



# Living with our landscape

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*In memory of*  
**Merfyn Williams**  
*(Merfyn Croesor)*



Sefydliad Materion Cymreig  
Institute of Welsh Affairs

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**Cover photo:**

The distinctive whaleback-shaped peak of Tryfan in the Snowdonia National Park, one of 15 mountain summits in north Wales over 3000 feet

**Ffoto'r clawr:**

Tryfan – copa nodedig siâp cefn morfil ym Mharc Cenedlaethol Eryri, un o'r 15 copa yng ngogledd Cymru dros 3000 troedfedd

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**Inside cover photo:**

Carreg Cennen Castle, near Llandeilo, in the Brecon Beacons National Park

**Tu mewn i'r clawr:**

Castell Carreg Cennen ger Llandeilo, ym Mharc Cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog

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## Foreword—

This project was initiated in 2007 by the late Merfyn Williams (Merfyn Croesor). He passed away suddenly on 4 January 2008, only having time to produce the initial papers on which the project is based. Merfyn was a man of many talents with a passion for the countryside, industrial archaeology, rugby, slate mines and community traditions. He thought, lived and believed in all things Welsh within an international context.

An environmentalist with a deep knowledge and understanding of Wales's industrial heritage, Merfyn possessed an ability to think forward and was concerned to ensure that Wales possessed the tools to plan for and manage change arising out of global drivers such as climate change, energy supply, food security and demographic change. He recognised two interrelated factors:

- The growing wealth of the developed world over the last few generations has been at the expense of much depletion of our natural capital.
- The tools available to plan and manage our environment and its contribution to economic and social well being were designed more than 50 years ago, at a time when our understanding of the natural heritage and its processes was very different.

Engaging the citizen and working with people and landowners in their communities was central to his vision of a sustainable Wales. For instance, it led him in 2004 to become the founding Director of Cynnal Cymru, the Sustainable Development Forum for Wales for two years.

Merfyn was highly involved in organising with the Institute of Welsh Affairs the initial meeting which launched this project, a conference at Plas Tan-y-Bwlch in Snowdonia in June 2007 which

I chaired. Held over two days this brought together a wide range of practitioners and activists in land management from across Wales and beyond. It resulted in an initial draft for this report which was debated over the succeeding months by those who had attended the conference. During 2008 a number of seminars were convened, again by the IWA, which resulted in more input by specialists in the field. A further draft was presented to an all-Wales conference organised by the IWA in Cardiff in March 2009 and addressed by Environment Minister Jane Davidson. This final report takes into account input from those who attended the conference.

A reason for the slow gestation of this project was that it was so frequently overtaken by events. One was the growing awareness of the impact of climate change, as evidenced for example by publication of the Stern report in late 2007. Another was the credit crunch and down-turn which has substantially changed the context for this report.

So, two years on from the initiation of this project the policy context is very different. Tackling the 'carbon crunch' and 'credit crunch' simultaneously is now part of the mainstream political narrative across all parties. *Living with Our Landscape* explores ideas to further embed an ecological perspective into our thinking. The management of our natural or green infrastructure is now widely seen as being as important as developing our economic and social infrastructure. Creating the tools to enable us to achieve this will be a fundamental part of ensuring that Wales remains robust and resilient over the next 50 years and more.

**John Lloyd Jones**

*Chairman, Countryside Council for Wales*

# Introduction—

This report assesses whether the environmental management systems in Wales are fit for purpose, given:

- (i) The influence of key drivers such as climate change; globalisation; social and demographic change; the imperatives of sustainable development; and the European Common Agricultural Policy and convergence programme reform, post 2013.
- (ii) Our understanding of the role and value of our landscape.
- (iii) The new policy and governance context following the 2006 Wales Act.

Overall the report aims to address the following:

- (i) The historical development that has placed us in the position we find ourselves in today.
- (ii) The wider policy context within the UK, Europe, and the World Conservation Union.
- (iii) Opportunities for reviewing the current legal and regulatory framework for conservation in Wales, taking into account the European Landscape Convention.
- (iv) How well we are managing the fundamental changes that are underway.

The way we respond to such issues depends to a great extent on the nature of our relationship with the environment. For example, farmers tend to stress the commercial and business side of their activities. On the other hand landscape policy professionals tend to stress management and conservation issues. In these debates in Wales there tends to be a greater emphasis than in England on the need to protect the family farm. How best can we manage change, and accommodate the sometimes conflicting demands of economic development and other activities with conservation, especially within protected landscapes?

The current global convergence of the carbon crisis and credit crunch demonstrates the inextricable link between environmental, economic and social well being and the need to develop integrated solutions. How should we respond to the current economic crisis? Should we develop strategies to ensure continuation of existing models of economic development, or should we move to a new economic order that provides both economic and carbon resilience?



# 1 ~ Our Inheritance —

**The whole of the landscape and environment of Wales is a strategic national resource that underpins the rest of our economic, social and cultural activity.**

In terms of the economy, for example, it is estimated that activity arising from direct and indirect engagement with the environment contributes £9 billion to the Welsh GDP.<sup>i</sup> It is estimated, too, that the three Welsh national parks attract between 10 and 11 million visitors, with a total of more than 22 million visits each year, with major implications for transport policy in particular.<sup>ii</sup> Meanwhile, climate change and other global threats result in contradictory pressures. For example, conservationists draw attention to loss of biodiversity, while others point to the need to respond to increasing tourism and housing demands on the countryside.

The legislative framework for the planning and management of the environment in Wales dates back to the post World War II settlement, a period when the social, economic and environmental context was very different. The 1949 Act established two statutory landscape designations, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. National Parks have their roots in a widespread recognition, dating back to the aesthetic movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, that certain landscapes and habitats are of such exceptional quality that they deserve to be preserved for future generations. People living in rapidly industrialised urban areas also desired access to clean, unspoilt countryside for recreation and leisure. In the UK this was first given legislative definition in the 1939 Access to Mountains Act, the product of a Private Members' Bill.

It is noteworthy that by today it is estimated that about an eighth of the world's land area has some form of protected area

status. Indeed, National Parks can be found in more than 110 states. About 25 per cent of the Welsh landscape is the subject of statutory landscape designation, a slightly greater proportion than other parts of the UK.<sup>iii</sup>

Hitherto, designations in Wales have been made within an England and Wales framework of reference and legislation. However, the new legislative powers devolved to the National Assembly by the 2006 Wales Act have provided opportunities for a specifically Welsh perspective in this field. At the same time any policy intervention should take into account the European Landscape Convention, adopted at Florence in October 2000. This is important for the following reasons:

- Its argument that all landscapes matter.
- Its democratic view of the value of the landscape – that is to say, all people have rights regarding the landscape, and not just the owners of the land.
- Policy should entail an inter-action between protection, management and planning.
- The importance of international co-operation.

The Marine and Coastal Access Bill provides a governance and management framework for the first time for 40 per cent of the administrative area of Wales. How should we develop a system which integrates environmental, social and economic well being within the marine environment?



Old slate workings at Bethesda, grown over with woodland, a landscape that combines industrial archaeology with natural regeneration of habitats  
Hen weithfeydd llechi Bethesda, wedi eu gorchuddio gan goetir, tîrwedd sy'n cyfuno archaeoleg ddiwydiannol ac adfywiad cynefinoedd naturiol

## 2~Major Drivers of Landscape Policy—

Analysing the drivers of landscape policy development is a complex undertaking given the wide range of influences, their inter-relationship, and also the speed, and indeed acceleration, of the changes that are underway.

In terms of the human impact it is fair to say that rising demands for water, food and energy are combining to require a fresh assessment. More broadly the key drivers can be considered under the following headings:

### (i) Climate Change

The last 200 years have seen an average annual two per cent economic growth in the UK as a result of abundant use of cheap energy based on fossil fuels. Climate change has been the unforeseen and unintended consequence. There is growing recognition that we need to respond to the challenge in terms of both mitigation and adaptation. Effective action will require a fundamental shift in the way we organise our economic and social activities. New sources of renewable energy will have to be tapped, not least to tackle the consequences of 'peak oil'. To meet Wales's global share of carbon reduction we will need to reduce our emissions by around 80 per cent. Inevitably, such a reduction will have a large impact on the way we manage our landscape, and especially our protected areas.

### (ii) Economic Activity

Agricultural use of the uplands will change. Stocking rates may be reduced and, at the same time, alternative uses for land will be sought. Increasingly, we are now using land not only to produce food, but also for a wider range of public benefits such as tourism and the production of energy, as well as carbon sequestration and retention, soil conservation, management of water resources, biodiversity, access and amenity. Some of these may result in higher international food prices because land is being given over to energy crops.

Equally, we can anticipate greater attention being given to locally produced food products, due to a combination of demand, quality and environmental considerations. Rising food costs across the world will result in more intensive farming. One expert in agricultural trade predicted in August 2007 that farmers in the UK would be challenged to double output in the next 40 years.<sup>iv</sup> The rise in food and oil prices since then mean that this may be a modest forecast. It is likely, too, that in response to the reduction and possible phasing out of CAP payments after 2013, many farmers will forego agri-environmental grants in favour of maximising production.<sup>v</sup>

The long term impact of the current credit crisis and down turn is likely to bring new pressures on the countryside as well. It is possible to foresee all countries around the world giving greater priority to home produced food, influenced as much by the need for security of supply as the requirement for reduced food miles and a reduction of our carbon footprint.

### **(iii) Biodiversity**

Current discussions indicate a need to address the loss of biodiversity by adopting a landscape-scale approach to nature conservation. Essentially, this requires introducing mechanisms that acknowledge the wider environmental context in which habitats and species can be protected. This perspective emerged from the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. While past conservation efforts were aimed at protecting particular species and habitats, the Convention recognises that protection requires attention to complete ecosystems.

Given its integrative nature, an ecosystem approach is increasingly being applied in many policy sectors.<sup>vi</sup> A European Commission study led by Pavan Sukhdev, a senior figure in Deutsche Bank, has examined at a global level the economic benefits of biodiversity and the costs of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.<sup>vii</sup>

### **(iv) Public Policy**

It is widely anticipated that as a result of changes to the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy financial support for agriculture will decrease post-2013. A future with significantly less subsidy for food production is a real possibility and will have a major impact on the viability of Welsh farms, land management and the landscape more generally. Against this, rising food prices may increase the viability of some farm operations .

Meanwhile, how flexible can we expect future landscape designation to be within the Welsh context? Could new Welsh legislation move the emphasis within National Parks and other landscape organisations away from protection in the direction of landscape management, with socio-economic and cultural considerations coming to the fore?<sup>viii</sup> Is it likely that the pressures of climate change will require more movement of this kind?



Sun-set over the hills of Llyn, as seen from Llanfihangel-y-Traethau on the Dwyryd estuary, Gwynedd

Machlud haul dros fryniau Llŷn, o gyfeiriad Llanfihangel y Traethau ar aber afon Dwyryd



### 3~ Climate Change —

Climate change is the main factor driving policy change within the environment but also increasingly within the economic and social sectors.

The urgency of the crisis facing us will demand policy integration. The Assembly Government Environment Minister Jane Davidson has made clear that her five priorities for climate change are:

- (i) Water management, especially dealing with risks of flooding.
- (ii) Carbon management, with sequestration/retention in rural areas high on the agenda.
- (iii) Energy, with an emphasis on renewables.
- (iv) Food production, with attention paid to the problem of food miles.
- (v) Biodiversity – the need to protect habitats and species.

In broad terms, these are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, the consultation on a high level climate change strategy for Wales provides further impetus to this process. Work to identify low carbon regions will shortly report with implications for the future evolution of the Wales Spatial Plan. This provides an opportunity to engage with initiatives to develop a green economy and ensure sustainable management of the countryside.

In rethinking the role of designations, the requirements of carbon management and reduction will inevitably come to the fore. Policy implications include:

- (i) Widespread use of rural Wales for carbon sequestration, and avoiding carbon release due to Climate Change.
- (ii) Facilitating the adaptation of landscape to encourage biodiversity, for example through habitat restoration and water management.
- (iii) Transition to the development of locally integrated

economies, including transition towns that will ensure security of supply in terms of both energy and food.<sup>38</sup>

- (iv) Reducing the carbon impact of visitors coming to protected areas – with greater, and more integrated use of public transport, and greater control and management of motor vehicle access.
- (v) Utilising the Countryside Council for Wales’s experimental and test bed role to take forward the concept of transition landscapes.
- (vi) Using the National Park authorities to pioneer innovative forms of energy conservation and small-scale renewable energy generation.

Underpinning such initiatives will be a requirement for more data collection and more research capacity. In order to make effective policy choices we will need a reliable evidence base.

We also need stronger, more directional leadership from Government to provide appropriate legislation (now potentially available as a result of the 2006 Government of Wales Act), clearer targets, and the essential motivation for the change that is needed. In this respect it is noteworthy that the *One Wales* coalition agreement between Labour and Plaid Cymru set out the following commitments, to:

- Establish a Climate Change Commission.
- Achieve reductions in annual carbon emissions of three per cent per year by 2011 in areas of devolved competence.
- Prepare an energy strategy and a review of TAN 8 planning guidance, revising upwards targets for energy from renewables drawn from a range of sources.

This agenda provides a key test for the planning and land management decision making process, which is already a source of frustration for politicians contemplating step changes in climate change policy.



The exposed Llyn landscape  
Tirwedd agored Llŷn

## 4 ~ Farming and Land Management —

The character of Wales's countryside reflects many generations of human activity, but we now face new challenges.

Land managers should be central to meeting these challenges and ensuring that the rural environment can continue to provide the full range of services that society expects.

Wales's rural space is not just a source of food and other raw materials; it supplies a wide range of environmental services to society which the market alone cannot be expected to deliver. A well cared for rural environment is a social and economic asset. It is vital to the well-being of Wales's citizens and to our future prosperity.

Land managers should be rewarded from public funds where there are no markets for the provision of services going beyond agreed environmental standards. Wales requires a rural policy geared to encouraging and rewarding the supply of these environmental services and helping rural communities make the most of their environmental assets in a sustainable way. A policy for Wales's rural space that puts sustainable land management at its heart will entail:

- Sustainable land management in relation to use of soil, air, water and biodiversity.
- Sustainable production of food, fibre, timber and energy in accordance with high environmental standards.
- Management to enhance ecosystem services such as the storage of carbon and the regulation of water.
- Action to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Action to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity.
- Action to protect and enhance the historic and geological features of landscapes.
- Action to improve opportunities for people to understand, enjoy and benefit from the countryside.
- Land management that delivers quality environments, thereby contributing to sustainable rural economies and socially inclusive communities.

All these require progressively transforming the CAP so that it is focussed more clearly on rewarding the environmental services arising from land management where the market fails to do so. These rewards should reflect the services provided and the costs incurred. The new policy should:

- Have a clear role in mitigating and adapting to climate change, addressing water and biodiversity management, and ensuring that farming and forestry have the capacity to deliver environmental security and sustainable production in the long term.
- Promote the sustainable use of the natural resources on which all production depends. Environmental standards should be enforced by risk-based regulation which is binding on all land managers.
- Reward the positive management of existing biodiversity, cultural landscapes, carbon and water resources whilst securing improvements in the environmental quality of all rural land.
- Help reduce the environmental footprint of agriculture and forestry, by targeting investment on environmentally beneficial technology and infrastructure.
- Integrate sustainable land management with economic and social policy in order to encourage integrated land use that enables rural communities to benefit from the economic potential of their environment.
- Ensure that progress towards environmental, social and economic objectives is monitored, evaluated and regularly reported.

Transforming policy in this way will take time. Any income support retained in the short term should be targeted, with conditions, on those farming systems making the greatest contribution to the management of environmental services for the benefit of society. Research and development should be focused on the challenge of enhancing long term productivity in ways that reduce environmental impacts and help adapt to climate change.

These proposals provide justification for a ‘new contract’ between predominantly urban taxpayers and those who manage rural land. How can this be achieved? The recent announcement by the Welsh Assembly Government on *Glastir* signals a major change to land management schemes. Potentially, it positions Wales to both influence and positively benefit from potential reform of the CAP post 2013.



Rural and urban landscapes live side-by-side  
in the border town of Welshpool

Mae tirweddau gwledig a threfol yn byw ochr  
yn ochr yn nhre gororau Cymru, y Trallwng

## 5~Rural and Urban Landscapes—

The drivers of change discussed in Section 2 make the case for taking in all the landscapes of Wales, both rural and urban, in framing policy.

We should view their management in a holistic way, and also look at their designation in the context of Wales as a whole. In particular, this means appreciating the intimate connections between rural, industrial and urban landscapes. Indeed, many ‘rural communities’ are to all intents and purposes ‘urban’ because of the lifestyles of the people who live in them.

In more philosophical terms this will necessitate rethinking the association between what might be understood as ‘beauty’ and ‘good’. Natural beauty has always been a product of perception and as such is a cultural phenomenon. Arguably, perceptions have changed in the half century since the first designation of National Parks. In those days, for example, the boundaries of the Snowdonia National Park were carefully delineated so as to avoid the slate quarrying regions of Blaenau Ffestiniog and Corris. If the boundaries were being drawn today would that decision be taken? At the same time, most people would undoubtedly concur that the three National Parks represent Wales’s finest landscapes today, just as they did in at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In recent years in addition to the Welsh castles of Edward I in

Gwynedd we have had Blaenafon designated as a World Heritage Site cultural landscape on the grounds of its industrial heritage. Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal were recently announced as Wales’s third and newest UNESCO World Heritage Site. The proposal for a Valleys Regional Park is another example of the boundaries between urban and rural Wales becoming blurred in our thinking, a process encouraged by the European Landscape Convention. It is noteworthy, too, that in Wales the World Conservation Union (IUCN) has designated the National Parks, AONBs and Heritage Coasts as Category V landscapes. That is to say, they are regarded as lived-in working landscapes of great value for their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.

Future policy approaches need to take in Wales as a whole. Certainly, when people are asked about the landscapes they value most they invariably begin with their own locality wherever that may be, whether it be in urban or rural Wales. In turn, this surely relates to a sense of place as being near the core of Welsh identity, what the late Professor Bedwyr Lewis Jones used to refer to as ‘brogarwch’ (love of locality) and ‘cynefin’ (relating both to neighbourliness and habitat). The central messages of the European Landscape Convention – that all landscapes matter and that landscape is to found everywhere – reflects this view.

## 6~Managing the Landscape—

**In future we will need to engage farmers and landowners across the whole of Wales, not just in designated areas, in a new relationship with resource management.**

They will need more pro-active assistance in seeing this as a primary role in addition to the production of food. In return for public subsidy they should be encouraged to deliver:

- Initiatives such as carbon sequestration and conservation to mitigate climate change.
- Management of water quantity and quality.
- Protection and enhancement of biodiversity.
- Maintenance of landscape features.
- Public access and recreation.

Additionally, the business community, which has been notable by its absence from many of these discussions, needs to be engaged. Many new rural businesses are being established which have a stake in the landscape and the rural economy which is not just the preserve of farming and forestry.

The Assembly Government *2020 Vision* report on the future of farming, published in September 2007, foregrounded some of these issues.<sup>x</sup> It must be borne in mind, however, that delivery mechanisms for sustainable land management are notoriously difficult to achieve. In one sense formulating what these mechanisms should be, and achieving a consensus around their operation, describes the central challenge we face.

*Farming, Food and Countryside – Building a Secure Future*, the overarching strategy for the Department of Rural Affairs, published in May 2009, outlines the Assembly Government’s policy direction through to 2020. It aims to secure a sustainable future for the farming, food and land-based production industry

and the environment of the Welsh countryside.

Protected Landscapes cover 25 per cent of the land area of Wales. They have a key role to play in the delivery of services relating to management of the environment. In 2003 Assembly Government Ministers called for a review of the national parks. The aim was to establish how these areas could contribute to the delivery and promotion of sustainable economic and social development. The review report, published in 2004, recommended that the parks should be given a new ‘third’ purpose to “promote sustainable forms of economic and community development which support the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the areas.”<sup>xi</sup>

The kind of activities envisaged include small-scale renewable energy, recycling initiatives, promotion of local goods, for instance through farmers’ markets, sustainable transport and green tourism. Localised examples of such activities are provided in the report which suggests that they should be carried forward on a more systematic basis. This would require a partnership approach with other bodies, for example local authorities, to promote wider public services such as roads, farming, tourism, jobs and housing. All this suggested a major shift in the function of Welsh National Parks beyond their traditional core function of conservation, access and public understanding.

This ‘third’ purpose recommendation was not accepted by the Assembly Government at the time, a stance supported by local authorities and some conservation and access interests. Local authorities feared losing control and delivery of economic functions to the National Parks, while conservation bodies felt that a third purpose might dilute their primary objectives.

Nevertheless, there is growing acceptance that the Review’s recommendation of a ‘third mission’ for national parks should be the direction of travel. All landscapes, even those in remote upland

## 7~An Integrated Approach to Policy and Decision Making—

regions, are the product of human interaction over many generations. If indeed there has ever been a pristine state of rural Wales, it has certainly experienced continuing change, as a result of farming, quarrying and a host of other activities.

So the practical issue inevitably becomes the way we manage this ongoing change and human impact. The crucial question that follows is who are the ‘we’? Given the emergence of the Welsh democratic process, with the National Assembly at its head, this ‘we’ should be defined as ‘Welsh society’, also taking into account the international context. This is both reflected in and justified by the Welsh Assembly Government making sustainable development its central organising principle, as laid out in *One Wales: One Planet*. If this is to mean anything it will place environmental governance at the top of the agenda, in turn raising the following questions in relation to the issues discussed in this paper:

- (i) How can we better manage those aspects of the landscape that we value?
- (ii) How can we link the landscape and biodiversity agendas?
- (iii) How can we get better community involvement and engagement?

These questions lead to the issue of direct representation and how far it should go. At the same time they underline the reality that all designations impose costs for some and provide benefits for others. So the questions can be illuminated by asking how can we transfer more of the benefits of designation to those who bear many of the costs – be they farmers, landowners, or those living in protected landscapes who may find it difficult to find a job or purchase a house (bearing in mind that many living in designated areas also benefit).

A large variety of agencies and organisations are involved in the planning and management of the environment including:

- Welsh Assembly Government
- Local Authorities
- National Parks and AONBs
- Environment Agency Wales
- Countryside Council for Wales
- Ministry of Defence
- Forestry Commission
- The third sector, including such bodies as the National Trust, RSPB, and CPRW
- The private sector, including land and property owners and managers and the utilities such as Welsh Water

While there is some integration of the functions of these bodies, for example through the Wales Spatial Plan, there is no overall policy for the Welsh landscape against which their activities can be benchmarked. Before we consider re-defining the role of organisations we should rationalise the planning process, with a properly-defined hierarchical structure:

- (i) Assembly Government to provide the vision, policy and leadership.
- (ii) National Agencies to provide expert scientific input, service delivery, and regulatory functions.
- (iii) Local agencies, including local authorities, National Park Authorities, the Forestry Commission and AONB management partnerships to deliver.

Currently, however, many of these functions intermingle. There is also a strong case for rationalising the planning process, so long as it does not imply a reduction in public accountability, engagement and transparency.

It is noteworthy that the *Making the Connections* public service reform agenda identified shared outcomes as a priority across organisations.<sup>xiii</sup> An example would be to seek to integrate social, economic and environmental objectives. Emphasis should also be given to working collaboratively to achieve sustainable communities in the context of climate change and other global drivers such as CAP reform.

## 8~The Role of Land Use Planning—

**In terms of using the new devolved powers of the National Assembly following the 2006 Act perhaps the greatest challenge is to develop a set of policies and practice which seek to use the range of planning powers (and building regulations as well before long) to drive positive change for good, as well as regulating and safeguarding the Welsh landscape.**

The Town and Country Planning System exists to regulate activities and the use of land and buildings for the public good, balancing private aspirations with wider community benefits. All too often it is seen as a negative process, introducing delays and constraints to development and economic progress, rather than a force for positive change. The growing need to address climate change and introduce greater sustainability into development is one the planning system is well placed to deliver, if the focus is to drive good, rather than just stop bad. Used in this proactive, positive way, which has been subjected to in-depth local community scrutiny and debate, planning is a key tool in landscape and countryside management. It should be used to build and to maintain sustainable communities, and to enhance the quality of life of all those who visit, or live and work in the Welsh countryside. It also needs to revisit its full title and become a force to reconnect, and to understand the inter-relationship between town and country.

If the planning system is accepted as a key tool in driving social, economic and environmental objectives, sustainable development in other words, then it must be resourced and managed to deliver clear, robust and relevant outcomes within acceptable timescales. At the same time, the public need to have confidence in the process, and what it delivers.

All too often, however, this is not the case. The Welsh Assembly Government is aware that public perception of the way Local Planning Authorities, including National Park Authorities utilise and deliver their planning and development control functions is not



Grave yard of the Church of Saint Peris at Nant Peris, near Llanberis in Snowdonia  
Mynwent Eglwys Saint Peris yn Nant Peris, ger Llanberis yn Eryri



The Pembrokeshire Coast Path at Marloes overlooking St Brides Bay  
Llwybr Arfordir Sir Benfro ym Marloes yn edrych dros Fae y Santes Ffraid

always positive. The apparent mismatch between countryside policies, their delivery, and peoples' perception of that delivery, needs to be addressed and connected as a fundamental part of building public confidence and support for the systems that are put in place.

In addressing these issues we should first focus on what we want from the countryside, and then determine what policies and actions are required to achieve it. Necessarily, this approach needs to take on board community involvement and engagement, including cultural and linguistic considerations, as well as social and economic needs of people living within (and outside) designated areas.

The Climate Change agenda, and the policy challenges presented by the *One Wales* coalition agreement provides a key test for the planning and land management decision making process. How will politicians deal with their frustration that the planning system as currently organised, practised and led is not allowing them to deliver the step changes they believe are necessary for us to embrace the concepts of sustainable development and face up to the pressures of climate change?

The Wales Spatial Plan process provides an opportunity to revisit those aspects. It also provides an opportunity to achieve better vertical and horizontal integration between those parts of the statutory

planning system in Wales and other key components, such as the Community Strategies, and National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans. Both are still a statutory requirement, and provide a holistic, area focused planning and management framework for 25 per cent of the land area of Wales.

All public bodies operating in the eight current landscape designations in Wales have a responsibility placed on them by Sections 62 and 85 of the Environment Act 1995 to have regard to "the statutory purposes of the Parks in taking decisions or in carrying out work within or near to them". Yet, this also provides a significant opportunity to pilot a greater integration of focus and effort by the wide range of public bodies and the services they deliver across Wales.

The Minister has recently written to all those bodies concerned, reiterating the need for and benefits of such a joined up approach, echoing similar themes to those in the Beecham report on Welsh public services and the ensuing *Making the Connections* agenda. Integrated Land Management flowing from integrated planning must be the good which both protects our finest 'Living Landscapes' as well as rising to the challenge of climate change.

## 9 ~ Welsh Divergence and Priorities—

Policy initiatives in Westminster suggest that there may be moves towards a more centralised approach to planning, in particular in relation to major developments.

The Planning Act 2008 provides one indication, and will bear directly on Wales in some respects such as energy where major infrastructure projects over 50mws are still decided in Whitehall. The proposed Severn Barrage and replacement of nuclear power stations are possible examples. At the same time, in Wales the Assembly Government seeks to maintain the integrity of the land use planning system whilst encouraging collaborative and partnership working between the public, private and third sectors.<sup>xiii</sup>

Within Wales there are growing pressures and movements for more areas to be given special status, of which the following are examples:

- Formation of the Cambrian Mountains Society in 2005 to campaign for greater legislative protection in the mid Wales uplands.
- Proposals for the creation of a Valleys Regional Park.
- The Clwydian Hills Pathfinder Project.
- The Dyfi Biosphere project.

But to which landscape designations should such initiatives aspire? For instance, should they aim to become a National Park, or be absorbed by an adjoining National Park? Alternatively, should they aim to be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)? This raises the question whether the present patchwork of designations is fit for purpose? Some believe these designations to be relatively arbitrary and imposed from above with little public consultation. Others feel they are incomplete. Is it time to fashion

a new approach within the overall context of the European Landscape Convention, the Sustainable Development Scheme for Wales, and the Wales Spatial Plan?

An argument for a new approach is underlined by the current statutory categories of landscape designation, which are divided between National Parks on the one hand and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the other. Both were defined and established under the 1949 legislation. Both were given equal status in terms of landscape value. However, while the administration of National Parks was undertaken by special committees of the County Councils from 1974, and given over to stand-alone authorities from 1995 (albeit that two-thirds of their membership remained county councillors), the administration of AONBs was retained entirely within local authority control.

A major consequence is that while most of the public funding given to National Parks comes directly from central government and as a result is, in effect, safeguarded, spending in AONBs depends on the priorities of the local authorities concerned.<sup>xiv</sup> The overall result, from the point of view of the landscape management of AONBs, has been extremely varied over the years. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and subsequent advice and guidance from the Government and Countryside Council for Wales has helped raise the status of AONBs.

Whether a landscape is designated as a National Park or an AONB, there is a case for enhanced public engagement in future planning and management of these protected landscapes. However, such community engagement is not without difficulty:

- (i) How do we define the ‘community’ to be consulted? Is it only the people living within the boundaries or should we also refer to ‘communities of interest’ such as ramblers?



Worms head on the Gower Peninsula, as seen from Pembrey sands  
Worm's head ar Benrhyn Gŵyr, o gyfeiriad traeth Pen-bre



Waunfawr valley in Arfon with the peaks  
of the Rivals of the Lleyn in the distance  
Dyffryn Waunfawr yn Arfon gyda  
chopaon yr Eifl yn Llŷn yn y pellter

- (ii) How do we weigh the importance we should attach to each community?
- (iii) How far do we embrace linguistic dimensions as a major consideration?
- (iv) To what extent are policy makers prepared to accept the results of a consultation if it fails to produce what are regarded as ‘acceptable’ answers?

A report on the three National Parks in Yorkshire by the Council of National Parks in 2006 found that more than two-thirds of businesses surveyed believed that high landscape quality had a positive impact on their business performance, and more than half felt that designation had a positive impact.<sup>xv</sup> While there can be no doubt that protected landscapes are of great benefit to many businesses, notably those operating in the tourism industry, there are others, especially perhaps those engaged in farming, which question the benefits. There is an apparent mis-match between countryside polices, their delivery and people’s perceptions of that delivery. As the 2007 policy statement on national parks put it, “The Welsh Assembly Government is aware that public perceptions of the way Park Authorities utilise their planning and development control function is not always positive.”<sup>xvi</sup>

In addressing these issues we should first focus on what we want from the countryside, and then determine what policies and actions are required to achieve it. Necessarily, this approach needs to take on board community involvement and engagement, including cultural and linguistic considerations, as well the social and economic needs of people living within (and outwith) designated areas.

At this juncture, it should be noted that the matter of language is not just about producing material in both official languages, it is also about appreciating the cultural associations of words and terms in different languages. In a multi-cultural society, the challenge of involving all communities should also be acknowledged.

## 10~The Purpose of Designation—

**There is a case for designating the whole of rural Wales as a Protected Landscape or subject to a Protected Landscape regime or discipline.**

Indeed, few people driving from Holyhead to Merthyr could identify the points when they leave and enter the territory of a National Park or AONB. A question that arises is whether the people of Wales have a clear sense of the rationale behind present designations. After all, the original boundaries were defined in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century on the basis of a limited consultation exercise and with little detailed consideration. It raises the question whether we should now be looking towards formulating a comprehensive land management system for the whole of the country.

Certainly, a case could be made for further designations. However, more often than not such calls are prompted by concern for protection as much as the management of on-going change. In this discussion we face some fundamental realities, including:

- (i) The impact of climate change and the need to reduce carbon emissions and conserve energy.
- (ii) Pressures to develop renewable energy sources.
- (iii) The needs of farmers and landowners.
- (iv) The needs of rural businesses.
- (v) The need of the communities living within designated areas to generate an income.

There is a need for integrated land management to reconcile the many different human activities that take place within the landscape. Before we can move to a consensus on these issues we should place the debate in the context of the European Landscape Convention and be informed by a landscape character assessment for the whole of Wales, an initiative currently being undertaken by the Countryside Council for Wales.

## 11~The Scottish Example—

Recent experience in Scotland has provided a different insight into the creation of National Parks with two Parks being designated where previously there were none.

These are now approaching their first quinquennial review. It is first of all noteworthy that the Scottish legislation creating them was one of the first acts to go through the new Scottish Parliament, where it was greeted with applause. The debates around their creation saw their role as central to the process of nation-building in Scotland. They were an expression of the recognition of landscape value as an integral part of the Scottish heritage that should be both cherished and celebrated as part of a confident nationhood.

The Scottish legislation is fundamentally different from that in England and Wales. It allows the inclusion of both land and water, and encompasses a wider socio-economic remit in setting out four clear objectives:

- i) To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
- ii) To promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of the area.
- iii) To promote understanding and enjoyment (including recreation).
- iv) To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

The Scottish legislation also introduced the principle of direct elections for 20 per cent of the membership through postal voting in specially created Park constituencies, and a closer link with the Scottish Parliament. The first two National Parks – the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, and the Cairngorms – are also in themselves very different. The former is structured along the traditional lines of Parks in England and Wales, with a sizeable staff and budget delivering a range of services directly. On the other

hand, the Cairngorms National Park Authority is a very different animal, with a smaller staff concentrating on facilitating and championing principles and practice through partnership and the National Park Management Plan. It works to achieve its vision through others, rather than undertaking the delivery of services itself.

The purpose of the Scottish Parks is to achieve the above four aims with the proviso that if there is a conflict between any of them, then the first should be given greater weight. The recent Review of National parks in Wales conducted by the Welsh Assembly Government saw the consultants report agreeing that these new Scottish objectives might also be appropriate for the agencies and authorities responsible for the similarly designated areas in Wales.

In the event this recommendation was not adopted. Instead, the three National Parks were left in the unsatisfactory position of having a “duty to foster the social and economic well-being of communities within their areas”, but only in relation to their twin purposes of conservation and the promotion of enjoyment and understanding, and not in its own right, or in isolation from the exercise of those purposes. This decision seems increasingly at odds with a renewed emphasis on community involvement and socio-economic aspects since the inception of the National Assembly. The Assembly Government's annual strategic grant letters deal with social inclusion and equality, access (especially by under-represented parts of society), affordable housing, sustainable transport, tourism, climate change and sustainable development more generally, such as design through the planning process.

A question, therefore, is whether there is a need to revisit the option of legislation to follow the Scottish example. This would entail an enhanced role for National Parks to become delivery agents for a wider range of public goods – including affordable housing, agri-environment and renewable energy schemes. They would then assist in fashioning more sustainable communities, complementing their primary role of conserving the landscape.



Rhossili Bay on the Gower, viewed from Worms head  
Bae Rhosili yng Ngŵyr, o gyfeiriad Worms head

## 12 ~ Policy Implications —

**Climate change and the need to respond to the sustainable development agenda are the main drivers in assessing new policy initiatives on how we live with our landscape in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Wales.**

Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change will result in new objectives for land management. One will be to preserve and enhance existing stores of carbon, especially in peat bogs, but also in soils more generally, and in woodlands. Another will be to limit flooding by preserving and enhancing wetlands and managing vegetation within river catchments. They may have favourable impacts on biodiversity. In this respect, too, there will be a need to implement land management over larger areas.

A key issue will be designing policy and delivery mechanisms to recognise the value of ecosystem services, not only for environmental but also socio-economic well being. A specific question is whether National Parks should undertake the so-called ‘third mission’ of promoting the economic and social development of the communities within their areas. These lead directly to questions of governance and community involvement and whether the time is opportune to consider new roles for the National Parks.

### **(i) Strategic Policy Implementation**

The creation of the Countryside Council for Wales under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 was a bold step towards remedying the fragmentation brought about by legislation after the Second World War. It brought together for the first time in the UK responsibility for nature conservation, landscape and countryside recreation. However there was no corresponding rationalisation of responsibilities on the ground, of a kind that is in any case desirable in scientific and management terms, but particularly advantageous in a relatively small country like Wales.

The issue for policy makers in Wales is to consider whether or not an integrated approach to rural development can be facilitated within the context of existing policy and governance processes.

In order to make progress, a comprehensive data-base for rural Wales will need to be achieved and made easily accessible to all potential users. This should be the role of the Wales Rural Observatory, jointly run by Cardiff and Aberystwyth universities.

### **(ii) Future of the National Park Authorities**

At present the effectiveness of a National Park Authority is reduced because it is only one among several public bodies exercising responsibilities for countryside management within an area designated as a National Park.

There would be a number of benefits if the responsibilities of National Park Authorities were extended, with appropriate financial adjustments, to include the local management of nationally designated nature and historical/cultural sites as well as being agents for the implementation of national countryside management strategies.

In addition the March 2007 Assembly Government policy statement suggests an enhanced role for the National Parks in promoting renewable energy, sustainable transport, and sustainable use of their natural resources. Examples given are collaboration with Coed Cymru in the sustainable use of Park woodlands, support for local farmers’ markets, food fairs and other initiatives promoting Park produce, green transport initiatives like the Beacons bus, support under the Sustainable Development Fund for community-level recycling and renewable energy ventures, and utilisation of local stone and other sustainable materials in building projects.<sup>xvii</sup>

As a result of the 2006 Government of Wales Act it has now become easier to work towards rationalisation. In its March 2007 Statement on National Parks the Assembly Government alluded

to some possibilities:

“As a possible contribution to the *Making the Connections* agenda, the Welsh Assembly Government wishes to see if the current synergy between the Park Authorities and CCW in the environmental field can be developed further. One possible means of doing this would be for the management of SSSIs and National Nature Reserves within the Parks to be transferred to the NPAs. The Assembly Government would like the implications of this to be explored further with a view to ensuring that any possible duplication of effort in wardening and monitoring of these sites is avoided and local management arrangements strengthened.”<sup>viii</sup>

Developing the role of the National Park Authorities in these kinds of ways would make possible, for the first time, a truly integrated approach to countryside management in, at least, 20 per cent of the land area of Wales. New procedures could be devised and put in place to make a reality of participation by individual communities. This would extend well beyond consultation to embrace much improved understanding of the environment, which it is part of the statutory purposes of National Parks to promote, volunteering, and practical enhancement projects undertaken on the initiative of the community.

As has been mooted since the 1980s, National Parks could truly become test beds for innovative approaches that could then be applied more widely across Wales. The designing of a system that will achieve corresponding benefits in the rest of Wales will require much further analysis and debate, and programmes to develop organisational capability. Meanwhile, full advantage should be taken of the experience that can be gained in National Parks, and on some aspects in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

As a rationalisation in the provision of services these changes would also represent implementation of the *Making the Connections* agenda, as hinted at in the March 2007 Assembly Government Policy Statement on National Parks.

### **(iii) Case for a Welsh Environment Forum**

This analysis of the drivers of change affecting the landscape of Wales has underlined the following realities:

- Change in the countryside is a constant and can be expected to accelerate in the decades ahead.
- In particular, the impact of climate change will require constant reviews of policy to find imaginative responses.
- Although the character of the countryside will inevitably change we will need to be on guard to maintain its quality and its value as a resource.
- Management of countryside policy needs to be more integrated than has been the case in the past, particularly in our understanding of landscape functionality.

Is there, therefore, a case for establishing an Environment Forum for Wales to keep these issues constantly under review? Climate change would be central to its agenda but also the related consequences of globalisation and the inevitably changing character of society.

### **(iv) A Way Forward**

Our land and sea are finite resources with many competing uses. The pressures on our environment are increasing, leading to conflict and competition as tourists, farmers, rural residents and conservationists all vie for space. Added to these existing pressures, addressing climate change means that we need to find room for



Llyn Brianne, a man-made fiord in the  
Cambrian Mountains of mid Wales  
Llyn Brianne, fiord wneuthuredig ym  
Mynyddoedd Cambriaidd canolbarth Cymru

renewable energy development, water storage, food production and managed retreat in our coastal areas. Meanwhile recreational pressures steadily grow along with the need to find land for housing and transport infrastructure.

To deal with these development pressures we need to be able to get the value of natural heritage considered in planning and development decisions. Through spatial planning and the concept of Green Infrastructure we have the opportunity to ‘design with nature’ and avoid conflicts between human activities and biodiversity conservation by organising natural heritage management in a spatial and pragmatic manner, alongside built, or grey, infrastructure.

Ecological planning, such as Green Infrastructure, can be considered the foundation for sustainable development, as its basic principle is that human society is embedded within the environment and needs to respect its limits and processes which deliver services to people.<sup>xix</sup> Green Infrastructure planning, and the recognition of the functional value of ecosystems, has the potential to assist with better evaluation of the environment in decision-making processes across different economic sectors, dealing with increasing development pressures in a more efficient, strategic, proactive manner. It seeks to provide nature conservation with the tools necessary to ensure natural resource use is better understood by policy makers and the public across all sectors and society. It also allows natural resources (including biodiversity) to be better evaluated and understood in decision making across all parts of government.

Green Infrastructure analysis should focus on a range of different ecosystem services. For instance, the information and scale relevant to river basin management planning will be different to that required for planning multifunctional urban greenspace.

We need to recognise the multifunctional nature of our environment and the sometimes competing uses to which it is put. The ecosystems approach says that it is for society to choose how to use the environment. A focus on which services are of most value in a given area has to involve a range of authorities and stakeholders. People might value a benefit differently in different places at different times. This information is as important as knowledge about the structure and dynamics of ecological systems themselves.

Wales’s policy and governance mechanisms give us an opportunity to take positive initiatives in integrated management and planning of economic, social and environmental well being. The Welsh Assembly Government’s *One Wales: One Planet* sustainable development policy provides a rational framework to meet the immediate and long term needs of our communities. Moreover, the ‘Making the Connections’ agenda with its emphasis on collaboration, partnership and a citizen-centred approach to service delivery provides further impetus to policy integration.

The urgency of the challenge will require political vision and leadership. The challenge is to encourage public participation and engagement to avoid the perception of central government simply imposing change. Protected landscapes have traditionally been viewed as test beds for new and innovative policies. A series of exemplar or flagship projects, such as the Cambrian Mountains and Valleys Park initiatives, should be supported to inform policy making. As part of this process the Welsh Assembly Government should promote legislation to provide the National Parks and other protected landscape organisations in Wales with a wider socio-economic remit as is the case in Scotland.

## Notes —

- <sup>i</sup> *Valuing our Environment: Economic Impact of the Environment of Wales*, a report commissioned by a partnership comprising National Trust Wales, Countryside Council for Wales et. al., 2004.
- <sup>ii</sup> Assembly Government, *Policy Statement for the National Parks and National Park Authorities in Wales*, March 2007.
- <sup>iii</sup> National parks cover 20 per cent of the Wales and 10 per cent of England. When Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are added 25 per cent of Wales is covered, about 23 per cent of England and 19 per cent for Scotland. For the UK as a whole the figure is 22 per cent.
- <sup>iv</sup> Mark Hill of Deloitte, quoted in *The Times*, 27 August 2007.
- <sup>v</sup> This was predicted by Professor Adrian Phillips, in *National Parks in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Time to Face Reality*, a paper delivered to the Snowdonia National Park Association, Plas y Brenin, 4 November 2007.
- <sup>vi</sup> The ‘ecosystem approach’ is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.
- <sup>vii</sup> Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres, *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity*, May 2008. This is an ongoing project whose reports can be accessed at [www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/economics/index\\_en.htm](http://www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/economics/index_en.htm)
- <sup>viii</sup> It is noteworthy that, as long ago as 1949, Aldo Leopold, an early conservationist in the United States, developed the idea of a ‘land ethic’, referring to the individual’s responsibility to maintain the health and self-renewal of the land – see his book *A Sand County Almanac* in which the following, highly referenced, quotation occurs, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic [i.e. ecological] community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."
- <sup>ix</sup> Transition towns are an initiative by the Transition Network, a charity recently established to develop Transition Models for adapting to Peak Oil and Climate Change (Peak Oil describes the phenomenon of the ever-declining fossil fuel availability which could lead to economic and social instability that in itself would militate against coping with climate change). Transition towns embark on an ‘Energy Descent Action Plan’ that will make them more resilient to face the future. In Wales, Lampeter has signed up as a Transition town.
- <sup>x</sup> *Farming Futures*, a review of the report by Professor Gareth Wyn Jones, is contained in the Winter 2007-08 edition of the IWA’s journal *Agenda*.
- <sup>xi</sup> Land Use Consultants, *Review of the Welsh National Parks Authorities*, 2004.
- <sup>xii</sup> See the Welsh Assembly Government’s response to the Beecham report, *Making the Connections – Delivering Beyond Boundaries*, November 2006.
- <sup>xiii</sup> This reflects both the Assembly Government’s ‘clear red water’ position in relation to policy emanating from Whitehall and the Beecham Review report *Beyond Boundaries* (2006) that recommended greater collaboration between public authorities in Wales
- <sup>xiv</sup> A complicating element is that some central funds are made available to AONBs, for example via the Countryside Council for Wales and the Sustainable Development Fund.
- <sup>xv</sup> Council of National Parks, *Prosperity and Protection*, 2006.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Assembly Government, Policy statement for National Parks and National Park Authorities in Wales, March 2007, para 18e.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Op Cit.* para 13.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid.* para 23.
- <sup>xix</sup> Green Infrastructure is a concept originating in the United States in the mid-1990s that highlights the importance of the natural environment in decisions about land use planning. In particular there is an emphasis on the "life support" functions provided by a network of natural ecosystems, with an emphasis on connectivity to support long term sustainability. Examples include clean water and healthy soils, as well as the more anthropocentric functions such as recreation and providing shade and shelter in and around towns and cities.