

**Sustainability, future generations and *The Wales We Want***  
**WALES 2050 CONFERENCE, CARDIFF, 16<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2016**

Robin Attfield (Cardiff and Penarth Meetings)

This was a conference arranged by the Welsh Assembly Government about the Future Generations (Wales) Act of 2015, and was held at a large hotel in central Cardiff. Well over 100 people were present, from many walks of life. (Among them I met Alan Armstrong of Penarth Meeting and David Harries of Bridgend Meeting.) The compere was Jamie Owen of BBC. But the main speaker of the morning session was the outgoing Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, Peter Davies, who has held this role since 2006.

One of the most important operations of this period had been a consultation on The Wales We Want. (Later we heard from Cynnal Cymru, the organisation that ran this consultation process.) It had resulted in a statement about the Wales We Want, made in the wake of the Paris Agreement of 2015, a statement that, among other matters, tackles climate change. All the political parties in Wales, with the significant exception of UKIP, had signed up to this.

Much of Peter's role had been explaining sustainable development within different ministries, and bringing out its implications. One illustration of an implication was the announcement, made in 2007 by Carwyn Jones, then Environment Minister, that all new buildings in Wales were to be carbon-neutral from 2011. Peter felt there had been much progress on sustainable development, including progress in grass-roots participation, but remarked on the lack of progress in the matter of community-owned energy schemes. He also felt that the Future Generations Act, with its seven goals, was set to make good many of the deficiencies in the system of governance of the period up to its adoption in 2015. (The seven goals, we were reminded in a brochure made available to everyone, are 'A prosperous Wales, A resilient Wales, A healthier Wales, A more equal Wales, A Wales of cohesive communities, A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and A globally responsible Wales.) He also stressed the need for a transition towards greater sustainability and greater participation, at all levels.

We then heard from Carl Sargeant, the Minister for Natural Resources, who had steered the legislation through the approval process, and who stressed that climate change affects all areas of life and governance, not excluding matters of health and matters of prosperity. However, the Act and the Sustainable Development Charter are not concerned with the environment alone, but also with an integrated approach to people's needs, both present and future. The attainment of 'The Wales We Want' requires much more than just this legislation; it needs action by many agents in many organisations. Carl had attended the Paris COP21, and had been struck by the role of businesses in sustainable development and action to tackle climate change.

Among the questions raised by the audience, one, from Liz Mills, a policy consultant, concerned the £1.2 billion 'City Deal' announced for the Cardiff region the previous day. Why had so little been said about carbon dioxide reduction in this connection? It was agreed to bear this in mind. One other question, raised later, asked whether the extraction of coal in Wales should continue. No one seemed able to take up this matter.

Several presentations followed from Sustain Wales (Cynnal Cymru) and bodies that had collaborated with them, including the Women's Institute. We heard of how nearly 400 organisations had signed up to the Sustainable Development Charter, and how there is now a module at Cardiff Metropolitan University about the Wales Future Generations Act (2015). But this report would be too long if it covered further details.

The main speaker of the afternoon (indeed of the day) was the incoming Future Generations Commissioner, Sophie Howe. Sophie declared that the new Act has given a statutory basis to The Wales We Want, and that the government of Wales cannot carry on as it had been doing. She told us of problems that have beset parallel commissioners elsewhere in the world, and of her personal motto: "Well-behaved women never make history." Thus the carbon goal of the Paris Agreement is just about achievable, but only with action on the part of all.

The fact that 23% of children in Wales are living in poverty decreases their chances of being constructive adults rather than causing problems as adults. So efforts must be focussed on these children's early years. The City Deal announced the previous day would help, but it too much be geared to the introduction of sustainable jobs and to policies on climate change. The newly announced Metro system would help, but must be geared to people's needs, for example, enabling them to travel to their local hospital. Much stress was placed on collaboration between organisations, and on how organisations can be examples for the public sector. One example she gave was Marks & Spencer's, which has greatly reduced their carbon footprint. Another example was how a private sector organisation has pioneered hydrogen cars.

Changing practices were needed particularly in the public sector, which was going to be her primary focus. Staff with sustainable plans would receive her full support. Many busy people in the public sector grasp what is needed, but are too busy to implement it, or think that a strategy document is enough; this approach would have to change. As for uninterested people, she clearly suggested that they should be eased out of their jobs. This seemed to me a little draconian, depending on whether these people would be given opportunities and help to change before being dismissed. Maybe that is what she intended. An example she gave of integrated approaches to development was that of the Fire Service. In view of the number of fires started deliberately, the fire-prevention services would need to focus not only on fire-fighting but also on what makes people start fires. Further examples of integrated services were presented, such as assistance to the elderly in matters of digital services.

In the light of subsequent questions it emerged that the new Commissioner's budget will be £1.4 million per annum. She will focus on public agencies, their practices and policies, but will need the help of others, particularly with making climate solutions happen, because her budget is too small for her own staff to deliver what is needed.

The Conference proceeded to divide into four workshops, each tackling and reporting back on questions posed by the new Commissioner... I left at this stage to do some fire-fighting of my own. The later stages of the Conference could maybe be related by other Friends who stayed until the end. Nevertheless it had been a rewarding day.

The second edition of Robin Attfield's book, *The Ethics of the Global Environment*, was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2015. £24.99 see <http://edin.ac/1A2LlIe>