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'POSITIVE PLANNING FOR WALES'
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Good Morning *Bore Da*

Mae'n dda fod gymaint ohonoch chi'n gallu bod yn bresennol heddiw ar gyfer Cynhadledd Cynllunio cyntaf RTPI Cymru as dw i'n siwr gyda agenda mor eang a heriol y cewch chi ddiwrnod diddorol iawn.

It is good to see the inaugural RTPI Cymru Annual Planning Conference so well attended and I am sure you will all have a very stimulating day with such a wide and challenging agenda.

Thank you Kelvin (MacDonald) for opening today's proceedings. Thanks also to Jim Claydon for allowing me to switch our sessions. I know you will be setting the UK context and outline key issues, but I would like to take this opportunity today, to set out what we are doing in Wales, focussing particularly on climate change.

Planning for Climate Change

I'm sure I don't need to convince this audience that climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing the world – and one that requires concerted action by us all.

I have put tackling climate change at the top of my agenda, which also covers waste, water, bio-diversity, access, marine and energy issues, as well as planning. As I have lead responsibility for climate change within the Cabinet, it is also at the centre of the Assembly Government's agenda.

Wales may be a small country, and what we can do may be small on a global scale, but the Assembly Government fully recognises its duty and the importance of minimising future climate change and is determined to show how Wales can be at the forefront of the drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Since I took up this Ministerial portfolio one of the things that has pleased me most is the real groundswell of interest and support in the climate change debate.

It's that very real interest that I want to develop. The Assembly Government is not just here to put in place policies to force through the changes we need to tackle climate change. I see the Government as the lead body to encourage society to change its behaviour and attitude towards climate change, using policy changes where appropriate.

The Stern Report (*October 2006*) expressed the consequences and dangers of inaction in economic terms – explaining that acting quickly today is a lot less costly than waiting until tomorrow.

As planning is central to shaping our environment, your profession has a key role to play in engaging people and communities in tackling climate change.

Climate Change is a symptom of our unsustainable lifestyles. If everyone in the world lived as we do in the UK, we would need three planets to support us. In order to tackle climate change, we need to move to a low carbon, more sustainable way of living which enables us all to live within the planet's resources. The planning system can ensure that we use land wisely and ensure that new and existing buildings are more sustainable, but more about that later.

The floods last summer were a stark reminder of the challenges of adapting to climate change. Planning provides a vital mechanism for collaborative working to tackle such challenges– particularly between professions and between our policy, regulatory and operational organisations. Through better sharing of information and knowledge, by shaping complementary strategies and plans by translating these gains into positive action, we can enable local communities to better cope with climate change, both now and in the future.

One of the 'real' impacts of climate change will be increasing flood and coastal risk. We need to understand the impacts and the planning system has to cater for them. There is a lot of work going on in this area and you will no doubt be aware that Sir Michael Pitt published his report into last summer's floods on 24 June. We are implementing this report in Wales and this will support our move to a risk management approach to flooding and the development of a wider toolkit of flood risk management measures.

We all recognise that our communities will face challenges in coping with these increased flood and coastal risks. For this reason we are developing and revisiting our key strategic plans. Catchment Flood Management Plans,

which in Wales will include surface water management, will be completed by March 2009 and Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) will be revised by 2011. The revision of SMPs will take into account the effects of climate change by considering the impact of increasing risk on local policies over the next 20, 50 and 100 years. In the worst scenario this could see communities becoming unsustainable over the longer term. If this was the case then we need to understand when this will happen and how we deal with it, and the planning system will have a role to play in managing the transition affecting people, property and places.

It is of vital importance, therefore, that all those participating in the planning process know about these plans and are fully engaged in facilitating the delivery of planning outcomes which are based fully upon the need to adapt to the increasing risks associated with climate change. I cannot stress enough how well placed planners are to explore and develop the avenues available for securing better engagement with technical and environmental colleagues and delivering the positive outcomes which will enable adaptation to climate change.

On the drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Welsh Assembly Government aims to achieve 3% annual reductions from 2011, as set out in the One Wales Document. We will be looking to deliver significant savings from the domestic, transport and public sector and other areas, including land use, where we have significant levers, such as planning, available to us.

In the short time that I have been Minister I have come to appreciate the important role that planners have in delivering the Assembly Government's agenda for Wales as set out in One Wales.

The planning system can make an important contribution to the Assembly Government's wider initiatives to combat rising greenhouse gas emissions and ensuring that our communities are able to withstand the current and predicted effects of climate change on Wales.

We have already rolled out a number of initiatives to ensure that the planning system plays a full part in our response to climate change.

Firstly, we are consulting on revisions to TAN 12 Design to ensure that climate change is a key consideration in the design of new building projects.

Design and Access Statements will be important tools to demonstrate early on in any project not just traditional aspects of good design, but also how they have achieved and addressed the climate change agenda.

We plan to secure the necessary secondary legislation to require design and access statements next year giving local planning authorities and developers time to prepare.

Secondly, in 2007 we consulted on lifting the barriers to domestic energy micro-generation equipment to help residents take up individual sources of renewable energy in Wales by removing the need to obtain planning permission where the impact would not be significant. We are also working the Department for Communities and Local Government on similar amendments to the Permitted Development regime for non-domestic buildings. We will bring forward secondary legislation in due course.

Removing unnecessary requirements for planning permission will help to make micro-generation more attractive and accessible for the public. I envisage a significant increase in the amount of energy generated in homes, offices and so on, using micro-generation technologies. Our micro-generation action plan will support this and the UK Government's Renewable Energy Strategy published for consultation last week proposes financial incentives to support householder take-up.

Thirdly, we will be reviewing TAN 8 following the production of the Energy Route Map and an Assembly Government Energy Strategy. The revised version of TAN 8 will increase the targets for energy from renewables, drawn from a range of sources. Work on the revision of TAN 8 is scheduled to commence next year. We are also looking to provide some funding for those LPAs with Strategic Search Areas (SSA) to support their work on the larger wind farm developments.

The revised TAN will also provide guidance on local renewable energy assessments, providing examples of how we can locate development and maximise opportunities to adopt renewable and low carbon energy.

And finally, in December 2006 we consulted on a range of proposed changes to Planning Policy Wales (PPW) through a Planning for Climate Change Consultation Document. This contained a draft Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS) to ensure that Climate Changes issues were fully addressed by national planning policy.

Since the conclusion of the Planning for Climate Change consultation in March 2007, it has been necessary to review the proposed policies in order to take into account the progress on the Climate Change agenda in Wales.

Most notably this includes the Assembly Government's aspiration for

- all new buildings in Wales to meet Zero Carbon standards from 2011,
- our One Wales commitment to the devolution of Building Regulations, and
- the adoption of the Code for Sustainable Homes in Wales as the preferred tool for assessing the sustainability of new homes in Wales.

Currently, all private sector housing must meet the requirements set out in the Building Regulations that are common to England and Wales.

Devolution of these Building Regulations will allow us to set higher mandatory energy standards for all new Welsh housing, irrespective of tenure, and enable the aspiration of zero carbon by 2011 to be achieved and establish a level playing field across all sectors.

The UK Government has confirmed its willingness to devolve the regulations and I hope to be able to announce a timetable shortly.

We recognise that the zero carbon aspiration is challenging and I am determined to do everything possible to pave the way for a major shift in the sustainability of buildings of Wales.

I have set in motion a number of actions, which will inform and develop our strategy for higher standards.

I decided earlier this year to require at least Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes for social housing in Wales, moving to Levels 4 and 5 as quickly as possible.

I have asked the Sustainable Development Commission to lead on engaging with a range of stakeholders, what I am calling my "coalition of the willing", including industry and the skills sector – both professional and trade - so that we can work positively with businesses to demonstrate how the standards can be met cost-effectively and to put Welsh businesses in a position to take advantage of the market opportunities.

The Sustainable Development Commission is forging ahead with this work and intends reporting to the Welsh Climate Change Commission in the Autumn.

The National Assembly for Wales' Sustainability Committee has also made recommendations on reducing the carbon emissions from the residential sector as they relate to planning, and the proposal that I will be outlining in a moment responds to these.

The response to the Planning for Climate Consultation identified that both local planning authorities and developers desire a more straightforward national approach to planning for climate change. Local planning authorities wanted clear and national consistency, while developers sought a level playing field for any requirements for the incorporation of renewable energy.

I am today responding to these comments by proposing a robust and deliverable national policy divided into three parts:

1. the use of sustainable building standards in planning policy;
2. the incorporation of local renewable and low carbon sources into new developments, and
3. the flexibility in local development plans to accelerate the move towards our overall goal of zero carbon buildings and more sustainable developments.

Just as I have adopted the Code for Sustainable Homes as the preferred tool to assess the sustainability of new social housing in Wales; I now want to extend the use of the Code as the preferred method for assessing the

sustainability of **all new housing** built in Wales. BREEAM will be adopted as the preferred tool to assess the sustainability of non-domestic buildings.

The Code itself is an innovative new approach to encourage house builders to go beyond minimum standards, not only in relation to carbon emissions but in other aspects of sustainability as well. It is also a signal for house buyers to demand more. The Code remains voluntary but this does not go far enough if we are to move towards Zero Carbon in Wales, sooner rather than later.

I therefore propose to use national planning policy to set a minimum sustainable buildings standard based on the Code for Sustainable Homes for new homes, and the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Scheme (BREEAM) for other buildings. This standard will initially be set at Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM 'Very Good' for all major developments, i.e. developments of over 10 or more housing units or with a floor-space of 1000m² or more. We intend the policy to commence in April 2009.

This policy will ensure that there is a level playing field across Wales and avoid the unnecessary burden for each local planning authority to devise, justify and propose similar policies to improve the sustainability of new buildings in their Local Development Plan (LDP).

For the second part of the policy, we have seen that councils such as the London Borough of Merton have invigorated the use of renewable energy in new developments. I recognise that the planning system should do more to encourage the uptake of these technologies, but I wanted a flexible approach for Wales.

This is why we are proposing a national minimum requirement for major development proposals to incorporate renewable and low carbon sources which equates to 10% of the regulated emissions, Merton plus if you like. This is in addition to the energy efficiency measures required by the Code.

The policy focuses on carbon reduction where both renewable energy technologies such as solar panels, and low carbon sources such as combined heat and power schemes, can help reduce the carbon footprint of new developments in Wales.

I also recognise that on many sites it is more advantageous both in terms of costs and carbon reduction, to seek solutions both on-site and near-site, but not remote off-site. The policy reflects this.

I do however recognise that planning is also about appreciating local circumstances and opportunities. On certain **strategic sites** there may be opportunities for standards higher than the national minimum to be achieved. The third part of the policy allows a local planning authority to do this, and I would strongly encourage you to look at the opportunities in your area for more innovative solutions to higher sustainable building standards.

I will be publishing the details of this consultation document next week and I welcome all your views on this key area of planning for climate change policy.

Following completion of this further consultation on climate change, we will bring together existing Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statements into a consolidated PPW later this year.

I have already highlighted that the national minimum requirements will not come into force until April 2009, and we are committed to prepare a draft Technical Advice Note specifically on these proposals.

I recognise that the delivery of sustainable and zero carbon developments in Wales requires a greater understanding of the opportunities at the local authority level. This is why we will be carrying out research to look at the barriers and opportunities faced by local planning authorities in Wales to delivering zero carbon developments. The findings of which will help us provide effective guidance, training and support to local planning authorities.

Effective public engagement and communication on Climate Change issues is very important and I have made this a major focus of our early work.

It is not just in the way we plan the future of our towns and cities that the planning system can help tackle climate change. The existing housing stock makes a very significant contribution to Welsh carbon emissions. During the past year local planning authorities in Wales received over 13,000 householder applications. These applications include substantial alterations and improvements, such as extensions, porches and garage conversions.

I believe that we should look at all opportunities in the planning system to tackle climate change. This is a prime example of where we can influence people who are improving their home to think about how those changes can be made in a way which helps tackle climate change. Which is why I am pleased to launch today a guide on climate change targeted specifically at this householder improvement audience.

With the help of the Design Commission for Wales, the Energy Saving Trust, and the Welsh Local Government Association, the **'Improving your Home - A Climate Change Guide'** details 10 common projects that a householder may carry out to improve their home. Alongside these projects are a number of measures that can be undertaken to respond to climate change in the most effective way.

For example, when a householder is thinking of adding an extension to their home I want to encourage them to think about the orientation of the extension to reduce carbon emissions, and also to think about the materials that they use to ensure they are resilient to flooding. There also may be opportunities to improve the fabric of the existing building at the same time, for example by upgrading insulation or installing a more efficient heating system.

It is these small measures and changes in how people think about improving their home, that can go a long way to reducing carbon emissions and making sure that the existing stock can be resilient to climate change.

I want to encourage all local planning authorities to disseminate this guide to those people that come to you for information on making changes to their home.

But I don't just want homes to be more sustainable, I also want them to be more affordable. I expect the planning system to play its full part in delivering more affordable homes. We must not use the current credit crunch as a reason for complacency. We must ensure that robust planning policies are in place to deliver affordable housing when the market improves.

For its part the Assembly Government has signalled a commitment to provide an additional 6,500 affordable homes. Affordable Housing Delivery Plans will play a key role in the delivery of this target and our proposals are currently out to consultation. Delivery Plans will enable local planning authorities to ensure that more affordable housing is delivered in the short term, prior to the adoption of Local Development Plans. By updating existing policies or modifying emerging policies, authorities will be able to ensure that this commitment is followed through in planning decisions.

We will also shortly be publishing practice guidance on using section 106 agreements to secure more affordable housing.

A consultation on a number of proposed policy changes specifically aimed at meeting housing needs in rural areas, but also including proposals for low impact developments is due to issue this month and will provide the planning response to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Essex Reports.

I have had responsibility for planning for a year now and over that time I have become a big fan of planning as a major tool in the climate change agenda as well as in the spatial arena. It is a key function providing a service to householders and businesses, and underpins the delivery of wider social, economic and environmental outcomes for the community. Whether working in the public or private sector or as elected members, you all have a tremendous opportunity- and responsibility- to shape our environment in the most positive way possible.

Development plans have a vital role in shaping our towns, communities and countryside. All local planning authorities are required to prepare a plan, making explicit your vision and strategy for the development of your areas, complementing Welsh national planning policy. I encourage you all to drive this work forward.

Similarly, we need to ensure that those utilising planning services, seeking planning permission, receive an effective and timely service from local planning authorities. I was particularly interested to hear about the collaborative work initiated by the 7 local planning authorities in North Wales, commissioning advice on how they could work more effectively, including sharing specialist services. Given the continuing shortage of professional planners, particularly in the public sector, and the Beecham focus on collaboration across what are mostly small local authority areas, I believe this is a critical and important way forward.

To help local planning authorities in your work, we have again agreed a grant of £70,000 to each authority, and are also looking to fund training, delivered in partnership with the WLGA and other partners such as Design Commission for Wales, Planning Aid Wales and RTPI, on key elements of the planning system for both Elected Members and officers.

I consider that the grant provided to support delivery, together with an increase in planning application fees, should enable LPAs to make the changes in the service delivery necessary to enable continuous service improvement.

I am therefore pleased to announce that we are issuing a consultation paper *Resourcing the Planning Service* which outlines options for changes to the system of planning fees. Subject to responses the changes will be introduced in the autumn.

Finally, I am delighted to have had this opportunity to share my latest thinking with you and I look forward to considering your responses on these key policies in due course.

You have a packed agenda today which regrettably I am unable to stay and listen to. However, I hope this inaugural conference is a success and look forward to meeting you all again next year.