



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

**Y Pwyllgor Cynaliadwyedd  
The Sustainability Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 7 Hydref 2010  
Thursday, 7 October 2010**

**Cynnwys**  
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi 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**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Lorraine Barrett   | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Angela Burns       | Ceidwadwyr Cymreig<br>Welsh Conservatives  |
| Jeff Cuthbert      | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Alun Davies        | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Rhodri Glyn Thomas | Plaid Cymru<br>The Party of Wales  |
| Joyce Watson       | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Kirsty Williams    | Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor)<br>Welsh Liberal Democrats (Committee Chair) |
| Leanne Wood        | Plaid Cymru<br>The Party of Wales  |

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

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Stephen Bladwell   | Y Gymdeithas Frenhinol er Gwarchod Adar<br>The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. |
| Dr Sean Christian  | Y Gymdeithas Frenhinol er Gwarchod Adar<br>The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. |
| Owain George       | Y Comisiwn Cynllunio Seilwaith<br>Infrastructure Planning Commission                      |
| Dr Pauleen Lane    | Y Comisiwn Cynllunio Seilwaith<br>Infrastructure Planning Commission                      |
| Emrys Parry        | Y Comisiwn Cynllunio Seilwaith<br>Infrastructure Planning Commission                      |
| Dr Roisin Willmott | Ymgynghorydd y Pwyllgor<br>Committee Adviser  |
| Mark Wilson        | Y Comisiwn Cynllunio Seilwaith<br>Infrastructure Planning Commission                      |

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

|                     |                               |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Dr Virginia Hawkins | Clerc<br>Clerk                |
| Meriel Singleton    | Dirprwy Glerc<br>Deputy Clerk |

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.02 a.m.*  
*The meeting began at 9.02 a.m.*

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

[1] **Kirsty Williams:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this morning's meeting

of the Sustainability Committee. I remind everyone that, in the event of a fire alarm, you should leave the room by the marked fire exits and follow the instructions of the ushers and staff in the building. No test is forecast for today. I ask everyone to ensure that all mobile phones, pagers and BlackBerrys are switched off. The National Assembly for Wales operates through the media of English and Welsh. Headphones are available to hear the simultaneous translation, if required. The interpretation is available on channel 1 and the verbatim feed is on channel 0. I remind Members and our guests this morning that there is no need to touch any buttons on the microphones, as they are operated independently.

[2] Apologies for this morning's meeting have been received from Karen Sinclair, Irene James and Brynle Williams. I welcome Jeff Cuthbert and Alun Davies, who are substituting for their colleagues. On today's agenda, we have further evidence for our inquiry into planning in Wales from the Infrastructure Planning Commission and the committee will begin our work on our biodiversity review, hearing from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

9.04 a.m.

### **Ymchwiliad i Bolisiâu Cynllunio—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth Inquiry into Planning—Evidence Session**

[3] **Kirsty Williams:** I welcome our guests from the Infrastructure Planning Commission, Pauleen Lane, Emrys Parry, Owain George and Mark Wilson, to this morning's committee meeting. Members have received copies of your written evidence, and we have a long list of questions, so would you like to begin by giving us a quick overview or making introductory comments before we ask those questions?

[4] **Dr Lane:** I am happy to introduce my colleagues, and I will ask them to contribute to the questions, if appropriate. Emrys is one of our core commissioners and is also a nominated Welsh commissioner, Owain is one of our bilingual case officers, and Mark is one of our case leaders and is dealing with a number of projects in Wales. I should say that we cannot discuss individual projects, for obvious reasons, but I am sure that that was not the purpose of your inquiry.

[5] My name is Pauleen Lane and I am the deputy chair of the Infrastructure Planning Commission. I give Sir Michael Pitt's apologies this morning as he is chairing a meeting of all commissioners in Bristol.

[6] We have given you a written statement, and I hope that that gives you some detail, but we wanted to open by saying that the Infrastructure Planning Commission has to work through an interesting legal scenario. I think that Jane Davidson said in evidence that the Planning Act 2008 was intended to be devolution-neutral; that is not an official phrase, but we concur with that. It throws up particular challenges, and there are a lot of details that need to be worked through, but we are comfortable working within that settlement, and we make efforts as an organisation to do so in a manner that is compatible with, and hopefully respects, the particular arrangements in Wales. We can get into some of the detail in answering your questions, but we wanted to start by conveying that, as an organisation, we are comfortable in working to do that and have taken practical steps in organising ourselves, which I have illustrated in the paper, both in access to resources and the adoption of the Welsh language scheme, for example. We also ensure that our contacts and liaisons are appropriate, and, in the last week, we have published a memorandum of understanding with the Assembly Government to give practical effect to making those things work.

[7] **Kirsty Williams:** Thank you very much. I will begin by referring to your paper. Given the number and the scale of potential energy projects in Wales to be considered by the

IPC or its successor organisation, what is the role of the IPC in delivering the Welsh Government's strategic energy policies?

[8] **Dr Lane:** We recognise that the Assembly Government has taken energy seriously as a policy, and obviously that is one of our key functions. The number of projects reflects that; it is a matter of the Assembly Government perhaps encouraging people to bring forward such projects, and our job is to facilitate them within the confines of the Planning Act. In that sense, it is not our job as an organisation to deliver the policy, but we work within the context of making the policy work, if you see what I mean. We are not a political organisation and we are not allowed to get involved in policy, but our effort is to ensure that we are geared up, organised and capable of delivering within the context of that policy.

[9] **Angela Burns:** When conflicts arise between Welsh Government guidance and national policy statements at a UK level, what criteria would commissioners use to determine primacy? I would be interested to know, because that has already happened in some cases.

[10] **Dr Lane:** As you know, there is a clear hierarchy laid down within the Planning Act as to the relevance of different policy areas. The national policy statements have what would be classed as primacy, in the sense that they are overriding, particularly once they have been fully debated and designated. However, one of the few areas in which we can override national policy statements is where, for example, they would be contradictory to international law. There are very few exceptions where we can do that. Having said that, once you have looked at that national policy statements, we then have a duty to consider anything that is important and relevant, and it is clear in the way in which the Act is framed that, within Wales, we would expect the policies of the Assembly Government to be important and relevant. You say that there was a direct conflict between those two and I would have to say that that would be a matter for the judgment of the individual commissioner, based on the commissioner, group of commissioners, or the council. If it is an individual decision that they are looking at, it would have to be a matter of considering each individual case. I cannot say that there would be no circumstance in which one might outweigh the other, but the national policy statements would be the starting point for primacy. However, there might be circumstances—and I think that there is some particular wording that is quoted on this—where the Welsh policy statements would be something that you would expect to comply with wherever possible. I suspect that the example in most people's minds is a move outside the strategic search areas in TAN 8, but you would have to have very good reasons to deviate from that, and you would have to be clear and explicit about that.

9.10 a.m.

[11] **Angela Burns:** For further clarification, it would be the commissioners who would make the final decision as to which one received planning consent, would it not?

[12] **Dr Lane:** Yes. If the commission is in decision-making mode—which is a sequence of events—the commissioners would have to make a decision, and they would have to justify that and explain it. If the commission is in recommending mode, it would still have to justify and explain its recommendation, and that would then go to the relevant Secretary of State.

[13] **Jeff Cuthbert:** In his letter of 9 June to this committee, Sir Michael Pitt says:

[14] 'The relationship in Government policy documents between policies set by Government in Westminster and the policies of the devolved administration is not a matter for the IPC to determine. We do, however, take the view that greater clarity in that relationship would be helpful within the context of individual NPSs.'

[15] In what way is there a lack of clarity now, and what can be done to improve that?

[16] **Dr Lane:** I think that there are no more than one or two sentences in the previous draft national policy statements—we expect the revised ones to come out shortly. We drew attention to the fact that there are some points in the national policy statement—the reference here is to EN-3 on renewable energy infrastructure—that should perhaps be clarified at a more strategic level. We have given you the answer in relation to the Planning Act, which is that we are given a policy hierarchy. However, it would be helpful to have explicit recognition of some aspects of the Assembly Government’s policy, and I think that the Assembly Government has been arguing for this. At the moment, it is perhaps not as clear as it could be. So, we are sympathetic to the point that was being put forward.

[17] **Jeff Cuthbert:** That is fine. So, you think that we are not 1 million miles away from it, and that it is a matter of making relatively small adjustments. Would that be fair?

[18] **Dr Lane:** I am assuming that the Assembly Government will be making further representations in respect of the latest drafts and, for the reasons that we have just been discussing, I think that it would be in everybody’s interests if these were clarified as far as it is possible to do so.

[19] **Joyce Watson:** How will the memorandum of understanding with the Welsh Government support the delivery of projects in Wales?

[20] **Kirsty Williams:** It is not short, is it?

[21] **Dr Lane:** It is not short, but given that the context in Wales makes it more difficult for members of the public, and perhaps even local authorities, to be clear about the routes by which projects are decided, the emphasis on encouraging early consultation and effective engagement—which does not preclude the position that the Assembly Government may take as a statutory consultee on an individual project—and on co-ordinating wherever possible the approaches to consultation, including the publication of information about projects, is the most important aspect of the memorandum. It is a very complex scenario, so it is hard to expect individuals and many smaller bodies to cope with it. Therefore, anything that we can do jointly to make it as clear and as comprehensible for them as possible can only be beneficial.

[22] **Kirsty Williams:** Alun, do you want to come in on this point?

[23] **Alun Davies:** The memorandum of understanding looks like the sort that we have seen several times between two public bodies. In your response, however, you describe the situation in Wales as being more complex, which I presume is in comparison with other parts of the United Kingdom. I presume that that is what you meant.

[24] **Dr Lane:** Yes.

[25] **Alun Davies:** We understand that. However, with regard to the status of the memorandum of understanding, what screamed at me when I read your paper is the fact that this is an organisation that will be abolished in a year’s time. To what extent are we simply managing the process for a year, and to what extent do you believe that what we are putting in place now will stick for more than a year to 18 months? I think that 2012 is the date for the new organisation. To what extent is this just a matter of managing for the next few months, and to what extent are you setting down ways of working that you expect the successor organisation to carry on?

[26] **Dr Lane:** I included a specific link in the written submission to the ministerial statement in respect of the abolition of the IPC. The abolition of the IPC means that the brand

of the IPC will go and that it will be taken in as a unit within the revised Planning Inspectorate structure. There will still be a major infrastructure project unit, and the core of the Planning Act in terms of the process and the projects to which it applies is being retained, and that is clarified in the ministerial statement. So, you are correct in the sense that our brand is going to disappear, but from the point of view of promoters, statutory consultees and members of the public, the core processes of the Planning Act will remain. Therefore, the currency of the memorandum, which is focused on how to organise ourselves to make those processes as easy as possible for people to participate in, is absolutely valid.

[27] This has not yet been entirely resolved—it is an ongoing matter for discussion within the Department for Communities and Local Government—but our expectation at the moment would be that anything to do with major infrastructure projects would retain these elements. So, the memorandum does have currency that goes beyond 2012, and that is without getting into all the detailed discussion about phasing and what happens to projects that cross the timeline and so on. The core processes of the Act will remain.

[28] **Kirsty Williams:** That is very clear. Joyce, would you like to continue?

[29] **Joyce Watson:** What do you understand to be the role of the Welsh Government's proposed national infrastructure plan for Wales and how will it be taken into account by the IPC or its successor body?

[30] **Dr Lane:** That is not an area to which I have yet given much thought. It would be interesting to see what status you consider it has in terms of the policy hierarchy, and then we would fit that into the appropriate policy hierarchy.

[31] **Leanne Wood:** To what extent do you expect the new draft national policy statements to differ from the drafts that were produced under the previous UK Government?

[32] **Dr Lane:** I presume that some account will be taken of the consultation process from the first round, but I cannot say as we are not in control of those. However, although the statements are co-ordinated by the Department for Communities and Local Government, they are drafted by the individual departments and, in the case of energy suite, for example, they would have taken some cognisance of the response to the first round of consultation.

[33] **Leanne Wood:** If they do take account of those consultation responses, what will be different?

[34] **Dr Lane:** That will be interesting to see, because I suspect that there will be some points on which there will be a degree of disagreement. With the exception of EN-6, which is spatially specific, I do not anticipate that there will be a significant change, which is the most significant consideration in Wales as the rest of the energy suite is not spatial, whereas most of the Welsh policy statements are spatial. Therefore, I do not anticipate that there will be a significant change in that. However, I hope that some of the commentary that was made in terms of clarification—in which we put our own list in terms of clarification, such as the point that we discussed earlier—will be responded to, but we will have to wait and see.

[35] **Leanne Wood:** Do you think that this re-look provides an opportunity to give Welsh policy a stronger profile in the new policy statements?

[36] **Dr Lane:** I have already indicated that we are sympathetic to the clarification of that position, and that that would be helpful for all concerned. Life moves on. We are in an evolving context even in relation to the devolution settlement, for example, so I hope that things will be written in such a manner that they are robust enough to survive on the five or 10-year timescale that the policy statements are intended to cover.

[37] **Kirsty Williams:** I am sorry to interrupt. Mr Parry, you are in quite a unique position as our nominee. Leanne raises a very interesting point here, and your colleague, Pauleen, has alluded to the fact that there is scope for greater clarification of Welsh needs within this process. How do you view the situation as it has been operating, and the potential for change?

[38] **Mr Parry:** I have to preface my remarks by saying that we are not involved in the policy aspects whatsoever, and that we feed in through consultations. I am not sure that I can add to that, because we have tread on ground that is not within our parameters.

[39] **Kirsty Williams:** Would you share the analysis that Pauleen has given us?

9.20 a.m.

[40] **Mr Parry:** Yes. There is a need and it would be helpful for everyone if there were more clarification. The memorandum of understanding aims to bridge the gap as far as it can without impeding policy, but it would be helpful for all of us to have more clarification.

[41] **Kirsty Williams:** Sorry, Leanne, I interrupted you.

[42] **Leanne Wood:** What would happen in a scenario where the direction of travel in Welsh policy terms was in contradiction with the national policy statements? How would that be resolved?

[43] **Dr Lane:** I should start by saying that, at the moment, there are many aspects of policy that are in alignment, but I understand that there are some points of friction. I agree with the comments of the Minister, Jane Davidson, when she gave evidence to you that, in those circumstances, we would have to look at the statutory basis on which there was an appropriate hierarchy and refer to that as our starting point. However, I cannot rule out that, if there were overwhelming reasons in respect of an individual project, a commissioner or commissioners could make a recommendation or a decision that would perhaps vary that slightly, depending on the particular circumstances. So, the policy hierarchy and the agreement in respect of various aspects of policy are settled from the overarching point of view, but we do take individual decisions on individual projects. So, there could be circumstances in which a conflict had to be resolved, and we would expect commissioners to reason their way through that if they thought that there were good grounds for dealing with such a conflict.

[44] **Leanne Wood:** Ultimately, the final decision would be that of the commissioner.

[45] **Dr Lane:** It would be either the decision or the recommendation of the commissioner, depending on the status or position at that time.

[46] **Leanne Wood:** Until the revised national policy statements on energy are finalised, what weight will be given to the draft ones?

[47] **Dr Lane:** We start from the point that even those in the first-draft round were not new policy; they were intended to bring together and codify policy that had already been in existence for a period of time. So, we would take account of that in giving them weight. We are also entitled to take account of the fact that, if policy statements have been published and are going through a consultation process, you would give some weight to where they had reached in that process. So, the answer at the moment is that the underlying background 'history' policy would be given significant weight, and some weight would be given to the way in which that had been put together in the draft national policy statements. You are now going to ask me the next question, on the Assembly Government's policies, and the answer to



it is that many of the Assembly Government's policies are in place, complete and have been consulted upon. I am aware that some updated proposals will perhaps come through, but those are clear. In that sense, it is much easier.

[48] **Jeff Cuthbert:** This question is about local planning policy and the relationship with national policy statements. Local development plans are important documents for councils, and I know how controversial they can be. What mechanisms are there to ensure that LDPs are in alignment with national policy statements? How effective are these arrangements?

[49] **Dr Lane:** The guidance in the letter from the chief planning officer of Communities and Local Government—I have to confess that I do not know whether anything equivalent has been issued by the Assembly Government—was that, in preparing local plans, authorities should take account of existing or emerging policy through national policy statements, as they are intended to sit within the overall planning hierarchy of documents. It would be fair to say that it is a matter for individual authorities as to how they interpret that. No doubt, there will be places where authorities are perhaps not as content in respect of their individual development plans with the implications of policy EN-6, for example, where there is a clear spatial element, as the national policy statement might wish. Similarly, authorities may or may not choose to make provision for other types of energy infrastructure in their local plans if they think it is appropriate to their local plans. That is the general guidance that came from the chief planning officer

[50] **Jeff Cuthbert:** Am I right in concluding that there are no mechanisms in place to ensure joined-up thinking here and that it is very much down to the local planning authorities to try to do it?

[51] **Kirsty Williams:** There has been no guidance regarding local development plans.

[52] **Dr Lane:** I was not clear whether there had been an equivalent. That is a question that is quite central to your inquiry, is it not? That is the question of the extent to which planning policy is joined up. At the moment, it is a valid question.

[53] **Jeff Cuthbert:** So, when we ask what mechanisms there are at the moment, the answer is really 'none'.

[54] **Kirsty Williams:** In a Welsh context. Roisin, would you like to explain the situation?

[55] **Dr Willmott:** I am not aware of any guidance whatsoever linking the national policy statements with LDPs—

[56] **Dr Lane:** I was simply referring to the guidance that has been issued in England. That is the extent of it at the moment.

[57] **Alun Davies:** The reply to that question is interesting because of what it says about the way in which the structure of decision making has been created in Wales. It appears that there is a very distinct and clear policy direction in England, but that, with regard to Wales, it has just been a case of, 'What do we do about the Welsh problem?'. We then create these mechanisms that seek to make life far more complex than is necessary. With regard to the impact that that has on people, it demands that greater resources are placed among communities to enable people to appreciate and understand this architecture of decision making, does it not?

[58] **Dr Lane:** To comment on the first part of your question, I would say that the position in Wales respects the devolved settlement as it stands. We accept that, potentially, that leads to a greater degree of complexity in terms of the number of decisions that contribute to an

overall outcome, which is why we placed emphasis on us all working together to try to assist people through that process.

[59] The question of where that sits in the political situation is another matter. It is our job to make this work as easily as possible. On the question of resources—and I guess that that means money and/or people—first, I would say that we recognise the specific character of Wales in terms of things such as geography and population density, which provide particular challenges, and that we as an organisation are doing what we can to assist with that. For example, we took the initiative on the Welsh language scheme. We were not given that as a starting point when we were formed. We decided that we would go ahead with that using our own resources. That means that we have to have a discussion with our sponsor department about the resource implications of that, and that is something we continue to do. So, with regard to people, effort and forward planning, I agree with the sense of your question. All I would say is that, we as an organisation—in conjunction with the Assembly Government in particular but also through the outreach efforts we have made with local authorities in areas affected by potential projects—have shown a commitment that we hope reflects the need that you have identified.

[60] **Alun Davies:** Are communities in Wales less engaged in the process?

[61] **Dr Lane:** That would be a value judgment, so I might ask my colleagues to comment on that as they now have some direct experience of our cases. I would not want to view that as a negative; I would say that it is a challenge that we all seek to deal with. However, I will ask my colleagues to comment.

[62] **Mr Parry:** Did you say ‘communities’?

[63] **Alun Davies:** Yes. I do not just mean geographical communities.

[64] **Mr Parry:** That is not my experience. I have been involved in several pre-application matters, and we go out to meet involved parties. My experience is that the local authorities in particular attend. They are as conscious as we are of the difficulties that we face, and we thrash out ideas. So, no, my experience is that people see the merit of the overall scheme—the concept of the Act—they see the issues because there is devolution in Wales, and they are looking to make it work. One of the major councils, which I will not name, is thrashing out ideas with us about how to get the message across—it is the point about communication that Pauleen mentioned earlier—and how we can work together. So my experience is that communities are very engaged with the representative.

9.30 a.m.

[65] **Angela Burns:** Everything that we have heard so far about processes, procedures and policies—what is laid down and what is statutory—has been very interesting. Alun has talked about local engagement, and I think of that as engagement with those living in communities rather than councils. I would be very interested to know whether the Infrastructure Planning Commission has halted, deferred or changed a major infrastructure project—in Wales or in England—because of local people’s views, as my postbag does not reflect that. I am curious, because you can have the IPC and the Government—even the local council—saying ‘we want this’, but the people who have to have the power station on their doorsteps, or the windfarm behind their gardens, do not have a say. Many communities in Wales are opposed to certain things that are going on in relation to major infrastructure projects in their areas, and while their voices may be heard, they are also being ignored. I want to know about the level of engagement with the individual people who have to put with these projects on a day-to-day basis.

[66] **Dr Lane:** I am happy to respond to that. First of all, there is a statutory basis for us to intervene; for example, at the point at which we consider the acceptance of a scheme, we look at the statement of community consultation that was given. If we receive information that that process was not abided by, or that it was not done effectively or genuinely, then that is one of the grounds on which we can refuse to accept an application; there is, therefore, a clear process. We would usually intervene before then, because there is no point getting to the end of a process and then calling off the project. We have given clear guidance to developers, including a developer working on a major project just over the estuary, where we had to explain very clearly to a large organisation that it was not doing things as well as it should, particularly in not taking seriously the process by which people could be consulted effectively on genuine options regarding the project. Where there is dissatisfaction with a process, our view is that it is in everybody's interest that it is dealt with at the earliest stage. However, if we have to, there are levers that we can pull that could bring the project to a grinding halt. It is in everybody's interest that we intervene earlier in the process; we can intervene, and we have done so.

[67] **Lorraine Barrett:** Are you notified automatically about relevant applications that would come under your remit, either by the local authority or the developer, or does it have to be brought to your attention in some way?

[68] **Dr Lane:** In respect of infrastructure projects that come within our remit—things that go over the threshold, in other words—we usually get advance notification in that organisations come to us for advice. Before they have formulated the application document, there is a process by which they can come to us for Section 51 advice, which is general advice on a project. As you know, we publish all of that information on our website for lots of good reasons that I would be happy to go into, if you wish. Usually, we have some advance notice of the proposals that are being thought about; where possible, we would then guide people to do the best that they can in terms of consultation.

[69] It is an interesting question, which relates back to what happens in Wales, where other aspects of the project—associated development, for example—have to be dealt with through other regimes. The guidance in our publications is that organisations should get on and consult with local planning authorities, for example, at the earliest possible stage. They should not just come to us; as soon as it becomes apparent that they might need to consult other parties, they should do so. We would advise people to do that, and would do whatever we can to support them in getting on with the process. I do not think that it is a problem of notification; if anything, it is the other way around, and is a problem of ensuring that local planning authorities are as well informed as they can be. We have said that we will take action to ensure that that is the case as soon as we can.

[70] **Lorraine Barrett:** Planning Aid England has been given additional resources to help communities engage in the process, but this is apparently not the case in Wales. Is what Planning Aid does that much different to what you do? Is Planning Aid the people's voice that will interact with you at a relevant stage?

[71] **Dr Lane:** We welcome and encourage the work of Planning Aid Wales in assisting groups and communities who perhaps do not have access to other resources to find their way through the process and organise their representations. We are supportive of that as a process and anything that can be done to encourage it is in everybody's interest.

[72] **Jeff Cuthbert:** My understanding, because I have used it, is that there is a Planning Aid Wales based at the Department of Planning in Cardiff University.

[73] **Kirsty Williams:** There is. The difference is the resourcing that has gone in from the Westminster Government. It does exist, and very good it is too.

[74] **Dr Lane:** There is, but the resource line is different.

[75] **Mr Wilson:** We have explored at least one project using Planning Aid Wales to assist us with our outreach work, but it came to an end because of resource issues.

[76] **Kirsty Williams:** It might be useful to have a note about that project. Back to you, Angela.

[77] **Angela Burns:** You have already referred to consenting regimes in your answer to Lorraine. The Minister was very clear in her evidence to us that if an IPC go-ahead had been given to an infrastructure project, but either the local authority and/or the Welsh Government had issues about the associated works, they have the right to raise those issues and to say 'no'. You have talked about how you want to get everybody engaged and talking, but you are going to end up, I would assume, at some point or other with a situation in which there would be a desire to have something in the national interest but a local council is saying, 'Yes, you can build a power station, but you cannot have the cables or you cannot dig up this or do that.' Would you then simply override it? What I am not hearing is people saying, 'The buck rests here absolutely and if we believed it was in Wales's or the UK's national interest, we will override everybody else'. Do you ever do that? Do you have those teeth?

[78] **Dr Lane:** In some ways, in England, where the associated developments can be wrapped into the development consent order, it is more of a challenge for the IPC, because those are exactly the sort of issues that we have to consider. We have to take into account all of those very particular local impacts, which may go much wider than the individual site and which are often very significant. I do not downplay the impact of traffic or the need for storage compounds: those are significant impacts, which for many communities are almost more significant than the main building. I am a local councillor myself, so I understand the way in which these matters affect people. In that sense, in Wales, we have the principle of the main development, which will have impacts that we must consider when weighting the national versus the local. However, at the end of the day, the decision on the wider associated development is a matter for the local planning authority. Then one has the right of appeal through the Assembly Government and its process. That is the devolved settlement, so it is a situation where it could not be overridden by the IPC. That is the bottom line; we cannot do that.

[79] **Angela Burns:** I was trying to understand the extent of your power. Therefore, a major infrastructure project destined for Wales could be stopped either by the Government or the local authority, if they went through all the appeals and their appeals were upheld.

[80] **Dr Lane:** It would be a matter for the promoter to deal with that situation and a matter for its commercial risk and its investment programme or of whether it can find an alternative. That alone should concentrate the minds of promoters. They should be trying to make the best possible cases and to respect the need to deal with those local impacts at the earliest possible stage for exactly those reasons.

9.40 a.m.

[81] **Alun Davies:** [*Inaudible.*—outside of that, I have to say, it is a recipe for conflict. We come back to the fact that there are different regimes in different parts of the United Kingdom. I would have anticipated that there would be a place where these potential conflicts could be resolved and that the legislation would create a means, an architecture, by which all of this can be resolved. In respect of the position that Angela describes, any major infrastructure development, particularly within energy and what have you, must have associated works in order to sustain it. If you have two different regimes dealing with that

area, you create a context in which you can have the conflict that you have wherever you have two competing regimes. That seems to be quite clear.

[82] **Kirsty Williams:** They are not competing regimes.

[83] **Alun Davies:** Two different regimes, then. Is there any means at all within Wales whereby that conflict can be resolved by a single body or organisation?

[84] **Dr Lane:** I do not think that there is a body that can resolve the single conflict, but you could have a scenario where the IPC had given consent for the major project, for example, and issues remained outstanding in respect of the associated development, which could mean that the project could not go ahead. It would then be for the promoter to go through the normal appellant procedure. I suppose that, in that sense, it is undertaken through the normal appellant procedure, which takes it back to the Assembly and its processes.

[85] **Kirsty Williams:** Ultimately, of course, the Welsh Assembly Government would have the power of call-in from a local authority. So, the associated works that could be dealt with by a local authority could be deemed of national interest and be called in and dealt with by the planning inspectorate, could they not?

[86] **Dr Lane:** Yes. That is correct. That is the nearest that you can get to that point.

[87] **Kirsty Williams:** However, you could still end up with a situation where the IPC is saying 'yes' to one thing and the Welsh Assembly Government planning inspectorate is saying 'no' to the associated works.

[88] **Dr Lane:** That is correct.

[89] **Alun Davies:** This is quite interesting. The planners in Wales would be driven entirely by the policies of the Welsh Assembly Government, would they not?

[90] **Dr Lane:** That is correct.

[91] **Alun Davies:** Therefore, where there is a conflict with the national policy statement for the UK, the UK makes the decision according to the statutory guidelines that you have. We understand all of that. Then, in the context that Kirsty and Angela have described, you go to the Assembly Government and it is driven, in the same statutory framework, by a different policy.

[92] **Kirsty Williams:** I think that we have established that that is the case and that that is the process.

[93] **Dr Lane:** I think that that takes you to the pertinence of your inquiry.

[94] **Kirsty Williams:** I think that it has been established that that is the case and that there are issues that could arise out of that situation. Can we make progress and move on to Rhodri Glyn, please?

[95] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Credaf ein bod wedi sefydlu'r broses yr oedd Alun yn ei disgrifio yn gynharach gyda'i gwestiwn. Fodd bynnag, nid yw'n glir imi y math o bwysau a rowch ar y gwahanol lefelau a beth, yn y pen draw, a fydd yn gyrru'r penderfyniad. Pe bai'r cyrff y mae gennych

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** I think that we have established the process that Alun described earlier with his question. However, it is not clear to me the type of weight that you give to the different levels and what, ultimately, drives the decision. If the bodies that you have a statutory obligation to consult with fed

gyfrifoldeb statudol i ymgynghori â hwy yn bwydo i fewn i'r broses sylwadau sydd yn gyson â pholisi cynllunio Llywodraeth y Cynulliad, ond sydd yn groes i'r hyn a ddisgrifir yma fel polisi cenedlaethol—mewn gwirionedd, polisi y Deyrnas Unedig ydyw—faint o bwysau a rowch ar y cyngor statudol hwnnw a ddaw oddi wrth y cyrff hynny?

into the process comments that are consistent with the planning policy of the Assembly Government, but contravene what is described here as national policy—it is, in fact, the policy of the United Kingdom—how much weight do you place on the statutory advice that comes from those bodies?

[96] **Dr Lane:** As you know, the statutory consultees have particular roles, and those will be a number of bodies—in terms of Wales, the countryside council in respect of environmental matters, for example, as well as local authorities. We are directed to give very serious consideration to those responses. In particular, local authorities' responses to the local impact report, which will be a summary of many of the issues that you might outline, are given strong weight. Where those responses relate directly to the question of a policy conflict, I am afraid that we are then back to the question of the policy hierarchy. Therefore, if it was a matter of a local authority, for example, saying, 'We support something in technical advice note 8, but we do not support the outcome of that in EN-1, for example', we would have to take account of that policy conflict. As I outlined previously, the starting point would be the hierarchy, but there might be, based on the arguments put forward, for example, in the local impact report, particular circumstances in which a commission or commissioners would be prepared to override that conflict. It would be very much dependent on the case that was being put forward. So, the starting point is policy hierarchy, then the reference point is what is being argued in particular locations. We can take account of that. That is the best answer that I can give you, because it obviously becomes very project specific. Many other aspects put forward by statutory consultees would be matters that would not perhaps have to sit within policy hierarchy, but would go to the central question that is asked in respect of all these major projects, which is balancing the national—both the UK's and Wales's—interests with local impacts. There is often quite a significant degree of alignment, but they will nonetheless have significant impacts. That is the same test that we would apply in all areas: how you balance the national interests with local impacts.

[97] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Thank you for that answer. I am still not clear about the weight that is given to the different levels, but I do not think that we are going to get there. I sympathise with you, because, without giving you a specific case, it must be difficult for you to answer that question.

[98] I now move onto something that is perhaps a little easier. On the outreach events that you have planned across Wales with regard to the pre-application period, can you give us some flavour of those events—how they will be arranged and who will be involved in them?

[99] **Dr Lane:** I will ask my colleague Mark to answer that, given that he has been involved in those events.

[100] **Mr Wilson:** We have held a number of them, mainly related to some of the proposed inland windfarms in Wales. What tends to happen is that we will send out invites to people, based on our statutory lists of consultees who are prescribed to us. So, they have so far generally been events with statutory bodies and local authorities, with the input of community liaison groups and community organisations. As of yet, we have not had an event to which the general public has been invited, primarily because we cannot get into discussions about specific projects. So, it is about the process and about telling the promoters and the organisations that will be inputting into the process how best to work with our processes. We have had quite a lot of interest in the outreach events that we have had so far, particularly the one held a few weeks ago in Merthyr.

[101] **Kirsty Williams:** So, your events are about explaining to people about your role and how people can engage in the process, rather than the merits of individual projects?

[102] **Dr Lane:** That is correct. We are not permitted to discuss the merits of individual projects or competing projects.

[103] **Kirsty Williams:** You might not be here to tell the tale if you were.

[104] **Dr Lane:** It is about clarifying the process. It is tough for everyone, not just in Wales. It is a new piece of legislation and will continue to be difficult until enough people have been through the process to get any kind of critical mass. It is difficult given the limited number of projects. We recognise that, which is why we have taken this effort to take the front foot and go out to talk to people well in advance.

[105] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** You refer to talking to people, but you are not actually talking to people—you are talking to consultees and organisations that are part of the process. Do you have any intention of talking to people? Developers go out to talk to people, but obviously have a vested interest with regard to what they tell people.

[106] **Dr Lane:** They are obliged to talk to people.

[107] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Do you feel that you have a responsibility to go out to talk to the public?

[108] **Mr Parry:** On a particular matter that I am currently involved with, we are waiting for the local authority, with which we have met with others, to come back to us. We offered to go to meet in communities as it saw fit, and it was going to think about how to structure that. The area involved in that particular matter is very large, so the question is where you might hold relevant meetings. So, the answer is 'yes', we are, and happy to do so.

[109] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** That is important because Angela made the point earlier that people feel strongly that their views are not given an adequate hearing and the issues that they raise are not considered and investigated. They feel that people go through the motions but that no-one is really listening to what they have to say. That could be useful because it would make people feel a part of the process.

9.50 a.m.

[110] **Dr Lane:** That is really important. This is a new process; as you know, we have accepted only one application and refused another for valid grounds. That happened to be in Wales, but I hope that that shows that we are serious and that people have to do the legwork. There are some significant differences with this process, as you know. It is about front-loading and it is the promoter's obligation to talk to local residents, local authorities and other consultees at an early stage. We take advice, as Emrys has illustrated, from local authorities about the best way in which that can be done and that is codified through the statement of community consultation. If the promoter does not listen to what the local authority has said about developing its statement of community consultation, that is a serious matter, for example.

[111] It might also be worth saying that our processes now rely on access to online information, which is a particularly interesting challenge. We are holding outreach events and will be holding public hearings, but a lot of information will be available online for people to get involved in the process at an early stage. It is all published online. It is not a case of going to your traditional planning inquiry with boxes of paper all around the place. A lot of information is available online. We are conscious that that means that we need to be confident

that communities have access to that, and we will give our attention to that in our discussions with local authorities to ensure that that is the case. The scale and the nature of the projects that the IPC is dealing with are right at the upper end, which means that there could be thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of consultees. The only way to deal with that effectively is to do so online, but we need to ensure that that can operate effectively in all communities, and that will be given attention in our discussions with the Assembly Government and local authorities to ensure that that happens. We are at the early stages. We are doing as much as we can to reach out and, in answer to Angela's earlier question, to ensure that promoters take seriously the question of consultation. I hope that, maybe in a year's time, how effective some of those processes have been will be clearer. We would be interested in receiving any feedback that you can offer us on ways to assist.

[112] **Mr Wilson:** An important thing that we can do at the pre-application stage is let people know what to do if they are frustrated with the consultation process that a promoter is undertaking. However, we cannot get involved in a debate at that point with the general public, or anyone else, for that matter, about the merits of any particular project, which is, naturally, what they want to talk about.

[113] **Dr Lane:** It is for promoters to demonstrate how they have responded to the representations that have been made to them during the consultation stages. That is the point that we have yet to get to, so that people feel that their comments are being taken seriously. However, that is partly because we are not quite there yet with some of the major projects.

[114] **Kirsty Williams:** To turn to the position of the Welsh commissioners, their statutory remit is to contribute specialist expertise and knowledge relating to Welsh matters, but they are not there as representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government. Does their role differ from the role of other commissioners in any way?

[115] **Mr Parry:** It differs in the sense that we bring our Welsh background, whatever that may be, and therefore we have empathy, as Welsh people, with Wales. In my case—and I will be brief—the first 20 years of my career were spent in Welsh local government initially and then with the Land Authority for Wales. I spent nine years as director of the Land Authority for Wales, looking to secure development opportunities through our processes in the whole principality. In those days, if we got a factory and a number of jobs, we felt that we had achieved something. So, I have an interest in, and a love of, Wales that goes all the way back to my training. I then went off to London to do other things, but, even there, I worked on the initial phases of Cardiff bay and other planning schemes for Wales. It is that in-built position as a Welshman that comes to the fore. I have family in Wales and still follow social events, as you will not be surprised to learn. So, it does bring a different perspective, yes.

[116] **Dr Lane:** That also relates back to the question of sensitivity and understanding the devolved settlement, and the need to appreciate on the one hand its complexity, and on the other, the richness of the environment in which you are operating and being able to cope with that.

[117] **Kirsty Williams:** Angela has the final questions.

[118] **Angela Burns:** These are on the future of the IPC and the major infrastructure planning unit. There are 13 projects currently on the programme that involve Wales. Have they all had permission granted? Are they up and running?

[119] **Dr Lane:** They are all at the pre-application stage. As you know, the one that got to application stage and was rejected by us, Maesgwyn, is back at the pre-application stage, but it may come forward again shortly. They are all at the pre-application stage, but if any of them are accepted for application for examination prior to 2012, they will go through the



current regime in some form or another. They may also be affected by the question of whether the policy statements get designated, and so on, and that will all be dealt with during the transition arrangements. We all look forward to further details from Westminster on the exact transition arrangements, but, as far as we are concerned, the projects and core processes carry on, engagement carries on, and promoters are still under all the duties that they were previously. We will attempt to examine them and co-ordinate the work in such a way that it does not further confuse or distract local communities, so that they feel that their argument is about the project and the impact rather than the change process going on around us. I have tried to emphasise in the paper that that is what we want to achieve. We want it to be clear for people, and we will do our best to make it as clear as possible in conjunction with the Assembly Government.

[120] **Angela Burns:** Does that mean to say that you have now stopped looking at other applications that may come forward?

[121] **Dr Lane:** No, if other applications come forward, we will deal with those in the same manner, and there may well be more in the next year or 18 months.

[122] **Angela Burns:** I accept that you are not wholly clear yourself about the transition period, but would you be able to put a finger on any of the benefits or changes that the Welsh Assembly Government can expect with the transition between IPC and MIPU?

[123] **Dr Lane:** We hope that it will see minimal change in the things that are within our control. As in the answer that I gave previously, I am aware that the Assembly Government through the Minister is arguing for changes elsewhere, both within the localism Bill and the policy statement, and they will no doubt continue to do so. We cannot comment on the localism Bill, and I have already expressed our opinion of the clarity of the policy statement. Anything that contributes to a clearer, more streamlined process is in everyone's interests. We will do our utmost to make it as straightforward as possible in the transition period.

[124] **Kirsty Williams:** That brings us to the end of our questions this morning. I thank you for your attendance here and your help with our work. A transcript of this morning's proceedings will be sent to you for correction. You cannot change your mind and take back anything that you said, but if there are any issues, please get in touch. Thank you once again for your time this morning.

[125] **Dr Lane:** Would you mind if I asked what the timetable was for the completion of your inquiry? We would be interested in the outcome.

[126] **Kirsty Williams:** We hope to have everything published in January.

[127] **Dr Lane:** We would be grateful to be informed of that and to receive a copy of your report.

[128] **Kirsty Williams:** Of course.

[129] **Dr Lane:** Thank you. We have some papers available in English and Welsh if Members wish to avail themselves of them.

[130] **Kirsty Williams:** If you could leave them with the deputy clerk, that would be great.

10.00 a.m.

### **Ymchwiliad i Fioamrywiaeth: Sesiwn Wybodaeth Gefndirol Inquiry into Biodiversity: Scene-setting Session**

[131] **Kirsty Williams:** The committee decided some time ago that it wanted to look at biodiversity. This morning, we begin this new piece of work with a scene-setting session. I am therefore pleased to welcome our guests this morning, Dr Sean Christian and Stephen Bladwell. Thank you for taking the time to send in written representations and to join us this morning to take questions from committee members. As you can imagine, we have a long list of questions to ask, but if you would like to begin with some introductory comments on our inquiry from the perspective of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, we would be pleased to hear them, after which we will go into questions.

[132] **Dr Christian:** First, I thank the Sustainability Committee for the opportunity to give evidence to this important inquiry, and I congratulate the Assembly on the welcome leadership that it is showing in this important issue.

[133] In November, representatives of the Welsh and UK Governments will attend the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan. Along with every other country represented there, Wales will have missed its targets to halt the loss of biodiversity. However, Wales will be the only country there that is taking this failure seriously enough to openly investigate its causes and seek solutions at the highest level under the leadership of the National Assembly. We appreciate this open and honest, rather than defensive, approach, because it is an opportunity for international leadership, and it positions Wales to lead us out of the problem.

[134] As you are probably aware, the RSPB is an evidence-based organisation, by which I mean that we like to take action based on the best available scientific evidence and learn from our previous successes and failures. We make plenty of mistakes, but we have to learn from them. Openly and honestly examining what has worked really well and what has not delivered is fundamental to identifying the future directions that will lead us towards success. So, we are really grateful to the committee for taking a good hard look at what has gone before and for seeking to learn from the positives and negatives of what has not worked.

[135] There are a fair few other things that I could say about this, but I am sure that they will come out in questions.

[136] **Kirsty Williams:** I am sure that they will. Thank you for that. I guess that the fundamental question, which you touched on, is what, in your view, were the main reasons for Wales's failure to meet the 2010 targets? We acknowledge that everybody else is in the same position, but why is it that we did not reach them?

[137] **Mr Bladwell:** There is a range of issues, which are very complex. To break it down to the main issues and to look purely at the impact on biodiversity and why it is still declining, we think that it all comes down to the amount of habitat that is available for species and the ability of the ecosystem processes that operate in the wider landscape to function properly. It is also to do with how that is arranged in the landscape, so the fragmentation or breaking up of those habitats means that species and processes cannot function effectively. That is the direct cause. However, overwhelmingly, that has come about primarily because of economic reasons. Our pursuit of economic development does not currently marry well with biodiversity, although we are moving in the right direction through our sustainable development goals. So, that, I guess, is the main reason.

[138] **Dr Christian:** We have to face reality: while on paper we have a number of well-protected sites, the reality is that they are often poorly managed, legislation can be poorly enforced, and strategic planning can be absent. So, natural systems often suffer from unacceptable compromises when there is overwhelming pressure for development. Having said that we are a scientific organisation, the term ‘biodiversity’ is confusing for many people. We are talking about nature or natural systems, which is a term I much prefer. If that becomes partitioned off as a peripheral part of the decision-making process, it usually loses out.

[139] **Kirsty Williams:** Could you give us a real life example of how these compromises between economic development and nature play out in Wales, or examples of sites that should enjoy our protection but, for whatever reasons, the enforcement legislative regime to protect them is not fully utilised to do so?

[140] **Mr Bladwell:** I suppose that we have achieved some wins such as the Severn barrage proposals and the M4 proposals, which could have massive long-term impacts on biodiversity. Thankfully, the decision not to push forward at this stage has been taken, so they equate to some wins for biodiversity and species, and also for people. They are big examples, but it is often about small decisions that chip away at sites that are important for wildlife and habitats. These include everything from individual trees being cut down to developments being approved and built on sites that are important for a lot of our species, such as invertebrates and plants, which often go unnoticed and unaccounted for.

[141] **Dr Christian:** I would agree with that. We can talk about large-scale examples, but the problem is death by a thousand small cuts.

[142] **Kirsty Williams:** It is pernicious. One housing application does not seem to be a lot on its own, but if that is replicated a thousand times it will have an impact.

[143] **Joyce Watson:** People are very focused on the big gains, but I am particularly interested in the small gains, because of the multiplier effect. You cannot help but notice that new developments—which are mostly small in rural areas—seem to be devoid of trees or anything to do with biodiversity or sustainability. As an organisation, are you invited to make representations on local plans? You might say that planting a few trees would help with things such as surface water retention, and attracting birds and bees. Are you invited to make those comments at a local level, so that the wider perspective is taken into account?

[144] **Mr Bladwell:** As a non-governmental organisation, we are not a compulsory consultee, but we are directly or indirectly invited through our statutory partners to comment on things such as urban development plans. Where a development is proposed that meets a certain threshold in terms of its impact on a priority species or site, we would endeavour to address the issue and come to a workable compromise with the proposer.

[145] **Dr Christian:** To add to what Stephen was saying, the majority of our casework around planning is to do with playing catch up. We are often called in to try to work out how to make a scheme better or try to compensate for loss, whether it be a housing development, windfarm or port. We will give advice on the impacts that might accrue from the development and the legal problems that would face the developer. If that development ends up going ahead, we would then look for compensation to try to recreate habitats or to strengthen them.

10.10 a.m.

[146] **Alun Davies:** Dr Christian, in your original response to that question, you outlined the reasons why we have seen this loss of biodiversity. You said that it was down to poor management, poor legislation and poor implementation. Can you give us hard examples of these?

[147] **Dr Christian:** Stephen is probably better able to give the specifics. However, on the state of sites of special scientific interest for instance, there might well be a commitment on paper to trying to get such sites to the right condition, but the practical management on the ground is what is important. We talk about ‘ownership’ quite a lot—who owns the problem—but you can ‘own’ a dog; what is really important is how you care for it. There are protected areas for which we as a country and as statutory agencies have responsibility, but the crucial thing is whether they are kept up to the right condition.

[148] **Mr Bladwell:** We need to make the point that it is not the legislation per se; we are very supportive of the current raft of legislation in place in the planning regime, from the European Union right through to domestic legislation, such as the birds and habitats directives. However, your point about implementation is the key, and that is the big issue. The problem is implementation, or the guidelines used to implement the legislation. For example, if you take SSSIs, as Sean mentioned, the process for getting the correct management on the ground is rather convoluted. We have made good progress in the recent past in understanding the state of our special sites, but it is about navigating through that system so that the work on the ground gets them into the condition that they need to be in, so that they can support biodiversity and provide the services that we rely on. Many of the sites interact heavily with our agriculture sector, so they need to be productive sites in terms of biodiversity. They also need to be productive with regard to our use of them for recreation and so on.

[149] On the Ceredigion coast, for example, there is an SSSI—I visited it recently—where there is a section 15 management agreement, which says that it should be managed in a certain way. It also has a Tir Gofal agreement, which reinforces the management agreement. However, when you go to that site, you will see that it is in poor condition, because the management is not being played out on the ground. There is no mechanism, due to capacity generally, but also because of the way in which the guidelines are implemented, as I mentioned, by which the Countryside Council for Wales can actively enforce the proper and correct management of that site. As a result, in terms of biodiversity, it is quite poor, as it is in terms of its productive value. There are many similar examples. Large areas of the Brecon Beacons have been designated, and while they may look great from the roadside or the trackside, from the perspective of wildlife, they are impoverished, and you will not get the production from them.

[150] **Alun Davies:** Could you send us a note on that issue with regard to the Brecon Beacons? That would be quite useful for us, because it is a protected area. If we are failing to achieve that level of protection, it is important that we understand that.

[151] **Mr Bladwell:** Absolutely.

[152] **Dr Christian:** Just to follow on from that briefly, it is important to note that, where sites have been designated and recognised as being important, they are a representative sample. However, the erosion of natural systems is happening across the wider landscape, beyond the boundaries of protected areas. If we are not getting it right within those protected areas, we have less hope of doing that in the wider landscape. That is critical, because that is where conservation, agricultural management and the agri-environment schemes overlap. We are highly supportive of the development of the Glastir scheme, which, on paper, looks much better than its predecessors.

[153] **Kirsty Williams:** If farmers throw up their hands and say that they are not going to bother—that they are not going to do anything at all—you could end up in a worse situation than is currently the case. While it looks great on paper, unless people participate in the scheme, none of this work will be carried out.

[154] **Dr Christian:** That is right. The structure has to be better focused and targeted towards specific objectives, but it also has to be attractive to farmers; they have to see the reason to engage with it.

[155] **Kirsty Williams:** We will see about that.

[156] **Angela Burns:** I have two brief questions. Roughly, what is the RSPB's income in Wales?

[157] **Mr Bladwell:** I would have to get back to you on that one.

[158] **Angela Burns:** Are we talking £10 million, £1 million or—

[159] **Dr Christian:** We are at the bottom end of that scale.

[160] **Mr Bladwell:** As an organisation, we are quite small. I would have to send those figures on to you.

[161] **Angela Burns:** That leads to my second point, because you talk about death by a thousand cuts. You talk about planning applications happening in inappropriate areas, trees being chopped down and sites of interests where small things that we do not even notice are eradicated because of building work. Where is the Countryside Council for Wales in all of this? Is this not its job?

[162] **Mr Bladwell:** We work very closely with and support the Countryside Council for Wales. We recently signed a three-year agreement with CCW, and it provides support to us in many aspects of our work. Notwithstanding that, the issue for CCW is that it is not adequately resourced.

[163] **Angela Burns:** It is much better resourced than the RSPB in Wales, and one of its key objectives and aims is the prevention of biodiversity loss. So, when you talk about a death by a thousand cuts, I get the impression that you are running around Wales trying to prevent this biodiversity loss. You do not refer much to CCW and what part it is playing. How much integration is there between you? How well does it work with you on this issue?

[164] **Dr Christian:** We have a strategic partnership with CCW, which includes aspects such as data sharing of all of our survey data and the monitoring of protected sites and species in the wider landscapes, and CCW also funds quite a lot of our work. To that extent, we could not function without CCW—its funding and some of its specialisms and scientific knowledge. Some of its people are very good indeed. However, I take your point that it needs the funding to be able to deliver for us, so we would welcome a strengthened CCW. The tools are apparently there a lot of the time, but the way in which they are used and integrated is another issue.

[165] **Kirsty Williams:** It is in the Government's action plan. We get the message that there are organisations out there, but there is a lack of doing the work.

[166] **Joyce Watson:** You say in your evidence that mechanisms were deployed with varying levels of success. In your view, which mechanisms worked well, because that is what we need to know, and which were less successful or might need improving?

[167] **Mr Bladwell:** Agri-environment schemes are a good example. We are heavily reliant on agri-environment schemes, particularly on Tir Gofal at the moment, until Glastir kicks in—it is showing potential, as we have already discussed, but the proof will be in the delivery. Tir Gofal's mechanism showed potential to deliver on habitats, but it was imprecisely

targeted for species, which led to a bit of a gap. Given that we are only starting to monitor Tir Gofal, it is very difficult to understand what those impacts are. However, if we had had good baseline information at the start and monitored it throughout the programme, we would have been able to make very precise assessments on how effective the scheme was as a tool. Indirect evidence from surveys on wildlife shows that it is not working in the wider countryside, except in specific areas, where it has been targeted through a partnership approach with farmers who want to take their holding forward in terms of a place for their livelihood and for biodiversity and the species around them. Therefore, that is one mechanism, but there are other mechanisms.

10.20 a.m.

[168] If you consider special sites—whether they are, as I mentioned, special areas of conservation, special protection areas for birds, or sites of special scientific interest—again, you have varying degrees of effectiveness in terms of the implementation. However, the way in which the sites are managed again depends on the amount of resources that are available, as well as how willing the owners of the land are to come through and deliver the management. There are many other mechanisms in place, from baseline legislation through to proactive management measures. The environmental impact assessment, for example, has huge potential to provide a good level of protection for biodiversity. However, if it is implemented incorrectly or imprecisely, it is not worth the time and effort that is spent doing it.

[169] **Joyce Watson:** I have a supplementary question. We have talked a lot about land-based biodiversity; how much more complicated does it become if it is water-based or sea-based? My understanding is that you then get into a different dimension, and that it becomes much more complicated.

[170] **Mr Bladwell:** That is correct, particularly if you consider marine areas. However, the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 provides some good tools, which will enable the Government to put in place strong, protective and enhancing measures within the marine environment. Again, it is not easy, because it is difficult to see what is going on under the water, where, ultimately, it is all happening. However, the new Act provides a good base to improve the protection of our marine areas, from a biodiversity and a sustainable use perspective. This is a new piece of legislation, which interacts with many other established bits of legislation, as well as with bodies that use the oceans.

[171] Therefore, there are two key points. We need to get a good, coherent network of marine protected areas in place as soon as we can, for everyone—along the lines of 2012. We then need to have some sort of protective regime, similar to what we are moving towards in our land-based environment in terms of a strategic goal and a spatial, geographically-based system, whereby we know exactly what we can do, where and what the trade-offs are, and what will allow us to maintain that as a system into the future. Freshwater is probably halfway between the two. The water framework directive is coming down, and we are taking some good steps forward in terms of managing our freshwater systems. However, again, that has a much closer link to what happens on the land, because the quality of our water systems is dependent on the quality of the adjacent land, but we are making good progress there. Schemes such as Glastir could potentially play a big role in improving the quality of our freshwater systems.

[172] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Yr ydych wedi cyfeirio at gynhadledd Nagoya. Yr ydych wedi dweud bod Cymru yn mynd i'r gynhadledd, o leiaf, gan gydnabod ei methiannau o ran cyrraedd targedau bioamrywiaeth—ac y mae pob gwlad arall **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** You have referred to the Nagoya conference. You have said that Wales is, at least, attending that conference, recognising its failures in terms of reaching its biodiversity targets—and every other country has failed to reach those targets.

wedi methu â chyrraedd y targedau hynny. Fodd bynnag, nid yw hynny yn ddo'i hun o unrhyw werth os nad ydym yn mynd i newid y math o strategaethau sy'n bodoli ar hyn o bryd, ac yn creu fframwaith a fydd yn sicrhau y byddwn yn cyrraedd y targedau newydd sydd wedi cael eu gosod gan yr Undeb Ewropeaidd ar gyfer 2020.

However, that in itself is not of any value if we are not going to change the kinds of strategies that exist at present, and create a framework that will ensure that we will reach the new targets that have been set by the European Union for 2020.

[173] Felly, beth sydd yn rhaid i ni ei wneud o ran newid strategaeth? Yr ydych wedi cyfeirio yn eithaf helaeth at gynllun Glastir. Fodd bynnag, fel y dywedodd Kirsty yn gynharach, mae rhagolygon ar hyn o bryd mai canran gymharol fach o ffermwyr fydd yn penderfynu cymryd rhan yn y cynllun newydd. Felly, ni fydd yn sicrhau llwyddiant. Beth sydd yn rhaid ei wneud o ran cael strategaeth i sicrhau ein bod yn cyrraedd y targedau neu o leiaf yn llawer agosach atynt yn 2020 nac ydym yn 2010?

Therefore, what do we have to do in terms of changing strategy? You have referred extensively to the Glastir scheme. However, as Kirsty said earlier, it is currently forecast that only a small percentage of farmers will decide to take part in the new scheme. Therefore, it will not ensure success. What has to be done with regard to having a strategy to ensure that we either reach the targets or are much closer towards them in 2020 than we are in 2010?

[174] **Dr Christian:** I agree. The jury is still out on Glastir. On paper, it has the potential to achieve great gains in the wider landscape for biodiversity targets and for those ecosystem services that will be vital in the future for clean water, the storage of carbon and so on, which will help us in fighting climate change. So, the jury may be out, but it is one tool that we will have at our disposal. We are hopeful that the scheme will be efficient, that people will join it and that the measures will work. It is also being seen as running in tandem with another approach that we have welcomed, namely the natural environment framework. To some extent, Wales is ahead of the game in trying to embrace the ecosystem-level approach. In our evidence we mentioned Professor Lawton's review, which looked at evidence in England about why targets had been missed there. If you can get hold of a copy, I would suggest that you take a look at it. It is very useful and includes 24 recommendations. The main point that comes out of it is that our system of protected areas will not do the job, and so we have to think on a much larger scale. We need more and bigger protected sites, and they need to be better and they need to be connected. So, there are four points.

[175] That can be called landscape scale, or Futurescapes, as the RSPB calls it, ecosystem scale, or water-catchment scale, which I am sure is what the Environment Agency calls it. Looking at the landscape and trying to work on the biggest possible scale to improve things, then looking at how you can affect land-use patterns through agri-environment funding and, in parallel with that, working on those protected areas where you can give a secure base for species and habitats to expand out from: all those have to happen in common. On the one hand we are very much in favour of the progress towards an ecosystem approach, and if we can get that from the natural environment framework, that will be fantastic. It places a lot of emphasis on the partnership—the new buzzword—between Government and the third sector, whereas we see the partnership within Government as being critical, and it is critical that the different arms of Government are operating together. The strategic management of Wales's landscape has to be multifocal and has to deal with many issues, which are fundamentally to do with people and those important resources that we have talked about. Biodiversity is just one of the things that need to be taken into account.

[176] **Kirsty Williams:** You anticipated very well the questions about the effects—

[177] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** May I ask a quick supplementary question?

[178] **Kirsty Williams:** Yes, if it is very quick.

[179] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** It seems that you are saying that we need to do what we are already doing, but do it better and on a larger scale.

[180] **Dr Christian:** What we certainly do not need to do is throw out what we do already. At the moment, we aspire to having a system of protected areas that are well managed, while focusing on particular delivery for a species, habitat or particular objectives. We must not depart from that but build upon it, and we must acknowledge that the way in which the wider landscape is used in Wales is absolutely critical. If 80 per cent of our land surface is managed for agriculture, then agriculture has a huge role to play in that, and bringing farmers on board with us is vital.

[181] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** You are confident that if we do that we will be able to reach the 2020 targets.

[182] **Dr Christian:** Targets are great, but they are only as good as the implementation.

[183] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** They are no good unless you reach them.

[184] **Dr Christian:** My understanding is that the 2010 target was a policy target. We never had a fully funded strategy to stop the loss of biodiversity by 2010. That did not happen, so what we had was a policy target, and where we always fall down is on the implementation.

10.30 a.m.

[185] **Lorraine Barrett:** We have started to talk about some of this, but what improvements are needed to deliver the mechanisms for biodiversity in the short and long term to ensure that those future targets are achieved? How would you prioritise the improvements?

[186] **Mr Bladwell:** If you are looking at the short term, we already have some things in place, which we have already discussed in some detail. I will not go into any more detail about Glastir. Obviously, if it is implemented effectively, it will have an impact in the relatively short term. We are talking about the wider countryside. To build on that in the longer term, Wales needs to take a strong stance because it could provide a great deal of benefit to Wales in terms of reform of the common agricultural policy. So, if we look to a longer term solution through the common agricultural policy whereby more funding is diverted through the various pillars into a land management sector that is based on not only providing or supporting productive systems, but providing more support for biodiversity and wildlife species and habitats, that would be a longer-term solution. If you put the two together and have more resources under the agri-environment element, you could channel that through the current structure of Glastir to have a bigger impact on a larger scale, which is what Sean was talking about. So, it needs to be targeted at very specific levels, but it needs to be done on a larger scale, and we need to implement it more effectively.

[187] With regard to other measures, our protected sites, which Sean has mentioned, are what you might call the jewels in the crown. It is fundamental that we retain protected sites as the cornerstone of our policy and delivery for biodiversity. So we need to use the existing legislation more effectively. We can provide you with detailed information on improvements that we think could be made in the short term and the longer term to the sites network. I will not go into that in too much detail now. That goes right through to the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and work in the marine environment.



[188] **Lorraine Barrett:** Do you think that the Wales Biodiversity Partnership and the local biodiversity partnerships are fit for purpose? Could they be improved?

[189] **Mr Bladwell:** A great deal of time and effort has been put in by bodies from Government at all levels right through to the non-Government sector in a partnership approach, obviously, to the Wales Biodiversity Partnership. The framework around that and how work is delivered through that framework have been improved significantly in recent years. It is a bit too early at this stage to say whether it has had any large-scale effect, but it is our belief that it will do in future. So, there is now a system in place. That is not to say that it cannot or should not be reviewed, but it is currently a workable system. Again, the issue is how it is resourced. We have talked about how much money the RSPB has to direct to this work in Wales. We are one of the larger non-governmental organisations in Wales. Some of the other organisations, such as Butterfly Conservation and Plantlife, are much smaller, but they are expected to put an equal amount of time and effort into this partnership, so it is very important to be able to resource that. I think that we will get much better value for money if that structure is supported effectively.

[190] **Lorraine Barrett:** We talk about biodiversity—and I am obviously on board with the whole project—and you talk a great deal about rural areas, but I just want to make the point that some of us were in a long battle with the RSPB over the Cardiff bay barrage. At the time, there was an argument about the birds that would not be able to feed on the mudflats. The only reason that they were feeding on the mudflats was that they were filthy and full of sewage that was coming down the rivers. Although that was a big contentious project, it has delivered a different sort of biodiversity. We have a hugely diverse population of birds, insects, bats and fish. It is amazing—there are millions of fish there now—and I think that it has improved the health of the local population.

[191] We now have a nature reserve and a country park and people are much healthier because they are able to walk more. I am just making the point that, while that was contentious in terms of affecting the biodiversity that was there, nature has adapted to what is there now. We have an amazing range of flora, fauna and everything that you could mention. I just wanted to make that point. I have been listening to this whole debate and I think that that is a good example in terms of economic development. You talked about the M4 relief road and the Severn barrage. Sometimes there can be a compromise and you get benefits from what you might have thought would be a really damaging project.

[192] **Alun Davies:** I was interested in what you said about the role of the Assembly Government. It felt that it did have the funded committed strategy to reverse the decline of biodiversity in Wales that we have referred to. When the Wales environment strategy was launched, that was part of its purpose. Clearly, that was a part of a driver of policy. In one particular area of that policy on protected areas, you mentioned earlier the Brecon Beacons. You do not give too much detail about this in your written evidence, but do you think that national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty are failing to prevent species loss? Secondly, do you think that there is a demand for a new statutory framework for protected areas in Wales?

[193] **Mr Bladwell:** In answer to your first question, it is very hard to tease out whether or not national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty are contributing over and above anything that is happening in the wider landscape. There are varying levels between each of the different areas. Each of the different national parks has various structures in place and delivers various levels of protection and positive management. The same applies to the areas of outstanding natural beauty. However, as a whole, generally speaking, it is very difficult to tease out whether or not there has been any significant benefit for species and habitats within those areas. I think that they could do much more.

[194] Each of the AONBs, for example, will be reviewing or may have been reviewing the delivery of biodiversity within their remit. We believe that much more needs to be done, and could be done, by both parties—because they are basically designated as landscape areas—to protect biodiversity and, more importantly, to positively manage it. The protection, particularly in the national parks, is the same protection as that of any other local authority. However, in terms of positive management, they could definitely do more.

[195] A review report by DEFRA was published this year on the implementation of the biodiversity duty, which is one area in which the Countryside Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly have made significant progress in raising the awareness of biodiversity and the duty on biodiversity within all levels of government. However, it needs to be transferred to practical action, which is the issue.

[196] **Kirsty Williams:** The mention of a national park gets people excited. [*Laughter.*] I now call on Angela.

[197] **Angela Burns:** I just found your answer to be slightly disconcerting because the national parks will hold up the preservation of nature, the increase of biodiversity, the protection of all things green, flying type of stuff and so on, as their reason for not moving forward on social or economic development pillars, yet you sit here and say that, for all of that, and by holding back everything else, there does not appear to be a clear lead from these organisations, or a clear difference between the bit of land that they manage and the bits of land that anyone else in Wales manages.

[198] **Mr Bladwell:** That is a good point. As I said, it is very difficult to tease it out. Until we can do that, we cannot make a definitive statement either way.

[199] **Dr Christian:** However, they have tremendous potential. When you talk about the landscape—

[200] **Mr Bladwell:** Absolutely.

[201] **Angela Burns:** They have had tremendous potential for an awfully long time though.

[202] **Alun Davies:** Sixty years of potential.

10.40 a.m.

[203] **Dr Christian:** Yes, exactly. If we are talking about integrated, sustainable and multifunctional land management, they should be able to present a model for the rest of us to follow. They are large areas of Wales.

[204] **Mr Bladwell:** There is a difference between the three with regard to their delivery.

[205] **Kirsty Williams:** Given the level of interest with regard to national parks, and given what you have said about the variance in performance, we would be interested to hear your views about what is working well and not so well in which parks. Perhaps you would be good enough to supply us with that information. We will be speaking to representatives of the national parks, so we would be very grateful if you could get that information to us quickly, because it would help us to frame the questions that we would like to ask them.

[206] **Leanne Wood:** You talked about land management being an issue with regard to biodiversity. Our previous witnesses in this session were from the Infrastructure Planning Commission. You mentioned competing aims in your opening remarks, such as economic development and energy security. These are important aims, but they seem to contradict, or

have the potential to contradict, the possibility of maintaining healthy ecosystems in Wales—I am thinking of opencast mining, for example. Some of the future decisions on energy generation will not be made in Wales, but by the IPC. So, while we might have many good documents, targets and aims for biodiversity in Wales, it could be the case that the IPC will come along and overrule the Welsh Assembly Government's view on a particular development. Is that a problem in this context?

[207] **Mr Bladwell:** There is definitely potential for that. Decisions taken outside Wales could potentially have large impacts on Wales. However, one would hope that, at that scale of development whereby the IPC would step in, measures would be employed, particularly through the habitats directive, that would reduce any damaging effects either by the halting of that particular development or the appropriate compensatory measures being put in place to ensure that there is no net change in the level of biodiversity.

[208] **Leanne Wood:** Do compensatory measures work?

[209] **Mr Bladwell:** We mentioned the Cardiff bay barrage earlier and the compensatory measures for that resulted in the Newport wetlands, which is a fantastic reserve. There are opportunities there for people engagement, education, such as schools visits, and biodiversity. It is fantastic. So, compensatory measures can work if they are done properly and if the appropriate assessments are made initially to ensure that a consistent measure is put in place for the damage that will be created.

[210] **Kirsty Williams:** A few of us are going to the wetlands on Monday.

[211] **Dr Christian:** You would be very welcome. I have one slight point on that. We know that Newport wetlands have been very successful, for instance schoolchildren come from as far afield as Bristol, and most of the children in south Wales have visited several times. It offers very good communication about the value of nature and the CCW reserve protects very important habitats. What it does not do, however, is compensate for the populations of birds that were lost when the barrage was built. So, what we know from science, from the British Trust for Ornithology, is that the redshank population moved and suffered increased mortality and reduced productivity. They initially tried to move over to other parts of the estuary, as far away as Bridgwater bay. Was it successful? Yes, it was in part. As I said earlier, with regard to the death of a thousand cuts, they only need to be very small cuts, but the cumulative effect is great.

[212] This balancing of issues is critical; we are a small country with very important issues. It is important to keep emphasising that the natural world provides countless benefits to people, many of which they are unaware of. We might initially think of food, but they also include fuel, water, energy, protection from natural hazards, such as flooding, places for recreation and relaxation and places that are vital for the health and wellbeing of the population. I keep emphasising that we cannot put the natural world in a box and say, 'We'll manage that for the benefit of habitats and species'. That is not the RSPB's position. We say that it must be integrated into a much more strategic approach. We are a small country and we must get it right for everyone who lives here.

[213] **Leanne Wood:** Is there not a danger that if we focus all our efforts on protecting certain areas, such as national parks, those areas that fall outside those protected areas will be the ones with all the dirty polluting developments?

[214] **Dr Christian:** Absolutely.

[215] **Mr Bladwell:** We touched on this earlier, but in terms of the protected sites and protected landscapes, if you want to make a distinction between the two, in order to improve

our performance on biodiversity our approach to management needs to extend beyond those boundaries. So, when we improve sites, we need to employ good management, to buffer them and to look at the areas in between them and at connecting those areas so that they are functional for species and habitats. That does not have to mean a corridor or a direct link; they can be stepping stones. That extends throughout, from the large sites to small sites that are important for nature conservation at a local level. They should all contribute to a big network of sites that are ecologically coherent and allow species to move and habitats to persist. That will also provide huge benefits potentially in terms of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

[216] **Leanne Wood:** To what extent are biodiversity targets and actions integrated across the Government at present?

[217] **Mr Bladwell:** We have mentioned the environment strategy and I am not sure whether the targets within that are integrated across all levels of government, but certainly some parts of government take their role in delivering those targets and actions seriously. Others will not have a direct function in terms of doing that, but they could have indirectly. There needs to be much smarter collaboration across the board on delivering targets. So, even if a department, or a section, is not directly responsible for delivering a target, that does not mean that it cannot contribute in some way.

[218] **Leanne Wood:** How can that integration be improved?

[219] **Mr Bladwell:** There are various mechanisms. We are already seeing some movement along those lines with the natural environment framework. I know that a lot of the work that was done leading up to the consultation to raise awareness of biodiversity and to outline responsibilities for the sustainability commitment across Welsh Assembly Government departments. The commitment to sustainability is the key there, and the natural environment framework could potentially bridge a lot of those gaps, if it is designed and developed effectively.

[220] **Angela Burns:** You talked about the natural environment framework, but what you have just said slightly contradicts your report, where you say that:

[221] ‘The climate debate has advanced at a far greater pace and has a far stronger governmental commitment to setting up measurable policy targets and indicators.’

[222] Therefore, what steps do you believe should be taken to ensure that biodiversity loss is placed on an equal footing with the climate change policy in the new NEF?

[223] **Mr Bladwell:** That is a very good point. If you look at the structures behind the climate change debate on a global level, without getting into too many details, you will see a lot of movement and a lot of commitment, which translates into commitment at country level. There are a lot of structures behind that, so that there is a lot of science behind that. You have the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the various structures in the UK, such as the UK climate impacts programme, which is providing a lot of information and evidence to develop the proper policies and structures to deliver that. Biodiversity has not had that in the past. We have a lot of evidence, but that concerted, consistent movement across the board has not been apparent. So, in the targets of the Climate Change Commission, which has been inaugurated and is working, biodiversity is a bit player, at present. There are moves, particularly in some sections of that and the Climate Change Act 2008, for biodiversity to play a more prominent role. We would argue that that is fundamental in adapting to climate change and providing soft engineering solutions to mitigation issues, such as flooding and carbon sequestration.

10.50 a.m.

[224] **Angela Burns:** May I posit a thought, Chair? I strongly agree with Lorraine's comments, on which Leanne has also touched. I do not think that biodiversity will gain credence as a strand, if you like, until we look at it in the round with social and economic impacts. Yes, there have obviously been great changes to Cardiff bay, but there has been replacement and, on top of that, so much more—it has enabled the development of an area, it has enabled industry to come in, with people and transportation links, and it has encouraged an awful lot. I sometimes have a concern that we need to protect and increase biodiversity, because it is fundamental to the world's health. We have to bring it into the mainstream; we have not touched at all on how we engage with the general public to bring people on board, or how we talk to the general public about this particular butterfly or that particular slug or caterpillar. People are not there. It is still too much of a specialist subject out on its own, and if we want to bring it into the natural environment framework as a more important element of climate change strategies, we have to—not demystify it, exactly, but stop it being seen as so precious. It has to be ranked alongside all the other pressures on people and on the world.

[225] **Dr Christian:** I agree with part of that. Some people's eyes glaze over when you talk about biodiversity. To challenge you slightly, it sometimes depends on which species you talk to people about; individual species catch people's attention. If they think of a species as 'their robin', or see a red kite flying over their house, they get engaged. I know of guys working in a quarry who are thrilled that peregrines are nesting there. Those are individual things, but, beyond that, the notion of moving away from the technical term 'biodiversity'—whether that is to 'nature', 'wildlife' or whatever—and trying to engage people and make that concrete and relevant to other areas of Government is a hard task. It can be difficult to explain why this is relevant to someone else's agenda, when it seems to them like someone else's problem.

[226] **Angela Burns:** To explore that a bit further, if biodiversity is a key piece of the jigsaw puzzle that is the natural environment framework, should that framework—and this is a Minister's word, and I hate it, but I cannot think of an alternative—be 'overarching', or should it sit on a level with all the other policies that currently run in Wales?

[227] **Mr Bladwell:** That is a difficult one to tease out. I cannot make any assumptions about where it should sit within Government policy, but certainly it should be right up there as a fundamental tool or framework to deliver our sustainable development commitments. You mentioned biodiversity as one component, but, from our perspective, we would say that biodiversity is fundamental to delivering sustainable development.

[228] **Dr Christian:** The term 'tool' is a good one—it is one of the tools in the toolkit, and so is the use of subsidies or the planning system to influence the wider agricultural landscape. We have not touched on the networked environmental regions approach, but we have been quite supportive of that, and of developing the Wales spatial plan to try to integrate the various pressures from the transport network or development.

[229] **Angela Burns:** It is—

[230] **Kirsty Williams:** Angela, could you make this question brief please, because we need to move on to Jeff before we run out of time?

[231] **Angela Burns:** It is not something that we have covered—we have touched on it. Briefly, what steps could we take as a committee and an Assembly to enable better engagement with the public on biodiversity? As you say, people talk about the endangered peregrine falcon, or whatever the species might be, but a lot of other stuff is dead boring, but incredibly important. What could we do to promote engagement with that, in quick one-two-threes?

[232] **Mr Bladwell:** This inquiry is a good start in raising awareness, not only within the Assembly and the Welsh Government, but also among other players.

[233] **Angela Burns:** What specific steps should we as a nation take to engage people in biodiversity?

[234] **Mr Bladwell:** You touched on a good point in terms of demystifying the issue. Although we have made a lot of progress in the last 10 years, biodiversity is a difficult concept for your average person to comprehend. Given that it is so large and all-pervading, it is a language change, and we are now moving into a language of ecosystems that is even more difficult to comprehend.

[235] **Dr Christian:** We are talking about nature, wellbeing, health and so on.

[236] **Mr Bladwell:** We need to make it relevant to people, which is where we will make our biggest gains.

[237] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I have the final question, which is on cascading good practice. Previous questions have mopped this up to a large extent, but you may wish to add something else. You provide several good examples of biodiversity practice—you mentioned two in Powys, and the north of England was also mentioned. What more can we do to cascade good practice, which is obviously advantageous, as well as perhaps highlighting practice that is not so good? Is there anything more that you would like to add?

[238] **Mr Bladwell:** Again, the inquiry provides a good basis for that. The natural environment framework is collating examples of good practice, and there is a lot of it around. Therefore, in terms of pushing that forward—as we have mentioned before—it is about continuing to develop that best practice. We do not need to look at a fundamentally new approach, but we need to build on the things that are working at present, we need to look at the current conservation tools, and use the best scientific and practical evidence that we have, in order to build on those good practices. We also need to do it on an appropriate scale, so that you scale things up if necessary, but that you also consider a much smaller scale if that is what is necessary, because biodiversity operates on many scales.

[239] **Jeff Cuthbert:** Is this being done systematically at present, or can we improve the process?

[240] **Mr Bladwell:** We could certainly improve the process, in terms of collaboration across Government and the private sector, which has a huge part to play in protecting and enhancing biodiversity. We need to bring the private sector into this; that builds on changing our language. Furthermore, new information on services, and the value provided, could potentially have a big impact in bringing the private sector and the general public along on the protection and conservation of biodiversity, and its fundamental role and relevance to people, for their recreation, wellbeing and food.

[241] **Kirsty Williams:** I believe that that brings this session to a close. Thank you for your time and for your paper, as well as your offer to provide further information. The committee would like to take you up on that, especially around the national parks, performance and legislation, if that is appropriate—you said that there were some changes to legislation that you would like to highlight; that would be very welcome.

10.58 a.m.

**Papurau i'w Nodi**  
**Papers to Note**

[242] **Kirsty Williams:** I wish to bring the papers to note to Members' attention. The next meeting will be on 14 October, when we will take evidence from a number of planning authorities as well as Planning Inspectorate Wales. That brings this morning's meeting to a close. Diolch yn fawr.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10.58 a.m.*  
*The meeting ended at 10.58 a.m.*