walking and cycling through more pedestrian and cycle routes, and by making walking and cycling safer, more accessible and better integrated with other modes of transport. Projects primarily aimed at leisure activities were not eligible for support.

New bids for safe routes to school

Bids were invited for safe routes to school schemes. Projects must demonstrate active co-operation between schools, parents, teachers and local authorities in determining the new approach to reducing car journeys to school, and should demonstrate how the work on the project will result in safer communities. Where appropriate, projects that include slower speed measures will be supported. Priority was given to these projects that demonstrate enhancement of local communities generally, paying particular regard to road safety issues. It is especially important that Safe Routes to School bids should contribute alongside the Road Safety Grant and local authorities' own resources in developing safer communities generally. Local Authorities should highlight how proposed Safe Routes to School projects integrate with existing and proposed walking and cycling provision, again the view to generally improving the safety of the community at large

3. 218 bids have been received seeking support in 2003-04 of £138 million. No new bids for road schemes over £5million were invited on this occasion. The programme is already supporting 18 schemes and is heavily committed for the next few years. The budget in 2003-04 is £75.3m and there is little headroom for new projects given the major forward programme announced in January 2001 and supplemented in January 2002.

4. These bids include projects which are already in the forward programme and discussions have taken place with local authorities which will inform the actual allocations. Within the total 56 bids have been presented for bus projects, seeking funding in 2003-04 of £16.04 million, with total costs of £65.43 million. These include a regional bid from the North Wales consortium, TAIH, which seeks to deliver their bus strategy over 5 years, further park and ride proposals in Swansea and Cardiff, and Priority Bus Corridors and extensions to the existing

TIGER and SWWITCH packages. Several authorities have also presented associated bids for revenue funding (to be paid under Section 156 of the Transport Act 2000), for example in respect of park and ride provision in Swansea, service enhancements in North Wales and the Snowdonia National Park.

5. 48 bids have been presented for walking and cycling projects, seeking funding in 2003-04 of £11.5 million, with total costs of £36 million. Bids range from small safe route to station schemes, a consortium bid from the South East Wales Transportation Forum which includes town centre routes across south Wales, to a major coastal route connecting Deeside and Chester.

6. For the first time since the initiative began, all local authorities have submitted bids for Safe Routes to School schemes. A total of 43 bids have been received totalling nearly £7.2million. The initiative continues to be enthusiastically received by local authorities and they are developing many innovative schemes in conjunction with schools. I have already advised the Committee that I intend to allocate some £3million to support successful SRTS projects.

7. Bid documents have been placed in the library. I hope to announce my decisions on Transport Grant support for 2003-04 in late January 2003.