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Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW)

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SPEECH

'A Sustainable Wales – moving toward a leaner, cleaner, and greener nation '

SPEECH

Introduction

Bore Da

Good Morning

Hoffwn ddiolch i'r Cymdeithas Brenhinol o Benseiri yng Nghymru am y gwahoddiad yma heddiw i siarad ynglyn â chreu Cymru fwy gwyrdd.

I would like to thank the **Royal Society of Architects in Wales** for inviting me here today to talk about creating a greener Wales.

Wales, and indeed the whole world, is facing one of the biggest challenges imaginable—the preservation of our planet for future generations. These are issues that cannot be put off until tomorrow and that require urgent immediate action -- **the planet can't wait.**

We may be a small country, and what we can do may be small on a European or indeed a global scale, but the Assembly Government fully recognises its duty and is determined to show how Wales can be at the forefront of the drive to be sustainable and to minimise the effects of climate change.

Yesterday I announced the start of a 12 week consultation on the Assembly Government's new Sustainable Development Scheme, One Wales: One Planet. Our new Scheme sets a bold, new vision for a sustainable Wales. It confirms our aspiration to set Wales onto a pathway of becoming a one planet nation, by reducing our ecological footprint from its current level of 5.16 global hectares per person, down to the global average availability of

1.88 global hectares per person. It confirms that we will do this in a way that will make Wales a fairer and more just society.

The new Scheme confirms that sustainable development should be the central organising principle for Government and the wider public sector in Wales. The Scheme references our key actions within our One Wales Programme for Government, and shows how they jointly will contribute to the twin themes of social justice, and of using less of the earth's finite resources. Alongside this, the new Schemes includes 17 actions, across all Ministerial portfolios that are intended to take forward our commitment to sustainable development.

Being a small nation does have its advantages—it enables us to move quicker than the rest of the UK and lead the way in the drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In One Wales, the Assembly Government has made a commitment to achieve annual carbon reduction-equivalent emission reductions of 3% per year by 2011 in areas of devolved competence and we will reduce our annual emissions by an additional 3% in each subsequent year.

The inventory covers emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and three groups of fluorinated gases.

Earlier this year I issued a consultation on how we could maximise our potential in Wales for diversified renewable energy generation, The Renewable Energy Route Map. With sufficient innovation and investment, the right Government framework and public support, Wales could produce some 33TWhr per year of electricity from renewable sources—with about a half of this from marine, a third from wind and the rest mainly from sustainable

biomass. If we were to achieve this in Wales it is envisaged that by 2025 our electricity needs could be met in their entirety from low carbon energy sources .

We received a great response to the consultation on our Renewable Energy Route Map and the analysis of these responses will be used to feed into an over-arching strategy on Energy to be published next year.

Whilst covering Energy I would like to add that I fully welcome the recent UK Government announcement that there will be a move to introduce feed in tariffs for generation up to 5 MW, as an amendment to the Energy Bill.

I believe that Architects and designers together with others in the supply chain have a key role to play in helping us realise our ambition to make Wales truly sustainable -- a **leaner, cleaner, and greener nation** ’

The Assembly Government is not just here to put in place policies to tackle change. I see us as the lead body to encourage society to change its behaviour and attitude towards climate change, using policy changes where appropriate.

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

What is the Government Doing?

We have set out the issues

Earlier this year I asked the Sustainable Development Commission to set out the issues we have to confront in Wales and to map out a plan of action to tackle climate change in the built environment.

Last week at the SDC Built Environment Summit in Cardiff, 42 companies, including a number of Architectural practices, signed up to UK's first green building charter committing themselves to support progress towards a built environment that contributes low or zero net carbon emissions as quickly as practically possible.

I am in no doubt that commitment to, and appetite for, change exists in Wales and is something we must harness.

The group led by the SDC 'my Coalition of the Willing'—has recently reported to the Climate Commission for Wales, identifying a number of key issues where action is needed.

- The need for clarity and engagement over what will be expected to allow business to plan for change
- The need for consistency in the messages being given out, the initiatives in place, to ensure we are all pointing in the same direction
- Better understanding of the costs of meeting higher standards and anxiety at a time of economic downturn
- Uncertainty over Building Regulations
- The need for a clear route map and milestones leading to change.
- Engagement with England and Europe to benefit from activity and learning on what,

in spite of differing timescales, is a common agenda

These issues are all being addressed.

We have already started to work with industry where the Assembly Government can influence standards but recognise that achieving a step change in the performance of all new buildings in Wales relies on devolving the building regulations.

We have had positive dialogue with Communities and Local Government over devolving Building Regulations in the last 12 months and only last week I spoke to Margaret Beckett and we agreed that discussions are on track and in the final stages, a decision should be made before too long.

The SDC report identifies a number of actions that I will want to consider further - but I am already convinced that we need to:

- Develop a focal point with links to UK Green Building Council and UK Zero Carbon hub
- Engage a coalition from across the sector.
- Ensure policy and action on the key themes of Energy efficiency, Energy supply, Skills and Training, Exemplars and Scaling up and Consumer engagement are coordinated, connecting the work on both new build and existing housing.
- maximise the opportunities of the EU programmes

We have introduced Sustainability Standards.

The Code for Sustainable Homes has been adopted for all Assembly government funded housing -- currently at level 3 and BREEAM Excellent for non-domestic construction.

We are running pilot projects

To help us understand better issues of cost, technology, buildability and robustness and consumer behaviour we have announced a pilot programme as part of the Registered Social Landlord development programme to build new homes to code levels 4 and 5 involving some 22 sites and 400 units. A similar programme of mixed use projects supported by Assembly government funding and land is also in place.

The projects which are supported by the BRE and EST will provide important experience at a welsh scale which will feed into proposed changes to future Welsh Building Regulations.

Many architects here today are already probably involved in these pilots.

However the continued absence of an agreed methodology for zero carbon is clearly an obstacle to progressing to true Zero Carbon.

Until we see the proposed CLG consultation, originally planned for the summer, I have decided that given the uncertainty over the role of renewables on and off site and any role for offsetting payments, our aspiration for homes will be level 5 (100% improvement on current Building Regulations).

We have established a Zero Carbon Support Programme

This is intended to map and monitor activity acting as a bridge between policy and delivery with the emphasis on sharing of information, raising awareness to ensure engagement over the next 2 ½ years

The programme will also liaise across Assembly Departments and with external organisations to ensure activities are coordinated. Current activity includes a series of awareness raising sessions for contractors and the professions and Jeff Perrin will, I imagine, be telling you more about this later this morning.

We have looked at new Planning Policy

The planning system has a key role in efforts to tackle climate change and sustainability both in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions but also in ensuring that our communities are able to with stand the current and predicted effects of climate change on Wales.

The recent consultation on Planning for Climate Change sets out how the Planning system can provide local planning authorities and developers with a national approach to planning for climate change which also gives clear and national consistency-- a level playing field. The consultation proposed a **national** policy to introduce sustainable building standards in planning policy, the use of local renewable and low carbon sources into new developments and flexibility in local development plans to accelerate the move towards our overall goal of zero carbon buildings and more sustainable developments.

The new policy will extend the use of the Code as the preferred method for assessing the sustainability of **all new housing** built in Wales and BREEAM will be adopted as the preferred tool to assess the sustainability of non-domestic buildings.

The Code itself is an opportunity for 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.

So from next April my consultation proposes three things:

1. to set a minimum sustainable buildings standard for new housing development of 10 or more housing units at level 3 of the Code and the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Scheme (BREEAM) 'Very Good' for other buildings with a floor-space of 1000m² or more.
2. Secondly to encourage the use of renewable energy technology 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 **in addition** to the energy efficiency measures required by the Code.
3. Thirdly in recognition that planning is also about appreciating local circumstances and opportunities I wanted to give planning authorities the flexibility to set standards higher than the national minimum on certain **strategic sites**.

We intend, subject to consultation, to commence new policy in April 2009 will ensure that there is a level playing field across Wales.

Analysis of the responses to consultation is underway and our conclusions will be published in due course.

We are also currently carrying out research to look at the barriers and opportunities faced by local planning authorities in Wales to delivering zero carbon developments.

These policies however will only be successful if Architects and designers can deliver buildings that meet the new sustainability standards. To do this effectively and efficiently will require the development of new skills and I am confident that the profession in Wales will rise to the challenge.

We have one of the leading centres for sustainable design in the UK- I am referring of course to the Welsh School of Architecture-- but I am encouraged by the exciting initiative currently being developed by RSAW and the BRE to set up a register of Sustainable Architects that will, crucially, enable clients, both corporate and individual, to be in a position to know that the designers they commission have an accreditation in Sustainable design.

We are looking to minimise Waste

Waste arising from Construction and demolition is a big problem. In 2007 for example 35% of the waste that went to licensed sites was from the construction sector—much of this could have easily been recycled instead of going to landfill.

I have awarded £1.5 million pounds of funding to Constructing Excellence Wales over 3 years to help industry increase recycling. I have also funded WRAP to help in the development of strategic recycling facilities for business, including the construction and demolition sectors.

Site Waste management Plans will also contribute to managing waste and we are working with industry and local authorities on the best way to take these forward before formally consulting in the spring of next year.

We must however look at ways to stop waste from arising in the first place and I want to encourage Architects when they are designing new buildings to take all opportunities to 'design out' waste.

What about the Existing Stock?

We all recognise that raising our game to design new sustainable development is crucial if we are not to **add** to current problem, but the current problem as attested by all the experts is a big one,

40% of emissions are attributable to existing stock.

The recent Green Building Council report on improving the existing housing stock (27% of emissions) called for urgent action to overcome what they saw as a lack of vision for low carbon homes; an industry not geared up to deliver low carbon refurbishment and a lack of occupier/tenant demand or action for low carbon homes.

During the past year local planning authorities in Wales received over 13,000 householder applications for alterations and improvements, extensions, porches and garage conversions.

The Federation of Master Builders campaign 'Building a Greener Britain' is calling for mainstreaming low carbon refurbishment and the need for building in energy performance improvement.

There are clearly opportunities but there are also obstacles not least the current VAT disadvantage that refurbishment suffers and the need to train and develop the predominantly SME based industry to deliver.

To increase awareness amongst householders we recently published 'Improving Your Home - A Climate Change Guide'. It contains 10 common projects and 20 measures for individuals to consider climate change when making improvements to their home. This has gone out to all Local Planning Authorities in Wales and is being distributed by B&Q through its stores in Wales.

These may seem small steps but they will, I hope, start to change how people think about improving their home, critical if we are to reduce carbon emissions and increasing the

resilience of the existing stock to the effects of climate change. Any change however small counts.

A new National Energy Efficiency Saving Plan, which I will be publishing in the New Year, will set out how we intend, within our devolved responsibilities, to start to tackle the existing stock.

Architects who specialise in building refurbishment projects will have a vital role in ensuring that carbon emissions are reduced in the existing stock by ensuring the principles of good sustainable design adopted.

The Credit Crunch

I cannot end today without referring to the dramatic impact that current market conditions are having on the construction industry and whilst the immediate problem is to keep the industry employed it must not distract us from tackling the climate agenda.

The New Economics Foundation claims that we only have 100 months to avert irreversible 2 degree rises in global temperature . This would take us to 2016. In Wales we have committed to change in 2011 to demonstrate our committed response.

Climate Change won't wait – but the economic downturn does provide us with opportunities for a less consumerist approach and more life time orientated – the cost of living **in** a home and not just buying it.

Any opportunity to bring forward investment could also bring with it opportunities for early learning in the higher environmental standards that the public sector is championing.

Closing remarks

I hope I have left you in no doubt that we are totally committed to change and I hope you will join us in that commitment. You as practicing Architects have a key role to play at the top end of the supply chain and I am looking forward to working with you to bring about the changes I think we all agree are necessary.

I am pleased to be speaking to you a day after we have launched our new Sustainable Development Scheme – “One Wales - One Planet”, now the central organising principle of the Welsh Assembly Government. We are determined to be a leaner, cleaner and greener nation. Please help us by playing your part.

Thank you