

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 26 March 2003

Time: 9.15am to 12.00 pm

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

REVIEW OF LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION: MINISTER'S RESPONSE

1. The report of the Committee's Review of Local Biodiversity Action was debated in plenary on 26 February 2003. During the debate the Minister responded to the Committee's recommendations.

2. **Annex 1** summarises the Minister's response to the recommendations. A full copy of the Minister's contribution during the plenary debate is at **Annex 2**.

Committee Secretariat

March 2003

ANNEX 1**MINISTER'S RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

Extracts from the verbatim record of the plenary debate

Committee recommendation	Minister's response

<p>General</p>	<p>"Recommendations 3, 4 and 10 are for the Wales biodiversity partnership to consider. I will ask it to discuss those recommendations in its next meeting."</p> <p>"I am pleased to be able to take forward the remaining recommendations."</p>
<p>1 – that the Welsh Assembly Government demonstrates its leadership in the field by mainstreaming biodiversity considerations into its policies and priorities, and those of sponsored bodies.</p>	<p>"Recommendation 1 is on the Welsh Assembly Government mainstreaming biodiversity into policy areas: that is already at the forefront of our work."</p>
<p>2 – that the Welsh Assembly Government considers means of strengthening local government commitment to local biodiversity action, and presses all Local Authorities in Wales to adopt Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) as supplementary planning guidance, in line with planning policy guidance, and use them to underpin Community Strategies.</p>	<p>"Recommendation 2 refers to planning. I should point out that local biodiversity action plans were recognised as supplementary planning guidance in 'Planning Policy Wales', which was set out in March 2002."</p>
<p>3 – that the Wales Biodiversity Partnership take steps to increase co-ordination between local and national strategies and partnerships, and place a greater emphasis on local target setting;</p> <p>4 – that the Wales Biodiversity Partnership take the lead in developing a strategy and accompanying guidance on monitoring and reporting of local biodiversity actions.</p>	<p>"Recommendations 3, 4 and 10 are for the Wales biodiversity partnership to consider. I will ask it to discuss those recommendations in its next meeting. I will also ask the partnership to consider ways of celebrating good practice and local achievements."</p> <p>"I will ask the Wales biodiversity partnership to consider setting local targets. The Countryside Council for Wales is committed to publishing data that will allow that to happen."</p>

Committee recommendation	Extract from Minister's contribution to the debate
<p>5 – that the Welsh Assembly Government establish a review of financing arrangements to clarify, streamline, and synchronise funding sources available to support local biodiversity action;</p> <p>6 – that the Welsh Assembly Government ensure that dedicated funding is made available to finance the WBP LBAP Facilitator and a permanent full-time LBAP officer for each partnership, and consider mechanisms for the specific funding of local biodiversity actions, possibly by the direct funding of partnerships.</p>	<p>"Some of the actions in recommendations 5 and 6 concern funding. I accept the principle that funding and resources—because biodiversity is very much about people—are critical in terms of sustaining progress and outputs of local actions. I will consider ways to encourage the mainstreaming of funding for biodiversity ... I support the idea of holding a review to identify and clarify funding sources for local action. I will ask the Wales biodiversity partnership to take that forward."</p>
<p>7 – that the Welsh Assembly Government take steps to establish the development of a national Local Records Centre network, building on the Powys pilot project.</p>	<p>"With regard to recommendation 7 on a national records network, in this coming year we will build on the successful record centre in Powys that many of you will know of. We will begin to establish and develop a network of local centres across Wales. That is considered by everyone involved to be of paramount importance in sustaining local biodiversity planning."</p>

<p>8 – that all-Wales bodies such as the Countryside Council for Wales and Environment Agency look at ways of increasing the accessibility of expert support locally, and to increase the capacity of local authorities in their ecological and LBAP expertise.</p> <p>9 – that the Welsh Assembly Government and ELWa consider ways of: increasing the availability and take-up of courses in conservation science, taxonomy, and practical land management skills by Welsh educational and training institutions; and encouraging the alignment of academic research to UK Biodiversity Action Plan research priorities.</p>	<p>"With regard to recommendations 8 and 9 on the need for expertise, I have announced £20,000 in funding to help provide training and guidance on the list of species and habitats of principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity. That money has been allocated to the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, which will take this forward."</p>
<p>Committee recommendation</p>	<p>Extract from Minister's contribution to the debate</p>
<p>10 – that the Wales Biodiversity Partnership establish 'biodiversity awards' to highlight good conservation practice and encourage partnership working.</p>	<p>"Recommendations 3, 4 and 10 are for the Wales biodiversity partnership to consider. I will ask it to discuss those recommendations in its next meeting."</p> <p>"The idea of an award, as set out in recommendation 10 of the report, is a good one."</p>

ANNEX 2

MINISTER'S CONTRIBUTION DURING THE PLENARY DEBATE

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): Wales has an exceptional diversity of habitats and wildlife, and I welcome the Committee's report, which reviews how local action for biodiversity in Wales has progressed and makes recommendations to move the process

forward.

Considerable progress has been made in Wales in recent years on biodiversity recognition and protection. Establishing the Wales biodiversity partnership in 1996 was crucial, and has helped to achieve more than we could have hoped for. I also recognise the achievements of the local biodiversity partnerships in developing their plans. Make no mistake, partnership is crucial and Janet is right to point out that business must be part of that partnership. We are not complacent and recognise that there is always room for improvement. The report's recommendations will help us to consider how we can further encourage locally based actions to help ensure that our valuable heritage is maintained.

I have taken careful note of the evidence presented to the Committee—the benefit of our system is that I am a member of the Committee—and I was impressed with the quality and range of advice offered. I intend to take account of all the evidence in taking action forward on the Wales biodiversity partnership's report on future biodiversity action in Wales.

My commitment to biodiversity action is well known and the Welsh Assembly Government's leadership in driving this agenda forward is widely recognised. I was pleased to hear the Joint Nature Conservation Committee recognise that leadership in this morning's Environment, Planning and Transport Committee meeting.

I turn to the Committee's recommendations. Recommendations 3, 4 and 10 are for the Wales biodiversity partnership to consider. I will ask it to discuss those recommendations in its next meeting. I will also ask the partnership to consider ways of celebrating good practice and local achievements. The idea of an award, as set out in recommendation 10 of the report, is a good one. Some of the actions in recommendations 5 and 6 concern funding. I accept the principle that funding and resources—because biodiversity is very much about people—are critical in terms of sustaining progress and outputs of local actions. I will consider ways to encourage the mainstreaming of funding for biodiversity.

In the current financial year, I have made £200,000 available to support local biodiversity action plans in Wales. I am pleased to announce that, for the coming year, I have agreed with the Countryside Council for Wales that it will continue to support local action. That indicates the Assembly Government's strong commitment to partnerships, in which local authorities, the voluntary sector, and local businesses have a part to play. Other sources of funding, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, and more obvious routes, such as the Countryside Council for Wales, are also welcome. I support the idea of holding a review to identify and clarify funding sources for local action. I will ask the Wales biodiversity partnership to take that forward.

I am pleased to be able to take forward the remaining recommendations and to report that many of the positive actions highlighted in the review are being implemented. For example, recommendation 1 is on the Welsh Assembly Government mainstreaming biodiversity into

policy areas: that is already at the forefront of our work. I will give one example of that: the transport directorate has recently announced its draft plan for mainstreaming biodiversity action on its trunk road and motorway network from 2004. From the schemes that I have seen around Wales, we have learned much about how to protect biodiversity in road schemes and we will build on the knowledge and experience that has been gained over the last few years.

With regard to recommendation 7 on a national records network, in this coming year we will build on the successful record centre in Powys that many of you will know of. We will begin to establish and develop a network of local centres across Wales. That is considered by everyone involved to be of paramount importance in sustaining local biodiversity planning. Recommendation 2 refers to planning. I should point out that local biodiversity action plans were recognised as supplementary planning guidance in 'Planning Policy Wales', which was set out in March 2002.

As regards recommendation 3, I will ask the Wales biodiversity partnership to consider setting local targets. The Countryside Council for Wales is committed to publishing data that will allow that to happen. With regard to recommendations 8 and 9 on the need for expertise, I have announced £20,000 in funding to help provide training and guidance on the list of species and habitats of principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity. That money has been allocated to the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, which will take this forward.

I welcome the fact that devolution has ensured that the Assembly Government has a voice in discussions about biodiversity policy at a UK level and that the Wales biodiversity partnership has a stronger role in UK arrangements.

Finally, I put on record my thanks for the good work that has taken place on biodiversity and the enthusiasm demonstrated around Wales. I have been privileged to launch many local biodiversity action plans. The enthusiasm and commitment of local biodiversity officers and volunteers is enormous. I thank everyone who has been involved in and has taken an interest in preparing this report. I intend to report back to the Committee to outline progress and I look forward to Wales reaping the benefits that local biodiversity action will bring in the longer term.