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SIARTREDIG

Rhodri Morgan AM/AC,
First Minister,
Welsh Assembly Government,
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

2005/17

26 March 2007

Dear First Minister,

**Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services for Wales.
A joint response of professional institutions.**

Professional institutions in Wales fully recognise the importance of the Welsh Assembly Government's "Making the Connections" consultation. The merger of the Assembly with the WDA, the WTB and ELWa will bring both opportunities and challenges to the democratic process in Wales. It will require a major commitment from policy makers, decision makers and practitioners within the public, private and voluntary sectors to make the new structures work more effectively and beneficially for the people of Wales.

Within this context, the professional institutions and related organisations in Wales most active in the development, construction, built environment and regeneration sectors have responded individually to the consultation. However the signatories to this letter have identified five key areas of concern that we all share in terms of taking the merger proposals forward in a positive and collaborative manner. We are all committed to engage with Ministers and senior officials during and after the process of achieving a successful merger, and are particularly keen to assist during the transitional period up to April 2006. We outline our shared concerns below.

Firstly, there is a need to ensure that sufficient capacity and relevant external expertise is available within Wales to meet the requirements of the **proposed Advisory Panels**. Critical to the capacity of external interests to engage effectively will be the defined functions, number, size and composition of the Panels; and the frequency and duration of meetings. It is also essential that advice given by external Panel members has clear influence; otherwise commitment from external sources will undoubtedly wane.

We fully support the need to monitor, evaluate and **benchmark performance**, particularly in terms of customer satisfaction with service provision; and in measuring the contribution to wider economic performance in Wales. We would support the use of relevant and focussed key performance indicators. In terms of benchmarking, it is also essential that Welsh performance in economic development and regeneration is both measured against, and informed by, best practice from other leading competitive regions.

The consultation makes clear reference to the commitment to **delivery at the regional level** within Wales. We believe that there needs to be clarity as to the structures for delivery at the regional level, particularly in relation to their powers & responsibilities. In addition, those structures need to be fully representative of public, private and voluntary sectors. Professional institutions in Wales have access to good practice elsewhere in the

U.K. and Europe, which we would be happy to share. Getting the regional perspective right will be a key element in achieving success, not only in relation to the merger, but also in respect of the Wales Spatial Plan.

There is a need to balance the **commercial role** currently performed by the WDA with the Welsh Assembly Government's regulatory function in areas such as planning and grant regimes. Also the independent self-financing role of the WDA's Land Division, which has enabled land banking and retention of land availability work as a central resource for the public and private sectors, requires retention within the new structures.

We believe that there is an urgent need to ensure a clear focus on the 'delivery' function, especially in relation to the integration of physical, economic and social **regeneration**. Wales also needs to retain and develop a broader range of professional and practical skills in regeneration, as it has fallen behind other competitor regions. For example, English regions have clearly benefited from English Partnership's enhanced role in delivering the Sustainable Communities programme; and major commitments have been given to the establishment of regional Centres of Excellence and the Sustainable Construction Skills Academy in Leeds.

We support the manner in which the Assembly Government, Ministers and officials have endeavoured to engage with all stakeholders throughout the merger process, and we look forward to working together during the transitional period up to April 2006 and beyond. In contributing positively to this process, we would be pleased to discuss further the issues raised in this correspondence.

Yours sincerely.

Cathy McLean
Director,
RICS Wales,

On behalf of:
Institute of Civil Engineers,
Royal Town Planning Institute,
Royal Society of Architects in Wales,
Chartered Institute of Housing (Cymru),
House Builders Federation.

Cc Minister of Economic Development & Transport; Minister of Education & Lifelong Learning; the Merger Team.