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SCALA / SCEME / CLAW Study Day

**Achieving a Low Carbon Environment**

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Cardiff University

## Speech

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Good Morning and thank you for inviting me to talk to you this morning about what we are doing in Wales to reduce CO2 emissions and to promote sustainable development in the context of building design and construction.

It gives me a great opportunity to talk to public sector professionals from all over the UK about how we intend to deliver our commitment to reduce emissions and why we want to move as quickly as possible to achieve our goals.

I hope that you enjoyed your visit yesterday to our new debating chamber. We are very proud of the building which achieved a BREEAM rating of Excellent.

We are also very proud that in Wales that Sustainable Development is one of our core principles and that we are one of the few administrations in the World that has a statutory duty in relation to sustainable development.

I announced last year my intention to publish a new Scheme for Sustainable Development and last November our Consultation Document One Wales One Planet was launched.

The Scheme sets out the outcomes the Welsh Assembly Government wants to achieve through existing commitments in terms of their impact for people and communities in Wales and it reflects the importance of setting out a pathway to Wales using only our fair share of the earth's finite resources.

The scheme complements our One Wales agenda and sets out a set of operating principles that will drive our policy and programmes. It focuses on two main themes;

- Helping people and
- Reducing environmental impact.

The First Minister and I will be launching the new Sustainable Development scheme later this month.

You who work in the public sector have a key role in helping us to deliver our goals and to lead by example in the drive to build sustainable buildings and create a sustainable environment.

I have always made it clear that achieving zero carbon from 2011 is a political aspiration, not a commitment and I make no apologies for that. The actual timetable will be set through regulation and subject to a consultation process but I believe it is acting as an extremely effective catalyst and there is a clear appetite for, and recognition of, the need to act quickly.

I have established the 'Coalition of the Willing' to support our ambition for early action to achieve low carbon building.

I am very pleased to say that fifty two organisations have signed up to the UK's first Green Building Charter demonstrating their commitment to action to support that

ambition and clearly showing that in Wales there is an appetite for change. This is something we must harness.

No one here will need to be reminded that minimising the impact of climate change is the biggest global challenge that humanity has ever faced.

From a Welsh Assembly Government perspective, we are also leading from the front in addressing the causes and solutions to reduce climate change in Wales. For example, in January we published our 'Climate Change Strategy' policy for consultation and this will lead to the creation of a 'Climate Change Action Plan' later this year.

Effective public engagement and communication on climate change issues is very important and the recent report to the Climate Change Commission for Wales identified a number of key issues where action on the built environment 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 and the initiatives in place.
- Better understanding of the costs of meeting higher standards and addressing anxiety at a time of economic downturn.
- 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 actions need to be addressed quickly.

Last November I announced that Wales would establish a zero/low carbon hub to take forward the work of reducing carbon emissions from the built environment. The hub would be the focal point for the coalition.

I am pleased to inform you that the Zero Carbon Hub Wales was established on 1<sup>st</sup> April and Chris Jofeh of Arup in Wales is the Chairman.

The hub will link with the work being undertaken by the Green Building Council and the UK Zero Carbon Hub to ensure that compatibility exists, and best practice is utilised and shared across the industry to maximise the opportunities created.

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. We recognise that reductions in new development is crucial if we are not to add to the current problem, but the current problem is a big one as 40% of emissions are attributable to existing stock.

The reduction of emissions from the existing housing stock is one of the key activities and the work of the 'Existing Homes Alliance Cymru', led by the Energy Savings Trust, will help inform our thinking.

On 16<sup>th</sup> March we issued for consultation the 'National Energy Efficiency and Savings Plan'.

The main aims of the plan will be to reduce Wales' greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to the reduction of its wider ecological footprint. It will also contribute to the reduction of fuel poverty and support economic development, in particular by helping businesses become more energy efficient and developing new business opportunities.

To underline our commitment to lead from the front I announced last week new planning policies that emphasises the role that the planning process can play in reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause Climate Change and on the use of sustainable building standards to drive up the sustainability of buildings in Wales.

Broadly the new policy will mean that ---

- New homes will be expected to achieve Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and a 31% reduction in carbon emissions for applications for 5 or more dwellings from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009. This policy will be widened from 1st September 2010 to cover all residential applications
- New non-residential development over 1,000 sqm will be expected to achieve BREEAM 'Very Good', or equivalent, and 'Excellent' for carbon reduction.
- LPAs will have the ability to set higher sustainability standards for strategic sites through their local development plans.

We did consider a 'Merton Rule' approach in Wales, but our approach in the final MIPPS sets out a more flexible approach to reducing carbon emissions from new developments by using the energy hierarchy to emphasise the need to reduce energy demand first before incorporating renewable energy technologies

I believe that a national development control approach is a much simpler way of improving sustainability standard by creating a level playing field. This avoids the proliferation of varying standards at different timescales across Wales.

To underpin the policy a **draft Technical Advice Note 22** – Planning for Sustainable Buildings has been published for consultation alongside the MIPPS. The consultation concludes at the end of July.

Over the past few months we have been carrying out research to look at the barriers and opportunities faced by local planning authorities in Wales to delivering zero carbon developments and the outcomes of this research will be published shortly with the results being utilised to determine future policies and activities.

We have funded the Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru to deliver four two-day **training** events on 'Planning for Climate Change – Delivering Sustainable Buildings and Quality Design. The training will help ensure full implementation of our policies and technical advice. The training is underway and will conclude in Conwy at the end of May. Over 100 planning officers will be covered by the training.

Planning policies can assist us with the zero carbon agenda but the devolution of the Building Regulations is an Assembly Government commitment and is a key element to setting higher building performance standards.

Discussions with the CLG and other UK Government Departments are in the final stages and it is hoped that these will be concluded in the very near future.

In taking forward changes to the energy efficiency requirements of the Building Regulations we will take account of UK Government thinking on the definition of zero carbon.

I supported the recent consultation which presents a practical approach to the need for significant emission reduction in new buildings whilst having regard for what can be delivered in the short/medium term.

Briefly the UK Government has put forward proposals to address the hierarchy of measures developed by the Green Building Council to meet the zero carbon priority. These place energy demand reduction and fabric improvement as the priority with minimum thresholds for on-site carbon reduction for regulated emissions and a range of allowable solutions for residual emissions.

Our policies, however, will only be successful if we deliver buildings that perform as designed and I am confident that you working in the Public Sector will rise to the challenge.

Last May I announced that the Code for Sustainable Homes had been adopted for all Assembly Government funded housing -- currently at level 3 and BREEAM Excellent for non-domestic construction.

The uptake is encouraging and in the first quarter of 2009 three hundred and ninety homes in Wales were registered for Code assessment.

To help us better understand issues of cost, technology, buildability, robustness, and consumer behaviour, we are currently running a pilot project 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 vital experience of building to higher standards in Wales and will inform the proposed changes to future Welsh Building Regulations.

The project is in its early days but we are seeing some exciting proposals, involving new approaches to design and the use of new technology.

A lesson we have already learnt is that to build good quality, sustainable, energy efficient homes requires issues to be considered right at the start of the design process—retro fitting or just bolting on bits of technology to standard house types is not the way forward---houses need to be designed in a radically different way to take account of issues like solar gain, thermal mass, and shading.

Some of the projects feature Modern Methods of Construction and Offsite Manufacturing systems. I am supportive of this approach and as higher sustainability and energy standards are introduced the advantages in terms of better quality and higher standards of workmanship are being realised.

Some of you here today may already be involved in these pilots as they are fairly uniformly distributed amongst Local Authorities in Wales.

Training and education is all important if we are to build high quality sustainable buildings. We must ensure that those involved in the delivery of sustainable buildings are properly trained and equipped.

We are fortunate in Wales to have one of the leading centres for sustainable design in the UK- I am referring of course to the Welsh School of Architecture-- and have close links with the School and in particular with the Centre for Research in the Built Environment. (CRIBE)

I am delighted that CRIBE has received funding under the Academic Expertise for Business (A4B) Knowledge Transfer Centre Programme that will help us in delivering low carbon buildings in Wales.

The 3 year project aims to equip the Welsh construction industry with the best research based knowledge and skills on designing, costing and delivering low/zero carbon buildings and achieve Welsh Assembly Government targets for reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It will also address the wider aspects of sustainability relating to material use, waste arisings, water use and socio-economic factors.

I am also encouraged to see the private sector taking forward the zero carbon agenda and am looking forward to paying a visit to the BRE Innovation Park in Watford later this year to see the Barratt Green House, designed by architects Guant Francis that won the 2007 Home for the Future Design Award, run by the Mail on Sunday.

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

With the current slow down in private sector construction activity the important role of the public sector in delivering building projects is even more critical.

I want to leave you in no doubt that we are totally committed to delivering our carbon reduction commitments and to build a sustainable environment.

I hope that you will support the actions we are putting in train and recognise that you have a key role to play in the 'team'.

I look forward to working in partnership with you to bring about the changes which, I think, we all agree are necessary.

Thank you.