



Supplementary Manifesto briefing September 2010

An Advocate for Rural Places

The geography and demographics of rural Wales are unique.

- **85% of Wales lies within a rural Local Authority area.**
- **One third of the Welsh population lives in a rural area.**
- **The rural environment contributes £9 billion annually to the Welsh economy.**
- **The countryside provides work for 1 in 6 people in Wales.**
- **All of Wales' internationally iconic landscapes are in rural areas yet some of the most economically and socially deprived areas of the UK exist within close proximity to them.**
- **The uplands of Wales hold the key to helping to solve our climate change challenge with huge amounts of sequestered carbon locked up in the woodlands, peat and organic soils of these areas.**
- **Rural areas provide most of the basic life support services upon which urban populations in Wales and beyond depend.**
- **Rural areas are bastions of Welsh identity, culture and the Welsh language**

The concept of rurality is therefore complex and not just encompassed by low settlement density, the cultural, economic and seasonal variations of populations, the existence of tourist attractions, and the inward migration of second or retirement home owners. All of these dimensions do however directly affect the character and challenges facing Wales' rural areas now and in the future.

Often denied parity because of their communities are characterised by isolation, poor communication, inadequate service provision, low wages, less disposable incomes, increased costs, a lack of affordable housing and limited job opportunities, it is imperative therefore that any future sustainable agenda of the next Assembly Government has a clear, comprehensive and distinctive rural dimension.

The needs and voice of rural communities and the identity of the places in which they live, must be decisively and democratically expressed within and by the Welsh Assembly Government. CPRW therefore believes there is an unquestionable need to provide a sharper and more integrated focus to rural policy within the next Welsh Assembly Government.

We contend that it is no longer acceptable for rural issues to be compartmentalised in different Ministerial portfolios. Whilst we recognise that WAG and the relevant Ministers have made some progress in supporting rural areas, we believe there is still a need to do more. The role that rural areas provide in delivering the public benefits which underpin the well being of those living in urban Wales needs to be more fully recognised not least because the food, fibre, clean air and water and enjoyable places they need for their every day welfare are mostly produced in rural Wales.

The need for an Advocate for Rural Places is clear.

Our proposed Rural Advocate is however nothing unusual and an equivalent Advocate existed in the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) since 2004¹. This arrangement gives rural communities, interest groups and NGO's a direct link to central policy makers and places a strong champion for rural issues at the heart of Government. Like the Commissioner for Older People and Children, our Advocate for Rural Places would be a voice for rural people and the pride that everyone has for diverse range of landscapes which characterise Wales. Whether our Rural Advocate is independent or within Government, is in our view secondary to the need to establish one!

To be effective our suggested Advocate would

- **Advise the First Minister on rural issues and be directly accountable to him or her.**
- **Support, coordinate and help tailor Assembly Ministers policies and programmes so they account for rural needs.**

In so doing, our Advocate would

- **Provide a realistic voice for rural issues and act as a conduit for rural expertise.**
- **Ensure that all Welsh Assembly policy has a realistic rural dimension and monitor and challenge the rural imprint of its approaches**
- **Hold organisations to account and help put things right when they go wrong thereby acting as the Assembly's rural watchdog.**
- **Ensure all Welsh Assembly policies and programmes realise the full economic and social potential of rural areas. .**
- **Co ordinate and Chair an annual Rural Summit, to scrutinise the performance of the Assembly's rural promises and actions**

Working with the Civic sector to promote new economic and social opportunities for rural areas, our Advocate would also provide support, a source of information and advice for rural people and ensure that their interests are fully accounted for by all public bodies in their programmes of work. Our proposed Advocate would therefore ensure that vibrant, thriving and sustainable rural communities become common place by promoting and synchronising within the Assembly.

- **equality for rural areas;**
- **rural solutions relevant to rural needs;**
- **opportunities for rural communities to become more self reliant;**
- **the delivery of bottom up local solutions which interlock with the top down strategic aspirations of the Assembly.**

An independent and clear voice for rural Wales is essential in realising the huge contribution that rural areas can make to a progressive, democratic and socially inclusive 21st century Wales.

¹ The Rural Advocate in England is sponsored by Defra, but following the recent rationalisation of Defra's arm's length bodies and the abolition of the CRC, a Rural Communities Policy Unit now exists within Defra

We believe our expectations are reasonable and trust that you will agree.

