

Working for the New Wales

**The Manifesto of Plaid Cymru,
The Party of Wales**

1999

Foreword.

For many generations the idea of a new Millennium has inspired hopes and dreams of new opportunities, a more peaceful world and a more just society.

In this century, through the excitement and energy of the 1960s to the more cynical 1980s, people have looked to the future to bring better times and the end of this Millennium has been the focus of those aspirations.

For most people around the world the change from 1999 to 2000 will signify very little in real terms. Their condition - rich or poor - will remain unchanged. For far too many, their environment will still be in danger, and the threat of war or famine will remain.

But in one small country at least, 1999 really will be the time when things start to change. In that country, a new framework of politics will commence. New representatives will be elected to a new Government which, for the first time in modern history, will be able to govern that country according to the people's declared priorities in most aspects of domestic life. New opportunities will emerge to regenerate communities. This is the new Wales, with its own national government and its own distinctive voice in a changing United Kingdom and within an evolving European Union.

The Welsh General Election of 1999 will present the clearest choice ever placed before the voters. For the first time their votes will decide who will govern Wales. In the past Welsh votes have been outweighed by those from the English shires and cities. In no General Election this century would Wales have returned a Tory Government. Plaid Cymru has always been stronger at local government --where our votes really do make a difference - than in UK elections. In these elections the voters of Wales have a real choice. The way in which they cast their votes on the 6th May will directly affect the government within the National Assembly, as well as the governing patterns on our local councils. Every vote for The Party of Wales, will register support for the policies spelt out in this manifesto.

The only real choice in this first Welsh General Election is between New Labour and Plaid Cymru. The continuation of New Labour's policies currently being implemented in London is one alternative. The other is represented by the new set of radical proposals spelt out in this manifesto. After the euphoria of kicking out the Tories in 1997, Wales has experienced bitter disappointments from the policies of London New Labour. They have in many ways implemented Conservative social and economic policies, which continued to treat Wales as a colony, governed by dictat. New Labour has rejected its Labour Party past, which Wales as a nation helped create. It has chosen to become the party of "middle England". The same choice faces the Welsh voter in the elections to the European Parliament, County Councils and Community Councils. The introduction of proportional representation to the European Elections means that every vote for Plaid Cymru will count and will help to elect the Party's MEPs. We already run Gwynedd

Council - rated as one of the top three in Wales - and our record in local government stands head and shoulders above New Labour's farrago of incompetence and corruption.

Credit must be given to New Labour for introducing constitutional reform, albeit long overdue and in a very restricted form for Wales. The people of Wales showed self-confidence and hope for the future in voting "Yes" in the Referendum for our National Assembly. That hope is being dissipated by New Labour. The new self-confidence of the Welsh electorate demands a confident and determined government that will build social, environmental and economic policies on the basis of our values as a nation and the needs of our communities.

New Wales demands a new party in government. Only one party in this election has its policy created in Wales, by the people of Wales, to answer the needs of Wales. Only one party has dedicated its policies and its campaigning to the people of Wales and only one party can make the National Assembly work for the new Wales and for the new Europe.

Plaid Cymru, the Party of Wales, is that party and this is our manifesto for national renewal.

Dafydd Wigley, MP
President,
Plaid Cymru the Party of Wales.

1. Governing Wales

1.1 New Wales, new government

The establishment of the National Assembly signals a new beginning in the history of Wales. It will present us with an exciting opportunity and a great challenge. It is time to undertake the task of building a new, successful and confident Wales.

It is also time for a fundamental shift in the political life of our country, as Plaid Cymru takes its place as a potential party of government.

Such fundamental shifts have happened before. Within twenty years of the election of Keir Hardie as the first Labour MP, the Liberals, whose radicalism had been the driving force of Welsh politics for so long, had been swept aside. Labour achieved a dominance in the life of Wales which lasted for the rest of the twentieth century.

By the mid 1990's however, Labour, reconstructing itself as New Labour, was adopting different priorities. Casting aside many of its fundamental principles, including the redistribution of wealth to help disadvantaged individuals, communities and regions, New Labour targeted "middle England". It was elected to power in 1997 on a promise to continue Tory spending plans for at least two years. Among Labour's traditional supporters in Wales, there is a growing sense of betrayal and alienation. Such feelings have been intensified by the way in which 10 Downing Street has sought to control political decisions in Wales, for example in the Welsh Labour leadership contest.

This leaves our new National Assembly in a precarious position. If New Labour gains control, adding to its current dominance at other levels of government, the Blairite agenda will prevail.

The alternative is clear. Only the Party of Wales offers a real challenge to more Tory – type policies in Wales.

For the first time, voting for Plaid Cymru **can** change the government. No vote for the Party of Wales will be wasted. Every one will count as a firm rejection of New Labour's Tory values in our county councils, our country and in Europe. We have always put Wales first and have always fought for using the wealth of Wales to build a fairer, more just society. The opportunity is there to move into a new millennium with a new government and a new party in government. This manifesto outlines the real choice offered to the voters of Wales, between New Labour's message of defeat and the Party of Wales's message of hope and national renewal.

1.2 What the Party of Wales is About

Plaid Cymru is a party rooted in the traditions and values of Wales. Our policies spring from these sources and from the practical experience of our people. They are designed to reflect Wales' priorities, but with a strong awareness of global, European and British needs and realities.

Our fundamental conviction is that Wales is a nation and that our political status should reflect that fact. We see the establishment of the National Assembly as a crucial step in a process of national advance and growing self-confidence. This is a process that must involve all of the diverse cultural and linguistic elements that make up our changing identity.

For the Party of Wales, building a national future is not merely an end in itself. Essentially, it is a matter of taking responsibility – for achieving economic success, social justice, cultural vitality, democratic renewal and environmental sustainability in a small corner of planet Earth. These elements come together in the concept of sustainable development, which is at the very heart of Plaid Cymru's programme.

Building sustainable development from the outset must be the central task of the National Assembly of Wales.

1.3 The National Assembly: a national voice

The National Assembly is more than a law-making body; it is also our voice in Europe and the focus of our national aspirations. Its role is far greater than that of allocating a budget every year. It must lead our national development: in job creation and economic development; in cultural renewal; in health care; in fighting poverty; in providing education and training, and in environmental sustainability.

Plaid Cymru seeks a new style of government. The annual dogfight for resources, which pitches local authority against local authority, health trust against health trust, and school against school, will be replaced by a consensual, partnership way of working. Each year, budgets will be agreed according to nationally set priorities and strategies. The Local Government Partnership Council, the Voluntary Sector Schemes and the consultation with social and business partners will all be vital tools in achieving this. National strategies for the labour market; anti-poverty action; NHS reform; educational reform; modernisation of local government; reform of training and lifelong learning will provide the basis for the decisions that will have to be made.

The National Assembly must also make its voice heard in Europe and the world. This includes ensuring the right to take part in meetings of the European Council of Ministers on matters of Welsh concern and building on the success of the Wales European Centre.

It also entails protocols with Westminster government departments to ensure the distinctive voice and culture of Wales are represented fairly alongside the other three nations in overseas delegations, missions and similar ventures.

Wales as a nation is vibrant. The revival of our national language has contributed to a stronger sense of identity among Welsh and English speakers alike. The two cultures have invigorated each other, a process further enlivened by the newer cultures that migration has brought into Wales. The result is a country which is renowned for its popular music, arts and environmental conscience. This has been accentuated by a quieter, but equally significant, revolution in our technological standing.

1.4 National Assembly key tasks

The key task of the National Assembly will be to consolidate this new Wales. The Party of Wales will aim to ensure that the following feature strongly in our new Wales.

- National self-confidence, together with an equally strong awareness of world citizenship.
- A just society, which fights poverty and social exclusion.
- Economic innovation and success.
- A commitment to safeguard the natural environment, locally and throughout the world.
- The ability to rise to the challenge of rapid change, the pace of which is likely to increase during the next century.
- A people who are alive to their democratic responsibilities and to their rights as individuals and communities.

1.5 Assembly structure

How the National Assembly conducts its business will be a key marker of its success in achieving this new style of politics.

Independent observers have noted that National Assembly Members (at 60, fewer than many county councils) will have a heavy workload and will be severely stretched for time.

The Assembly should therefore structure itself so as to ensure it is able to fulfil its tasks, without getting bogged down in endless meetings.

Consistency of policy delivery across departmental boundaries must be ensured, and mechanisms must exist to ensure that certain cross-cutting issues are integrated into all policy areas.

The Assembly has a crucial statutory responsibility to promote sustainable development and equal opportunities and both of these require action in all policy areas. The same applies to the vital national task of revitalising the Welsh language and creating a truly bilingual society.

1.6 A national government that leads

The Party of Wales will treat the Assembly as our new national government. It will have important powers to debate all issues affecting the Welsh electorate and to make laws about many of them.

We will:

- ensure that the National Assembly debates the vital issues facing Wales, calls expert witnesses to its committees and works with its partners in local government, business, the trade unions and the voluntary sector on developing policies.
- ensure that the National Assembly instigates any necessary legislation on those issues. Where the Assembly's powers are insufficient, we will call for the necessary primary legislation to be passed at Westminster. Plaid Cymru is pressing for a means to fast-track such laws through the complexities of the parliamentary process. Further, we intend to use the power to promote a private Bill through the Westminster Parliament when appropriate.
- use public inquiries and polls as a way of increasing democratic participation in the Assembly's decision - making. We will also encourage the use of community appraisals and other methods by all public bodies as part of our proposals for community planning and participation.
- use modern information technology to ensure that the public in all parts of Wales have easy access to the Assembly's proceedings and decisions.

1.7 Welsh public service

When the Assembly is established, the Assembly and its civil servants will replace the Welsh Office. Providing the most professional expertise to the highest possible standard for the National Assembly must be its employees' top priority. We want to see the development of a national public service which would provide a proper career structure for civil servants in Wales, working for the Assembly, local government, health authorities and other public agencies. Inter-agency working, secondments and career moves between these different parts of an integrated Welsh public service should become much more common.

We would encourage exchanges between the public services in the four nations, along with secondments and exchanges with the European Commission's public officials, and

with other European states and regions. Such co-operation can only deepen our understanding of the process of devolution and bring new skills and ideas into Wales.

We recognise that this cannot be achieved overnight. There will be an immediate need for outside resources, advice and expertise. This will have to be negotiated in a concordat with the civil service in Whitehall, and elsewhere in devolved parliaments. In the long term, the Party of Wales would like to see the development of a **public service college**, with associated training, in Wales.

1.8 Paying for our programme: the Assembly, the EU and the Treasury

The National Assembly will have an extremely important role to play in prioritising spending according to Welsh needs and circumstances. But it has no way of levying taxes; no way of responding to Welsh demands for greater public spending in one area, other than by cutting it in another.

However, UK government spending is not the only source of support for the Welsh economy. European Union Structural Funds can be used to regenerate communities and support enterprise. Important changes are planned for these funds.

The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy could present serious problems for our rural areas. On the other hand, Wales will probably benefit from far higher levels of funding for the seven years from 2000 through the achievement of Objective 1 status.

However, these resources can only be used to best effect if matching funds are available. As the Assembly has no revenue-raising powers, only the UK government can ensure that the available European money is brought into Wales. Failure to do so would be a betrayal and a clear sign that tax cuts in middle England are a higher priority for New Labour than the regeneration of Welsh communities.

Plaid Cymru in the National Assembly will give first priority to the campaign for the essential match funding from the UK government coffers.

This will not be easy. Over the years, the London government has systematically diverted European cash that should have come to Wales. The annual rebate which the UK gets from the EU, negotiated by Mrs Thatcher, has been portrayed as an unmixed blessing. This is far from the truth. European payments for economic and social renewal involve a reduction in the UK rebate. The result is a chronic reluctance on the government's part to access European structural funds. This, together with an unwillingness to provide match funding, has led to Wales's losing out on a massive scale and is a big part of the reason for our country's current economic difficulties. The contrast with Ireland, which has made full use of European assistance, is stark.

- The Party of Wales totally rejects New Labour's view that European funding in Wales should be matched by taking money from our hospitals and schools and **demand**s that the government commits itself to providing the necessary co-financing.
- We will ensure that the business, public and voluntary sectors are fully geared up to attract all possible European funding, which will prioritise support for employment, equal opportunities and the environment.
- We will ensure that true local partnerships are formed to deliver the bottom-up development favoured by the European Commission.
- We will demand that European funding comes directly to the National Assembly and not to the Exchequer in Westminster.

1.9 Funding relationship with Westminster

Given the Assembly's lack of tax-varying powers, the allocation of the block grant by the UK Treasury is a crucial issue. We will fight for that allocation – in our view, currently inadequate – to reflect the true needs of Wales.

2. The National Assembly and you

The National Assembly's most immediate impact may well be on family and home life. From the outset, there will be opportunities to change the way we deliver early years education and care, social services, housing and community safety.

These are all services provided for people, in the context of their home life. Nursery education and child care is much discussed, but delivered patchily; social services suffer from understaffing and a lack of appreciation of the role of carers; housing policy remains skewed towards owner occupation; there is a real lack of good quality accommodation to rent, and crime and the fear of crime still blight many communities.

2.1 Early years education and care

Young children are the foundation of our Wales. There is plenty of evidence that good quality early years education provides great benefits to society:

- Children who receive it gain in terms of their later education, employment and their relations with the community.

- Provision for children in their early years is an essential foundation for the kind of new Wales we want to build.

Such provision

- supports families
- helps parents return to work if they so choose
- helps employers retain staff
- helps children develop socially
- enables the local community to share in bringing up the next generation, including the passing on of language and culture.

However, there is a danger that in considering the wider economic and social benefits of early years provision, the needs of the children themselves may become subordinate. Children themselves are citizens. They have little power, but great expectations. For the Party of Wales, it is their needs that are paramount.

2.2 Educare

There is little practical difference between the educational and care needs of the young child. Plaid Cymru believes that both should be promoted through an integrated system of *educare*. This will require education authorities, health authorities, voluntary groups and families to work together in both formal and informal partnerships. The ability to provide the framework for such partnerships to work and achieve high quality *educare* will be a marker of the National Assembly's success, as will quality in standards.

2.2.1 At the local level:

Local authorities should build on the Early Years Partnerships in each area to ensure educare can be delivered. This will entail expanding the present target of providing the option of nursery places to all four year olds to three year olds. This can only be achieved, especially in rural areas, through strong co-operation with voluntary organisations. Each local authority should therefore have an Early Years Unit which will work with the Partnership to co-ordinate services across a wide range of providers, and ensure needs are met.

Through a National Early Years Strategy, local authorities will be encouraged to develop further partnerships, particularly with voluntary groups and the health service (such as health visitors), to meet earlier care needs. It is essential that there be mixed provision, including child minders, private, voluntary and statutory run crèches, and informal care arrangements, to meet parents and children's needs.

Partnership must be genuine. The current tendency for local authorities to dominate, leading to the closure of many voluntary units, and an actual reduction in accessible provision and the involvement of parents, must be urgently addressed by the Assembly.

Organisations such as Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association, must be key players in a comprehensive strategy. The National Child Minders' Association has an important role to play in the very earliest years.

We must take advantage of the unique opportunity to make the Welsh language available to all our children. Voluntary groups, such as the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, have been the mainstay of introducing and encouraging the use of Welsh among babies and young children. Demand still outstrips supply however. Further expansion is needed. Also there is an opportunity, on a voluntary basis, for children attending English-medium nursery schools and playgroups to have some experience of the Welsh language and culture.

2.2.2 At the national level:

Plaid Cymru will ensure that every National Assembly committee considers the needs of children when discussing its policies.

An Early Years Taskforce will be established to develop a National Early Years Strategy. This will include.

- A national training framework for nursery teachers and those working with young children, together with a simplified qualifications system.
- Action to bring provision within the financial reach of families, by encouraging take-up of such incentives as Family Credit and the Working Family Tax Credit. This will form part of both local and national anti-poverty strategies and will be subject to a vigorous awareness-raising campaign through local voluntary groups and health services.
- Ensuring that children with special needs are fully integrated into the national strategy and catered for at the local level.
- Ensuring that the learning experiences of young children are appropriate for their age.
- Targets for Welsh-medium educare in every locality.
- Meeting the needs of children from ethnic minority communities and those whose first language is neither English nor Welsh.
- Challenging race and gender stereotypes in the early years curriculum.

The Party of Wales has identified early years educare as a key priority. We see it as the foundation of a lifelong learning strategy for the new Wales.

2.3 Social Services

The successful provision of social services depends on:

- The dedication and professionalism of staff working at all levels
- Participation by the users themselves
- Adequate funding
- Close co-operation with other sectors such as health and housing
- Recognising the key role of carers and responding to their needs.

Plaid Cymru believes that market mechanisms, introduced by the Conservatives and continued by New Labour under the guise of Best Value, have been inappropriate and damaging.

We will fight to abolish the market in social care and advocate a new compact with local government over best value. This will replace the element of competitive tendering with one of consultative planning with users, benchmarking excellence and standards, and collaborative working. This will allow local authorities to run social services on the basis of the best quality, and not merely the cheapest available.

Artificial boundaries between health, nursing and social care can lead to distress and injustice, particularly among the elderly. We will:

- Encourage greater integration between housing and social services at a local level.
- Move away from competition in the NHS
- Create a collaborative framework between the different agencies to ensure services are delivered according to the individual's need.

Partnerships at a local level should encompass user groups, communities, voluntary sector providers and health and local authorities.

2.3.1 Participation by users

Participation in the design and implementation of social services by their users is at the heart of best practice. However, local authorities are often more familiar with consultation, and occasional participation through the ballot box, than with true day to day participation. The Party of Wales will strengthen participation through our new model of best value. We will also seek agreement on uniform service charges for such things as home care through the Local Government Partnership Council. Local authorities would only be able to vary these charges significantly if they could demonstrate user and community agreement through their participatory mechanisms.

2.3.2 Standards

High standards in care are essential. Plaid Cymru is committed to:

- fighting discrimination of any kind

- supporting the vital role of carers, recognising the need for respite care and greater home support
- establishing a Social Care General Standards Council to set and uphold the standards of registered workers
- the development of better training
- compulsory registration of children's homes with fewer than three children.

A national anti-poverty strategy, working through local councils' own strategies, will set targets for reducing social exclusion and achieving local partnerships. The Party of Wales commits itself to working with local communities and groups on this.

2.3.3 Children

Services to children require a stronger emphasis on preventative work. Plaid Cymru supports

- statutory power for the recommendations of the Warner and Utting reports on child protection
- basic national standards for child protection and services developed in partnership with local government and voluntary organisations
- working in partnership with children and young people.

Consideration should be given to the appointment of a Commissioner for Children who would

- provide information and advice to the Assembly on children's issues
- ensure that policies of all kinds are compatible with children's welfare
- oversee the development of local and national Child Care Strategies.

2.3.4 Learning Difficulties

People with learning difficulties face problems resulting from cuts in funding. The Party of Wales wants to protect services and build new developments on existing good practice. Enabling all people to realise their full potential is the hallmark of a civilised society.

2.4 The Welfare State

Benefits and pensions will remain outside the remit of the Assembly. Plaid Cymru is profoundly concerned at the erosion of the welfare state under New Labour, and the effect of this on the elderly, the young, the unemployed, the disadvantaged and the disabled.

At the time of writing, the UK government has refused to commit itself to free provision of residential care for the elderly.

We see an important opportunity for the National Assembly to challenge the right wing views that currently dominate London politics.

2.5 Housing

The housing stock in Wales is relatively old. We have a high level of home-ownership, but a lower level of income to support that ownership. Changes in the make-up of households – more people living on their own, people living longer at home – mean that there is still a demand for new rented accommodation and new houses to buy.

Welsh circumstances demand new solutions. Plaid Cymru recognises that housing is much more than bricks and mortar. Poor quality housing both reflects people's lack of resources and contributes to it – there is a clear correlation between poor housing and poor health, poor educational achievement and social problems. This situation is now entrenched on many of most run-down and peripheral housing estates. Improving our housing stock is a vital national task for the National Assembly.

In order to gain an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the Welsh housing stock, it is essential to carry out a full Housing Condition and Needs Survey. This will provide the information to target resources, and draw up a national housing strategy.

We believe that local authorities should be given the tools and responsibilities to undertake the task of planning and implementing the task of improving the housing stock. The Unitary Development Plans that are now being produced will be strengthened when they are linked to the national assessment of needs and priorities available from a full national Housing Condition and Needs Survey.

Local authority development plans must also be connected with land use planning and the Welsh Development Agency's role in allocating land. Such strategies should only be developed in collaboration with voluntary and community groups, including tenants.

2.5.1 New House Building

Plaid Cymru believes that there has been too much emphasis on building private new homes on greenfield sites in recent years. We welcome the declared wish of many local authorities to see additional social housing provided by the renewal and regeneration of existing housing. No single method of providing housing is appropriate to every part of Wales, but in general we assert the following principles:

- The regeneration of existing homes and estates will be favoured. While preferring brownfield to greenfield development, the value of some brownfield land for access and / or wildlife should be recognised.
- In recognition of the social problems that large estates of social housing can engender, mixed tenure will be required for all new developments except those which are very small. This should include homes suitable for first time buyers and for letting by social landlords.
- Housing authorities should lead the development of sustainable communities by encouraging co-operation across estate boundaries and types of tenure and between different housing providers. Initiatives should focus on identifiable communities in a way that encourages tenant and resident participation from the bottom up. These should be part of the local anti-poverty strategy.

2.5.2 Home Ownership

We acknowledge that home ownership is preferred by the majority of households though some of this results from the stigma attached to single tenure social housing estates, the poor quality of some private rented accommodation, and the limited choice of accommodation.

Resources released through the abolition of Mortgage Income Tax relief should come to the National Assembly to increase targeted support.

Such support should be directed towards assisting people on lower incomes and those facing mortgage repossessions through the Home Buy Option. This provides interest free mortgages on condition that the capital profits released when the property is sold are returned to the lender.

2.5.3 Home Renovation Grants

A reform of the Home Renovation grants system is needed. This would be based on the results of the Housing Condition Survey. In the interim, Plaid Cymru would move towards:

- A more flexible approach to demolition and rebuild – which is sometimes the most cost-effective solution
- A targeted approach to home improvements, looking at the overall needs of an area, and linked to anti-poverty strategies.

2.5.4 Social Housing

There is currently a shortage of social rented housing. Under the current financial rules, registered social landlords such as housing associations can provide almost twice as many houses for a given sum as local authorities. The Party of Wales would therefore:

- Support schemes which would produce the best value outcomes under existing legislation

- Establish a scheme for tenant representatives on the Board of Management of all social landlords
- Advocate co-operation of local authorities and social landlords on a common housing register and allocate housing by an agreed points system. This must be open, transparent, easily understood and based on best practice.
- Allow and encourage social landlords to purchase empty homes to provide a mix of tenure and to regenerate communities
- Lobby the UK government for a phased release of Capital receipts held by local authorities from the Right to Buy Scheme, without loss of Housing Subsidies or Housing Credit Approvals.

2.5.5 Care and Repair

Care and Repair Schemes provide an excellent service to elderly and disabled persons, allowing them to adapt their homes so that they can remain there with dignity. We wish to see a secure funding system so that such schemes are available everywhere.

2.5.6 Energy Conservation

The promotion of home energy conservation must be prioritised. This benefits the environment, creates jobs and reduces residents' fuel costs.

2.5.7 Homelessness

Homelessness affects all communities and produces social and health problems. Tackling homelessness involves long-term solutions based on local needs. The Assembly and local authorities should work with partner agencies to provide realistic and diverse solutions which encourage long-term re-housing in the community.

2.6 Youth

The involvement of young people in the decision-making process of the new Wales is essential. The danger of ignoring a sector of society already disenchanted with conventional politics must be averted.

The Assembly and local authorities must offer young people opportunities to play an active role.

The Party of Wales recognises the following as key areas for the social inclusion of the young:

- Employment
- Access to decent and affordable housing
- Education and training

Establishing Youth Development Forums by local authorities would allow young people to have an input on decision-making.

We will give responsibility, for this area of policy to a specific Assembly Secretary. This “Youth Minister” will highlight young people’s needs and views throughout the Assembly’s policies and consult with Local Authority Youth Development Forums to ensure that the voice of the future is heard.

2.7 Community Safety

Though most issues to do with the police forces and the criminal justice system will be outside the remit of the National Assembly, several key issues relating to community safety will be affected by its decisions.

Despite this divided responsibility, the two main approaches to crime prevention must be integrated. However, Plaid Cymru believes that a society that ensures a constructive role for all its citizens is the best guarantee of community safety. Communities vulnerable to offending should be targeted and action taken to reduce risk factors such as poverty, discrimination, family problems and low self-esteem among the young. The policies set out above – to regenerate our housing (2.5); improve personal social services (2.3); and set the foundations of citizenship in the early years (2.1) - will help ameliorate the factors that cause crime. Our economic plan (6.1) will likewise contribute.

The right kind of economic development (see below) is crucial. We re-affirm our commitment to the programme set out in our 1997 manifesto, including:

- Neighbourhood Watch schemes.
- Better vetting and strict licensing for security firms.
- Sensitive use of closed circuit television cameras in major public areas, such as town centres, after full community consultation.
- A national commission into the causes and effects of the use of illegal and legal drugs to make policy recommendations. This commission would take evidence from all those with an interest in the subject, including illegal drug users and voluntary groups working with them.
- Better supervision of licensed premises to curb underage drinking, including voluntary use of the “age card”.
- A ban on the advertising of strong alcoholic drinks aimed at young people
- Education and rehabilitation for young offenders in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

Most young offenders will leave their criminal past behind. To facilitate this, most are best dealt with by sentences of supervision within their own communities.

3. Your local council and the National Assembly

The urgent need to renew political, social and economic life in Wales cannot be fully achieved without a similar renewal at the community and county council level. Local government is the key to that change. Plaid Cymru believes that local government deserves to be modernised and given the opportunity to demonstrate how it can serve local communities by giving modern leadership and becoming their champions.

The community and county council elections are an opportunity for local government to follow the new national government of Wales along the path of change. This means encouraging local councils to see themselves as the facilitators of local services. Local councils must take responsibility for finding out community needs; providing or ensuring the services are in place to meet those needs; and creating the opportunity for local economic and community development. These ways of working demand responsive local councils which are prepared to collaborate with the National Assembly, national agencies and local social partners such as community groups.

There is little that legally stops local authorities taking such an approach now. However, they have become paralysed by nearly 20 years of council-bashing, fear over funding, and a severe shortage of fresh blood and new ideas. Councillors as a whole are not representative of the types of communities and people that they serve and seem slow to introduce reforms by themselves.

The Party of Wales sees strong and invigorated local government as central to the success of the Assembly itself. In return for a partnership role with the National Assembly in our national government, we will press for the modernisation of local authorities. We also wish to build a new partnership between local councils and the National Assembly in the field of education and training and health services. Below, we set out how a modernised local government system would work. Other aspects of local government policies can be found at:

housing (2.5)

social services (2.3)

economic development (6.1)

culture and leisure(7 & 5)

Welsh language (8)

planning (6.11)

voluntary sector (3.12)

3.1 Modernising local government

There are three broad strands to the changes that are needed to ensure better and more accountable local government.

3.1.1 Empowering the local community

Good local government has to be as close to the community as possible. A sense of community is fundamental to a healthy society, and a sense of belonging is essential for the happiness and well-being of everyone. Each community – as well as the individual – should be able to express its wishes through the political system. Every locality in Wales should ideally have a community or town council. These councils should be given an enhanced role in local democracy and particularly in the role of planning and monitoring services. County councils should work closely with their community councils to preserve local identity and give it political value. Where community councils are absent, the National Assembly must insist upon meaningful community participation and planning strategies from local authorities (3.1).

There are still more government appointees to un-elected bodies in Wales than elected local councillors. Many of these perform functions that were once the preserve of local government. Local authorities must be the local eyes and ears of the local community, monitoring the workings of these bodies closely and critically. Their reports and financial information should be scrutinised by local authorities as part of their own planning cycle. Privatised public utilities, such as water and energy supply companies, should be monitored and encouraged to communicate in the same way.

3.1.2 The strategic authority

Local authorities must work strategically. Policies must be devised and implemented across the range of council departments to ensure the council works holistically and not as a collection of different departments, competing with each other for resources. County councils should develop strategies that first set out to discover the needs of their local communities and then plan the services to meet those needs with the most effective use of resources. These strategies should bind the council, voluntary groups and private concerns together to create a synergy of operation and to maximise results.

In particular, two areas must be addressed by local authorities:

Sustainable development strategy (or Local Agenda 21).

This should build on community development work and anti-poverty actions to bring new opportunities to our most deprived communities.

Support for the family.

Most of us are part of a family of one kind or another, but those isolated from family support structures often turn to socially disruptive activities. Individual policies which should be integrated to support family life include: play areas for children; child care provision and after-school care; concessionary fares for the elderly; support for carers; youth participation and full community use of school facilities.

3.1.3 Co-operation not confrontation

The culture of local government must change. The arrogance of old-style Labour and patriarchal Tory politics must be set aside for the good of our communities. Local authorities should co-operate on matters such as the best strategic provision of professional or specialist services and with the National Assembly itself. The Local Government Partnership Council must work with this aim in mind.

The Welsh Local Government Association must become autonomous and set about developing policies, guidelines and training for Welsh needs. The Association should collaborate with its English and Scottish counterparts, perhaps through the proposed "Council of the Isles", as well as European associations of a similar nature.

In particular, there must be partnerships and collaboration with the voluntary and community sector, business and communities. The existence of the voluntary sector scheme with the Assembly demands a strategic response from local government.

3.2 Electoral reform

We have long advocated proportional representation for local elections. This remains our aim, but electoral reform by itself does not inevitably deliver modern local government. As PR is not immediately achievable under the Assembly's powers, this must mean that a range of other reforms must be implemented first.

These fall into two clear categories:

- increasing direct participation in local government, e.g. at elections, as candidates, as users of services, and
- increasing community participation in local decision-making.

3.2.1 Electoral participation

We will:

- hold local elections on days other than Thursdays
- allow more regular elections according to local choice
- ensure completely accessible electoral stations
- place all local government agendas and papers on the Internet
- establish the right of public and community councils/groups to ask questions and make presentation to council meetings

- encourage a greater range of members of society to be represented in local council chambers – particularly younger people and women – by ensuring better remuneration for fewer councillors, supporting working parents

3.3 Management structures

Complementary to the reforms needed for our electoral arrangement are those required for the way councils organise their internal structures, management and business. The Party of Wales favours the separation of the executive from the “backbench” councillors, with the important condition that the backbench councillors are given a clear remit and support to achieve that.

Wales has a strong tradition of collective decision-making. For this reason, we are not persuaded of the need for directly elected mayors, and the individual executive powers they entail. However, we recognise that a particular area may wish to explore the introduction of a mayor through a local referendum.

A further managerial change that would be welcomed is that of increased decentralisation both to local government, within local government and between local government and its local partners.

To support these aims, we will:

- Support or initiate the necessary legislation to allow councils to change to a Cabinet or other reformed committee system according to local demands.
- Review the number of councillors with a view to decreasing their number and allowing better remuneration.
- Encourage more decentralised decision-making within local government.
- allow the appointment of council managers, with delegated responsibilities for services.
- Introduce safeguards for “backbench” councillors, including full access to all information and dedicated officer support for their scrutiny role.

3.4 Community participation and planning

The second element of increasing participation in local government is ensuring that communities can play their full part in local decision-making. This means both communities bringing their unrivalled knowledge and expertise to joint working and also local authorities recognising their value as equal partners. It includes both neighbourhoods and service user groups taking a leading role in examining and planning the services they require.

We will build community participation into our new model of Best Value Service Standards (3.6). Local authorities will be asked to ensure community participation in

formulating their unitary development plans and in setting priorities. Failure to do so should be a material, and public, factor in allocating revenue support for future years.

3.5 Community and town councils

Community planning depends on very local participatory democracy. Where community councils exist they can become the channel for this, but a framework for other areas is also desirable. We would like to see community councils in every area of Wales, but recognise that doing so by diktat could well increase public alienation. We therefore propose that there should be a national model for community planning and participation, which would include:

- A scheme for town and community councils with the aim of creating a climate in which they would develop naturally into **Local Partnership Agencies**, taking a lead role in co-ordinating and monitoring local services and needs.
- A scheme for community planning and participation, which would link local authority funding closer to an analysis of local needs and build into national and Assembly funding schemes a requirement for a proper consultation plan to discover those needs.

3.6 Best Value Service Standards

We want to encourage the development of a community-based model for local authorities. These should work on the basis of a comprehensive identification of community needs, and assume the responsibility (not necessarily directly) for meeting them. Such authorities show a mixed mode of service provision; take strategic, long-term decisions; advocate ideas on behalf of their citizens and seek to redistribute wealth locally.

Best Value Service Standards will ensure that all authorities perform to the best of their abilities and use their resources effectively. Our participatory approach to local planning will be linked to national benchmarking of services by the Audit Commission and a dual assessment of community need – by both social exclusion indicators and local appraisals.

Mechanisms which deliver local authority commissioned services and which also retain or build local economies should be favoured. This may often mean direct service provision, but could just as well mean community-owned enterprises.

To achieve this, Plaid Cymru will set out a new model for Best Value, which will replace competition between authorities for resources with collaboration and professional

excellence. Services will be measured against those delivered elsewhere – and not just by other local councils – to ensure their efficacy and effectiveness (“benchmarking”).

3.7 Probity

To do their job properly, councillors need both expenses and decent remuneration. The expectations of work in the new county councils are especially heavy. Yet, this must not become a gravy train. We will expect the new Partnership Council to set out open guidelines on what sort of remuneration can be expected.

We support a legally enforceable “whistle-blowers charter”, policed by the District Auditor, to safeguard those who blow the gaff on any wrongdoing.

3.8 National Parks

Legally, these are local authorities. In practice, they are quangos. Councillors representing their local authorities are nominated, not directly elected. Confusion can reign as to who holds the executive strings and the large number of nominating bodies involved can lead to poor strategy.

We therefore advocate that National Park authorities should be comprised of 50% of members nominated by the National Assembly and 50% councillors **directly** elected by the voters of the Parks’ area, and will support the necessary legislation to achieve this.

3.9 Taxation

Our long standing policy is for local income tax and a local business tax on profits and/or VAT. We also seek the return of the business rates (NNDR) to local authority control. These measures require primary legislation. In the meanwhile, there is scope to develop hypothecated taxes, for example, giving local authorities the power to police and fine (i.e. raise revenue from) illegal parking and use the resources to support transport initiatives.

- We will explore the use of hypothecated taxes and charges within the local authority finance system.
- We will negotiate a new, lower Council Tax band in Wales and for further discretion for local authorities over the loading for empty properties, etc.
- We will abolish all rate capping.
- We believe that the local business community should play a much more participative role in NNDR consultations than at present. We will work for a more integrated

strategy of consultation with local business, similar in principle to that for community planning.

3.10 Relationship with the Assembly and workings of Partnership Council

Plaid Cymru is the only party to have long advocated a new way of working between local and national government in Wales. Our key principle is that the annual financial settlement for local government, including revenue support grant and capital approvals, should be made between the National Assembly and local government as partners.

This means that we will encourage the Partnership Council to raise local authority standards **across the board**. Our vision of Best Value will be used to keep councils on their toes and results will be publicised to demonstrate their council's performance to local voters. It follows that Plaid Cymru would not limit any new powers to some councils only, but would extend them to all local authorities, subject to them meeting the minimum standards of Best Value and agreement of the Partnership Council.

We will ensure that the negotiations in the Council over the way the National Assembly's support for local authorities is shared reflect their true needs, and that authorities serving deprived areas are given as great a share of the resources as possible. We support a complete review of the way the financial settlement is worked out, in order to tackle the unfairness of the existing pattern of allocation.

The Party of Wales will ensure that adequate time and resources are given to consultation with local authorities, and will recognise the value of local government experience.

The concept of competition and challenge, which have proved so damaging in funding in recent years, will give way to a rigorous and open assessment of need and viability.

3.11 Local government and sustainability

Local authorities in Wales are charged with ensuring the planning and implementation of Local Agenda 21 strategies. The National Assembly will have a duty to promote sustainability. As a key indication of both our commitment to sustainable development and our aspirations for national government, we will incorporate sustainable development into Best Value and guarantee that every authority meets the current timetable to draw up an LA21 strategy by 2000. These strategies should be subject to full public participation and should be followed immediately by action plans. The

Partnership Council should ensure that best practice is followed and failing councils toe the line.

3.12 Voluntary and community sector

We support the requirement on the National Assembly to have a scheme with the voluntary sector in Wales, but feel that much of the real partnership work will have to be done at a more local level.

Local authorities have a unique local leadership role, reflecting that of the National Assembly at a national level. We believe that this role is most effective when its is used to co-ordinate and facilitate developments that communities have been able to identify and express for themselves. This is the basis for our community planning schemes (3.6). We would further advocate that each local authority establishes its own partnership with its local sector, along the lines agreed by Wales Council for Voluntary Action and the Welsh Local Government Association. These local agreements should oversee community planning; ensure community participation in European funding bids and other joint funding bids; and provide a framework for an ongoing partnership of equals.

We believe that community development can achieve sustainable results in building communities and tackling social exclusion. We will insist on community participation in any such programme at a local government and national level. We also support the need for such programmes to demonstrate long term funding and the development of skills and knowledge so that local people can lead and sustain the development of their community. Our plans for domestic business support (6.7) include unique ways of encouraging the expansion of the social economy, such as development trusts, community businesses and co-operatives.

4. Education and training

We want the new Wales to be a learning country. To meet the challenges of global change, to build national self-confidence, to create an awareness of world citizenship and to ensure economic success, we must revive the old Welsh commitment to education as the key to success and civilised life. Our policies for education and training are therefore central to our programme of national development.

We want to revive the partnership between local and national government to set education back on the pedestal it once had in Welsh life. Little by little, local authorities have seen their discretion over educational policy taken away and centralised. This has

been allied by an increasing tendency to set school against school and college against college in an ugly competition for resources based on student numbers and results.

We recognise that education and training is a national project that must be closely connected to our economic plans for Wales. But the lessons of lifelong learning – for pupils after their leave school and college; for vocational training; for adult education and for workforce flexibility – demand a locally accountable infrastructure to deliver that national project.

4.1 Local Education Authorities

Revitalised local education authorities (LEAs) must retain their key strategic role in relation to school education. The Party of Wales rejects opting out from the local authority framework by individual schools, along with the creeping privatisation advocated for certain areas by New Labour. Each LEA will set out its blueprint for providing places for pupils in a strategic plan to be approved by the National Assembly.

While local management of schools (LMS) has brought many benefits, the Conservatives, who introduced it, wished to undermine local government and establish a competitive market between schools. We want a review of the schools funding formula to:

- Allow very considerable discretion on spending decisions for schools
- Ensure co-operation between schools based on local communities
- Reduce bureaucratic burdens
- Safeguard key services

Raising the prestige and improving the morale of teachers is a precondition for high-quality teaching and learning in an age of constant change.

While recognising the need to reward teachers for remaining in the classroom and the role of appraisal, we totally reject payment by results and the bureaucratic control and appraisal processes advocated by New Labour.

4.2 Education and Training Council for Wales

To fulfil their demanding role, teachers need the best possible advice and support. Plaid Cymru proposes the establishment of an Education and Training Council for Wales with the following functions:

- Curriculum development for schools, educare and post-16 education
- Ensuring that teaching materials are available

- Examinations and testing
- Monitoring performance and providing feedback to schools, including governors and parents
- Publishing analyses of performance on a national basis
- Providing a full advisory and in-service training service to school staff and governors
- Collaborating with LEA specialists to disseminate best practice
- Maintaining national institutions such as the Youth Orchestra and Theatre.

ETCW would have the power to intervene to tackle deficiencies and raise standards. It would be a democratically –constituted body. LEAs would have the most important voice, but governors, parents, teachers, higher and further education, and the “social partners” would also have representatives. It would subsume the functions of the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) and the Wales Curriculum, Qualification and Assessment Authority (ACCAC).

The General Teaching Council for Wales would safeguard teachers’ professional standards and work with other partners on initial teacher training, professional development and promoting teaching as a career.

We would retain an independent inspectorate but the present system of ‘blitz’ inspections is damaging and inefficient. We want to see a fundamental review of the system.

4.3 Tertiary education

Further education colleges left local authority control in 1992. Since then student numbers have increased greatly and more disadvantaged students have been able to follow courses. On the other hand, colleges have faced financial problems and a market in post 16 education has been created, with schools and colleges in competition. The role of the TECs in training further complicates the situation.

The Party of Wales supports change to improve efficiency and increase real choice for students. Elements in a new strategy would be:

- a network of comprehensive tertiary colleges
- tertiary colleges and schools sharing functions in an integrated and cost-effective way
- close co-operation with employers, including workplace courses.

4.4 Qualifications

We foresee ETCW assuming responsibility for the whole range of academic and vocational qualifications. The aim would be to move towards a system of Welsh qualifications which would be recognised at a UK and European level. A Welsh Baccalaureate for pupils at 18 and beyond would be central. We pledge to find the finance to pilot such a WelshBac by the year 2000, with the aim of establishing it as the main qualification for 18 year olds within a decade.

4.5 Lifelong learning

Plaid Cymru believes that lifelong education and training should be available for the whole population. Only by creating a society where learning is a natural part of our way of life can we rise to the standards of Europe's most successful regions.

Our schools, colleges and higher education institutions will play a major role. Just as importantly, a wide range of other providers, including those from the voluntary and private sectors, must play their part, and the relevance of informal learning - not necessarily leading to qualifications - must be acknowledged. We support the principle that an informal education sector, working through community groups, should be funded to this end.

In order to bring all these elements together, we suggest that the Further Education Funding Council be renamed the **Lifelong Learning Funding Council** and that its work should be redefined in this light, with a particular emphasis on local partnerships.

In a bilingual country, the opportunities to learn and develop Welsh language skills must be extended, as must the use of modern technology to bring lifelong learning of the highest quality to many more people.

4.6 Higher education

Higher education must play a key role in the task of building the new Wales.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate, particularly in research, in a context of international collaboration. Our HEIs must take their place in this global context while increasing at the same time the relevance of their activities to our country's needs and priorities.

Achieving a world class HE sector in Wales must involve far greater collaboration and co-ordination between individual institutions. This will be greatly facilitated by the expansion of broadband telecommunications. The National Assembly should require the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to review the provision of courses across all institutions and prepare a strategy aimed at:

- Ensuring high-quality provision within Wales in the whole range of disciplines and specialisms and the existence of world-class centres of excellence.
- Attracting a higher proportion of HE students from Wales to study in Wales
- Enabling students to pursue courses/modules at more than one institution in order to obtain the appropriate combination of subjects.

High quality research activity in Wales must be strengthened, and the research councils should be pressed to increase substantially the proportion of their funding spent in Wales.

Fundamental and “blue skies” research must be protected, but HEIs should also be rewarded for providing services to business, industry and public-sector institutions such as schools. They should also, in certain circumstances, be encouraged to adopt an entrepreneurial role.

Wales should become a centre of excellence in curriculum development and the preparation of structured course materials for the global HE market.

Provision for Welsh-medium teaching and learning should be strengthened. HEFCW should urgently conduct a feasibility study with a view to establishing a Welsh-medium federal college within the University of Wales or the wider HE framework. Students and staff of such a college would be located at different HEIs but would be part of a single network.

5. Leisure and Sport

With the complex changes in family life and working patterns, our needs are very different from a generation ago. We have also come to learn of the value of providing safe, interactive play areas for children which allow them to develop social skills and begin an active and healthy life.

Access to purposeful and fulfilling leisure, including both sports and arts activities, is an important weapon in combating youth crime and stress in society. We advocate the following principles:

- The right to leisure time and access to a reasonable variety of activities.
- The provision of leisure facilities by public, private or statutory bodies as appropriate. Local government will form the strategy, in consultation with users, and encourage the widest co-operation to achieve the objectives.
- The protection of allotments and other green spaces by local authorities

- Ensuring that where local leisure facilities are used to boost tourism, the local economy benefits
- Maintenance and preservation of public parks.

Plaid Cymru recognises the value of sporting activities for many people of all ages and its ability to relieve the stress of modern life. We will therefore work closely with the Sports Council of Wales to develop a strategy for good comprehensive provision of a wide range of activities throughout the country.

We will also encourage the establishment of County/County Borough Sports Councils in each local authority area; these would be expected to work together so that there is genuine consultation and agreement on local needs and new provision. Development programmes for young players will be expected as a result of this co-operation.

The County Sports Council will have representation on the Sports Council of Wales.

Providing access to sport and leisure for young people and those unable to afford the full cost will be encouraged.

It is accepted that private sponsorship may play a part in meeting the financial costs of sports development.

6. The National Assembly's national tasks

The Party of Wales wants to build a strong National Assembly, working with its local government and social partners in Wales, and representing our national aspirations in Europe. The Assembly's vision for our national future, and the image projected by it will have a profound influence – on other countries, inward investors and our own people.

In this part of our manifesto, we examine four key areas of national responsibility in which the National Assembly will have to succeed.

6.1 An economic development plan for Wales

The National Assembly will not have access to the fiscal and monetary instruments governments usually use to influence the economic environment. It will be responsible for only half public spending in Wales and will have limited flexibility within a set budget. Nevertheless, we believe that the National Assembly can exert real influence

on economic affairs, and improve the deployment and distribution of Wales's resources, giving priority to disadvantaged areas.

We see the National Assembly adopting:

- A number of linked strategies to ensure the Welsh economy gives maximum opportunities to all the people of Wales, including disadvantaged groups
- A multi-pronged approach to job creation, backed by well-researched market intelligence, and appraised against social, cultural, environmental and equal opportunities criteria
- Priority development of the domestic economy, accompanied by a focused, selective approach to inward investment
- A social partnership approach to get maximum creative input from employers' and workers' representative bodies, the voluntary sector, community organisations etc, at all levels
- Transparency - including an independent monitoring unit, similar to the National Audit Office
- New assessment tools to measure progress, and to ensure that public spending gives maximum social and economic benefits to those who need it most
- A new institutional framework to deliver these objectives.

Such an economic plan needs to co-ordinate a wide range of new and radical approaches. We have identified the following:

- A labour market strategy (6.3)
- A new infrastructure and emphasis on education and training (4)
- Improved public transport to ensure people can get to jobs, and first rate telecommunications throughout Wales (6.4)
- A strategy to deal with the effect of CAP reform in rural areas, including a fully funded Tir Gofal agri-environmental scheme (6.6)
- Policies to support indigenous enterprise in all its manifestations - mainstream small and medium business, community or voluntary sector initiatives, and co-operatives, - and to ease access to appropriate finance for domestic business (6.7)
- Promoting equal opportunities and participation by women, the disabled, and ethnic initiatives.
- A limit on how much per job the WDA can offer inward investors, on a sliding scale related to the needs of various regions of Wales
- Support for existing strong industrial sectors and suitable emerging ones
- A new emphasis on cultural, and environmental tourism, with a revamped Wales Tourist Board working more closely with the Welsh Development Agency overseas and answerable directly to the Economic Development Committee of the National Assembly (6.8)
- An energy strategy for Wales with emphasis on renewables and the development of cutting edge technologies (6.9)
- A new national planning system (6.11)

- The maximum use of EU Structural Funds (1.8)

6.2 Ensuring sustainable development and equal opportunities

Taken together, the different parts of our economic development plan are all predicated on the principles of sustainable development. Plaid Cymru welcomes the statutory requirement for the National Assembly to promote sustainable development. Powerful mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that environmental sustainability and social regeneration are integrated into all policy areas, particularly economic development. We support creating a cross-cutting sustainable development committee.

The Assembly's economic development plan should draw upon the process of Strategic Environmental Assessment. Use should be made of environmental and social, as well as economic indicators. Economic growth as measured by GDP is no longer on its own a satisfactory way of measuring success.

Likewise with equal opportunities for which there must be a cross-cutting committee. It is vital that those whose access to work has traditionally been limited are enabled to participate fully in economic life.

6.3 A Sustainable Economy

A Labour Market Strategy should be at the heart of Welsh economic policy, ensuring both economic and social dimensions to a multi-stranded job creation strategy. All employment, training and recruitment programmes supported by the National Assembly must make the best use of public resources. The Party of Wales will advocate a new economic objective for all of these programmes – the creation of employment which is of high quality, sustainable and far more widely dispersed.

We propose the establishment of an independent Sustainability Unit which would provide the Assembly with objective analysis and monitoring of the Assembly's economic development programme as delivered by the Welsh Development Agency and others. This Sustainability Unit would be responsible for a constantly updated skills audit of the Welsh workforce and monitor the success of policy by the following criteria:

- Effectiveness in correcting social and regional disadvantage
- Environmental sustainability
- Ensuring equal opportunities
- Innovativeness and competitiveness

Objective criteria will be used for the awarding of public financial support and the Assembly will receive periodic reports on the cost per job of employment creation in each sector. This will include an annual statement of jobs promised and **jobs actually**

created by all investors receiving public funding and an analysis of inward investment to reach the true picture of Wales' share, including employment created.

We recognise that the public sector is a key contributor to employment in Wales and a stabilising influence on the business cycle. This sector, in particular local government, will also be harnessed to prioritise support for those households who are “multiple marginalised” (by location, job status, illness, etc) and for a policy to fight poverty as an integral part of the labour market strategy.

The Labour Market Strategy will have to take the provision of training – vocational and academic – fully into account. Our proposals for a new training infrastructure are detailed at 4. We also envisage some institutional changes to the WDA to support this strategy:

- Separation of the WDA's international and domestic functions, with the international division to function as an efficient analyst of international business intelligence.
- Shifting the WDA's regional divisions towards becoming facilitators of bottom-up, sustainable local development.
- Clarifying responsibility for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and rules to prevent WDA regions, economic fora and local authorities bidding against one another against the national interest.
- Giving Business Connect a clear brief and a set period in which to prove it can deliver business services.

6.4 Transport and communications

Our transport policy has five main objectives:

- to give environmental and safety considerations first priority
- to provide good quality links with the rest of Britain and Europe
- to improve links within Wales and between North and South
- to integrate all modes of transport in the context of strategic land use planning
- to reduce road traffic overall

Unfortunately, the Assembly lacks all of the powers necessary to meet these objectives. We will therefore seek primary legislation at Westminster to enable

- The transfer of responsibility and funding for railways to the Assembly
- The creation of a Wales Passenger Transport Authority

A Strategic Transport Authority would take decisions on investment in rail and other public transport and in roads. Local authorities working through regional transport boards would co-ordinate public transport and different modes to achieve seamless interchange,

Until such a structure is established, the Assembly should work with OPRAF and the Regulator to integrate transport and improve railway services.

When the UK government creates a Strategic Rail Authority there will be an opportunity for the transfer of functions referred to above. As a transitional stage, a Wales division within the Strategic Rail Authority would be a step forward.

New Labour are proposing large scale investment in the M4 and a new road to Wales International Airport. Plaid Cymru by contrast favours investment in rail, including a rail link to the airport and significant investment in the Valley lines.

A fast rail service from the North West to Cardiff is an urgent priority.

Roads will of course remain vitally important, not least in providing for high-quality public transport by bus. We wish to see a decent “figure-of-eight” road network giving north-south links to the four corners of Wales and connections with the main east-west routes such as the A40, the A55 and the M4.

6.5 Electronic Networks

We are on the edge of one of the major changes in human history. The information revolution will have profound consequences for the economic and social life of Wales.

That is why a first-rate telecommunications network is absolutely essential for Wales, a country of small dispersed communities. The advantages for economic development of investment in such a network could be enormous, and the need for people to travel, and thus generate road traffic could be reduced.

The Assembly must work with private and public-sector bodies, using European money as appropriate, to deliver this fundamental necessity for the new Wales.

6.6 Rural development

Agriculture and the rural economy are more significant in Wales than in the UK as a whole: farming contributes more to GDP and employment, and almost a quarter of the population lives outside the conurbations of the south-east and north-east. Rural Wales is distinctive in economic, social and environmental terms, and has a particular place in our national imagery and cultural identity.

Because of the predominant influence of European policy, the link between policy changes and conditions in rural Wales is strong. Despite high levels of support through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a succession of agricultural crises have occurred. These have tended to accelerate the long-term transformation of agricultural holdings. Social changes have been induced by the loss of farming jobs as it has become difficult even for farm family members to carry on in farming.

Diversification of the rural economy, for example in manufacturing and tourism, have only partially compensated for these losses in agricultural employment.

The pressure for deep cuts in agricultural support, particularly from the UK government, present a serious threat to our family farm structure and rural areas. The Assembly should campaign against such cuts and in favour of redirected support into agri-environmental programmes, integrated rural development, with special attention to the family farm and new entrants to the industry. Over time, the Assembly should be given responsibility for agricultural support payments in Wales.

A sustainable land-use strategy should provide the framework for policy decisions on rural development. Key elements would include:

- a fully-funded Tir Gofal scheme
- the promotion of green and cultural tourism
- sustainable forestry
- adding value to primary products including food
- renewable energy, including crops
- encouraging co-operation amongst producers

Plaid Cymru welcomes the WDA's new role in developing a Welsh food strategy, including marketing Wales as the source of high-quality environmentally-friendly products.

6.7 Domestic business support

Plaid Cymru will direct the new Welsh Development Agency to look to domestic business support and growth as a priority. This must include "new" sectors such the social economy (which includes not-for-profit companies and co-operatives), as well as SMEs.

The financing of these sectors needs a radical approach if new businesses are to be started and jobs created. We will urge the National Assembly to:

- Encourage mainstream banks to establish specialist units or partnerships with social investment specialists.

- Help credit unions to extend their micro-finance role.
- Facilitate the formation of a **development bank**.
- Direct the **WDA** to offer “soft” loans.
- Offer business rate rebates or holidays to encourage businesses in the areas of greatest need, in conjunction with local authorities.
- Insist that the community and voluntary sector be taken seriously as an economic development partner, thus ensuring that the maximum available European funding is attracted.
- Specific support for women and ethnic minority entrepreneurs.

One of our key objectives is to ensure that Welsh-based knowledge – whether at the community, small business or corporate level – is utilised when the National Assembly itself needs to purchase outside expertise, and that as much as possible of the revenue spent is retained in Wales.

6.8 Tourism

Tourism makes a major contribution to the economy of Wales, The further development of sustainable tourism must involve its growing hand in hand with natural and community assets. This will entail protecting and strengthening our built and natural environment, and developing local facilities in tune with local community needs.

Tourism must be maintained and developed under a national strategic umbrella, such as that provided by the Wales Tourist Board. However, there is a clear need for greater co-ordination between the WTB and the WDA. Both agencies should agree a joint strategy for the economic promotion of Wales and report to the Economic Affairs committee in the National Assembly.

The delivery of individual tourist facilities and ventures is in the hands of a myriad of agencies, local authorities and private operators. Community interests should be brought much more into the planning process of the Wales Tourist Board.

Welsh tourism has benefited from considerable European funding. There is room for improvement, however, and the new Structural Funds offer the opportunity to promote tourism within the wider aim of a Europe of cultural diversity, environmental sustainability and community-controlled development.

6.9 Energy

Energy is crucial in shaping economies and societies. It is vital that the National Assembly develops an energy policy that meets the needs of a growing economy in a sustainable way.

The economic development powers of the Assembly can be used to promote such an energy policy. Plaid Cymru will use them to:

- Promote energy efficiency. The WDA should encourage this among business, for example in the use of combined heat and power schemes
- Help the renewable energy sector. This includes hydro, wind, solar, biomass and tidal energy. Biomass energy has a particular role to play in the regeneration of rural communities.
- Recognise a continuing, though reduced, role for coal.
- Work with the educational, voluntary and research sectors, for example in providing information and ideas to the public.

The planning system has a key role. We will operate on the basis of a presumption against further open cast mining and nuclear power stations and in favour of renewable energy generation. Planning decisions about housing and other development should consider how ecological features – such as solar energy, energy efficiency measures and water saving – could be incorporated.

6.10 Water

Water is a vital environmental and economic asset which will be in increasingly short supply. Wales however is a water-rich country. The Party of Wales is determined that water be developed in an environmentally responsible manner in the national interest.

Policy priorities will be:

- Preventing further transfers of water out of Wales and “adding value” to it within our country
- Developing a charging system based on Welsh needs
- Over time bringing all water supply into the Assembly’s remit
- Seeking fair recompense for exported water to reduce bills in Wales
- Encouraging conservation.

6.11 Planning

Land use, and community planning, are central to ensuring co-ordination between our economic development plan and other policies which impact upon it, such as housing and local government.

We propose that the present ad-hoc and inadequate arrangements be replaced by a new distinctively Welsh planning framework, comprising

- A Development Plan for Wales, integrated with the functions of the WDA. This would give a land use perspective to issues such as transport, housing, sustainable development, and tackle the big issue of hotspots in the south-east whilst stimulating appropriate development elsewhere.
- A new national system of guidance, replacing the current inadequate adaptations from England with new guidance on individual policy areas, such as open cast mining, renewable energy (6.9) and water (6.10).
- Building upon local authority community-based, development plans within the national framework.

We would further ensure:

- a limit on greenfield development
- a presumption against out of town stores
- a presumption against landfill
- a requirement to follow the 1% for Art scheme in larger developments
- community councils, groups and individuals allowed to address planning meetings
- in the longer term, democratisation of the National Parks

The WDA must be brought much more into the planning system, particularly now it incorporates the Land Authority for Wales. The Party of Wales will advocate that the WDA:

- has targets for acquiring and developing brownfield sites in each local authority area
- forms genuine partnerships with local councils
- modifies its “clawback” rules to promote the reclamation of brownfield sites.

6.12 A Welsh National Health Service

The NHS was conceived in Wales and born of Welsh values and aspirations. On its 50th anniversary we can celebrate its achievements while recognising the serious difficulties it faces. The National Assembly will inherit a situation in which social inequality and deprivation have created some morbidity blackspots which are among the worst in Europe, as well as a funding crisis.

Despite the enormous resources the NHS commands, it is under funded in comparison with international standards. Repeated tinkering over the years with its structure and administration – culminating in the present regime of internal market competition – has reduced efficiency.

The Party of Wales will strive for a health service that is fairer; eliminates two-tier services; is based on co-operation rather than competition; promotes better health; and involves the public. Such a health service should have two core aims:

- **An effective, clinically led service, based on quality and equality**
- **The promotion of good health and prevention of disease.**

This involves integrating health considerations into areas such as housing, transport and the environment. In setting out to realise these aims, the National Assembly must establish a mechanism for achieving a consensus on needs and demands.

6.12.1 A new structure for the Welsh NHS

The existing NHS structure is forced to compete with itself as an internal market. Plaid Cymru aims to:

- **abolish the internal market and the Trust structure**
- **reorganise the NHS around units of clinical delivery, with the minimum disruption to service delivery**

Our new NHS would comprise:

- A Health Committee and ministry in the National Assembly, responsible for strategic planning and policy decisions.
- The five Health Authorities will be reconstituted democratically to be responsible for the commissioning and delivering of all health services within their areas. The purchaser/provider split will be abolished. The HA's will employ and deploy the family practitioner and primary care services (6.12).
- Local Health Councils. These democratically constituted bodies will be the principal advisory mechanism to inform the Health Authorities of the specific needs of their area. They should evolve in a staged way, initially as Local Health Teams and eventually becoming LHCs.

The HA's will be responsible for the district general hospitals serving their areas, but without rigid boundaries as the compartmentalisation created by trusts will have gone. They will draw up health improvement programmes based on the health needs of their areas and following wide consultation. They will collaborate on nationally - or regionally – provided specialist services. Their annual reports will be required to report on collaboration within the NHS and with other agencies including local authorities and the voluntary sector.

6.12.2 Standards

With the purchaser - provider split gone, standards and quality would be checked by an independent Health Service Inspectorate and a Welsh Department of Health which should liaise with its equivalents elsewhere in the UK and abroad to benchmark our services against best practice.

6.12.3 Primary care

Family practitioners and the community nurse are the cornerstone of the Welsh NHS. To improve these services, we will relieve the family doctor of the responsibility for sick certification and encourage the amalgamation of single practices into groups.

Where appropriate, community hospitals may be managed clinically by GPs, with nursing and other colleagues, working in clinical directorates similar to those in district general hospitals.

A new pattern of salaried GP's will be piloted. This will help attract GPs to areas of need, such as the industrial valleys, and give greater synergy to their work with other salaried primary health workers. A similar scheme for dentists will be enhanced.

Nurses will be able to develop aspects of their roles such as screening, testing and limited prescribing, releasing medical practitioners from inappropriate work and allowing a more cost-effective use of NHS personnel. Public health nurses such as Health Visitors and School Nurses will be the cornerstone of local initiatives to improve the quality of life of children, families and communities.

Emergency primary care treatment centres, sited in the community hospital, with GPs, nurses, dentists and pharmacists on call, will improve casualty and out of hours services.

6.12.4 Secondary services

These are mostly focused around the District General Hospital. Giving the demography of Wales, the National Assembly should resist the drift towards large hospitals staffed predominantly by specialists and reinforce the more local district hospital staffed by generalists.

Innovative ways of integrating primary and secondary care, for example telephone consultations, specialist clinics and tele-medicine increase the ability of primary care staff to make assessments and release hospital staff to concentrate on more appropriate tasks.

6.12.5 Highly Specialised (Tertiary) services

The strategy for these should be decided nationally, and not by competition and duplication as at present. Centralisation in one centre should be resisted.

Criteria for determining access to some treatments should be provided in national guidelines.

6.12.6 Mental Health Services

The essential task of providing a service for those with mental illness in their own communities must be supported by an effective hospital service. These two aspects – community care and in-patient services – must be taken forward together. The one does not depend on the dismantling of the other.

The simplistic approach of simply replacing hospitals with community care has been disastrous. We now have a situation where prison places increase as hospital places decrease, with a corresponding rise in the numbers of prisoners with mental illness. Effective treatment for these individuals is an issue of basic human rights.

For this reason, Plaid Cymru calls for the suspension of further hospital closures or psychiatric bed reductions. Mental Health Services must be developed along a model of dual deployment whereby the same teams provide both the community and hospital-based services and have involvement in both.

6.12.7 Community Health Councils

These should concentrate on developing public participation in the NHS. They should be co-terminous with Local Health Councils and local authorities and reflect the views of the population they serve.

Health care must be backed up by a comprehensive public health strategy. Close collaboration between Health and Social Services is of fundamental importance.

6.12.8 Resourcing the Welsh NHS

In the light of the crisis facing many aspects of the NHS, a radical approach is needed to free up funding. This should include:

- Treatment free at the point of delivery for services that are within the defined area of need.
- Proven, effective treatment interventions should be free on the NHS.
- The National Assembly should seek the abolition of capital charges, which are effectively a tax on NHS assets. This should lead to the abandonment of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which is little more than ruinously expensive hire purchase.
- Measures to control the cost of drug prescriptions. A modified form of limited list prescribing should be established on a national basis.
- Targeting resources at areas of greatest need. Firstly, Health Action Areas will be established in areas of high morbidity, such as the Heads of the Valleys. Secondly, initiatives which could yield significant health gains will be prioritised.

7. A strategy for Arts, Culture and Heritage

Cultural activities are increasingly recognised as enhancing the quality of life and personal development of every individual. The National Assembly should recognise the key role played by the arts in expressing and promoting Wales' diverse cultural identities and heritage, at home and abroad.

The arts, culture and heritage sector is making an increasingly significant contribution to the Welsh economy.

In recognition of this, Plaid Cymru believes that a national culture strategy should ensure that the widest range of experiences and activities are available to all, at a level which meets their needs and fosters their personal development and are within their reach both practically and financially.

- There should be free entry to libraries in Wales. Telecommunications network covering the whole of Wales should ensure access to the catalogues of these institutions. The nation's rich heritage collections should be available in digital form and thus available on the world wide web.
- The National Lottery should be run by a non-profit making body and all its funds should be devolved to decision-making bodies in Wales.
- The distribution of arts funding in Wales requires a radical rethink. It should be based on the principles of enabling, respect for artistic independence, transparency and accountability.
- Public appointments in the arts, culture and heritage should be the responsibility of the Assembly. Membership of the management boards and councils should be broadened in order to achieve a better balance between the sectors.
- The Assembly's deliberations should be informed by practitioners' views.
- A decentralised, 'bottom-up' structure with a high degree of local input and a relatively devolved administration should be aimed for. Local authorities should be encouraged to assign responsibility for cultural activities to a designated officer.

7.1 The Film Industry

Film, animation and multi-media are growth industries in Wales alongside but separate from broadcasting. They need support from the artistic, educational and economic development aspects. Funding for the film industry must be fair in comparison with other art forms and sufficient to enable it to develop further. This is a fruitful area for internal economic development that can lead to further inward investment to Wales.

7.2 Broadcasting

Broadcasting is an important employer within the Welsh heritage sector and an enormous influence on our national consciousness. It is a major anomaly that the National Assembly has no formal role in policy for television and radio. We will ensure that the National Assembly becomes the people's voice on broadcasting in Wales and will press for the necessary legislation to give it a real role.

We resisted the threat to downgrade S4C and fought for a proper provision of digital multiplexes in Wales. We will ensure good quality Welsh language programmes continue during peak hours. Equally important is a comprehensive English-language service produced in and for Wales.

8. The Welsh language

Recent decades have seen a revival in the fortunes of our national language and the establishment of a powerful consensus in favour of encouraging its wider use.

The status of Welsh has in many ways been transformed. It enjoys official recognition and a significant presence in the media. It is promoted through the education system.

However complacency in the context of these advances would be misplaced. There are serious grounds for concern, for example, at the erosion of the language's territorial base and many parents' failure to transmit the language to their children. Many Welsh speakers lack the confidence to make use of the language for more complex purposes.

The establishment of the National Assembly provides the occasion for the revival of Welsh to be given a new impetus. The aim should be to change Wales from being a country with a minority language to being a truly bilingual nation.

The Assembly must establish effective mechanisms to plan the growth of the language. This will involve a range of public policies and close co-operation with local authorities. The Assembly should work with the Welsh Language Board to formulate a strategy which would include the following elements:

- Particular emphasis on early years education as the foundation for Welsh-medium education at all levels
- Focus on local "mentrau iaith" (language ventures) to co-ordinate and energise activities.
- A truly bilingual National Assembly

- The Welsh Language Board adopting a stronger language-planning role, developing and disseminating best practice.

In the longer term, the inadequacy of the Welsh Language Act to deliver integrated language planning will need to be addressed.

9. Europe

When Plaid Cymru coined the phrase “Wales in Europe” ten years ago, it was not just the slogan of our European election campaign, it was our programme for the decade. It was our vision of Wales participating fully in shaping the new European Union and playing an active role within it. We saw our country’s future as a modern self-governing nation within the Europe of the 21st century.

1999 will go down in history as the first year of a new Wales. The establishment of our National Assembly coincides with momentous events within the European Union: economic and monetary union, changes to the structural funds and the Common Agricultural Policy and an increase in the number of Member States. Many vital decisions affecting the people of Wales are already taken in Brussels rather than London. This makes it all the more important that Wales has a voice in all the institutions involved in EU decision making. The National Assembly can provide that voice and help shape a new Europe of the future.

9.1 A Europe of the Nations and Regions

The political construction of Europe must be built on the diversity of European experience and tradition, on the principle of subsidiarity and with the active participation of its citizens. The most effective way of achieving this is through the involvement of the nations and regions which together form the European jigsaw which cannot be completed as long as one piece is missing.

As the European Union embarks on a process of enlargement which could make it a union of nearly 500 million people, there have to be changes to the way it functions. The structure designed for a union of six Member States is no longer feasible. Neither is it democratic or accountable. A further Inter-Governmental Conference will be held to decide on the fundamental changes required. This will be an historic opportunity for change. The Party of Wales will be putting forward the following proposals:

9.2 A Democratic European Union

- The European Union must become democratic. Each of the natural communities – the nations and historic regions – should become a basic unit in the process of integration. This is in line with the principle of subsidiarity whereby decisions are taken at the lowest and most effective level.
- The European Parliament should have legislative powers. In addition to the first chamber of the Parliament, directly elected as it is now, there should be a European senate made up of representatives of each of the nations and regions. The Committee of the Regions could form the embryo of this new second chamber. European law-making should be transferred from the Council of Ministers to this bicameral parliament.
- In the short term, Plaid Cymru welcomes the strengthening of the role of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions, and the extension of majority voting.

9.3 An Open and Accountable European Union

It is important in the development of the new European Union that its citizens have confidence in its institutions. Measures must be adopted to make the EU more open and accountable. Plaid Cymru supports the following:

- A written constitution for the EU and a Bill of Rights for Europe
- The decision-making process of the Council of Ministers must be made more accountable and representative
- All documents should be published and available in a readable form to the public
- The EU should promote citizen involvement and educational systems which encourage public concern for public affairs

9.4 The National Assembly and Europe

The establishment of the National Assembly should be reflected by a stronger presence at the centre of the European Union. Overall, responsibility for relations with Europe will remain with the British government and parliament. However, EU legislation will impinge on many of the direct responsibilities of the National Assembly. The Assembly will need its own machinery to scrutinise and debate EU legislation which affects Wales. It will be able to make subordinate legislation implementing Community law. It will also have to identify areas in its work programme which will relate to EU legislation and policy.

9.5 An European Affairs Committee

- The National Assembly will have a cross-cutting European committee. It must have a European Minister to deal effectively with European strategy and policy issues.
- The Committee must be supported by a staff unit with the relevant skills and experience.
- Welsh MPs, MEPs and representatives on the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee should have the right to attend meetings of the European Committee as non-voting members.
- Each subject committee in the National Assembly should have formal responsibility for examining relevant EU developments which affect it. One member of each committee should be designated as European co-ordinator.

9.6 A Presence in Brussels

- Wales should have a strong presence within the Office of the UK Permanent Representation to the EU (UKrep).
- The relevant Welsh Minister should reflect the Assembly's views directly at the meetings of the Council of Ministers.
- A multi-function "embassy" should be established in Brussels and provide a shopfront for Wales in Europe.

9.7 Enlargement

The enlargement of the present fifteen members of the European Union to bring in countries from central and Eastern Europe will have profound changes on the way the Union operates.

We support enlargement as a further move to promote peace, stability and economic progress. However, extending Europe at all costs will bring it to the edge of what is feasible. Uniformity cannot be the objective. It is essential to involve the nations and regions closely in the process. Greater co-operation with the regions in the new member states could help to reinforce democracy and cohesion.

9.8 Economic and Monetary Union

The introduction of the Euro will have profound consequences not only for the eleven founder members but also for those such as the UK who have opted to remain outside.

EMU also raises the question of a two-speed Europe, with a core of member states pressing ahead with a more rapid programme of economic integration. This poses a

threat to the economic interests of the UK. Future currency fluctuations of sterling against the Euro will mean uncertainty for UK business - especially in Wales where a higher average proportion of the economy is accounted for by manufacturing industry. The uncertainty is also likely to prove a disincentive for overseas investors who have played a major role in developing Wales's manufacturing base.

The Party of Wales believes that the single currency can bring significant benefits for industry and competitiveness. Given a strengthened regional economic policy and a commitment to employment, for building up a Welsh financial sector. Plaid Cymru therefore believes that:

- The National Assembly should debate the effect of monetary union on Wales as a matter of urgency and decide on a position which is in the best interests of Wales.
- Entry into the Euro should be balanced by a stronger regional policy and treaty commitment to full employment.
- The European Central Bank should be democratically accountable to the Parliament.
- The European Central Bank should have a broader remit than controlling inflation, including particularly high employment

9.9 The Democratic Party of the Peoples of Europe - European Free Alliance

Plaid Cymru is a member of The Democratic party of the Peoples of Europe - European Free Alliance (DPPE - EFA). It is an alliance of political parties representing the real nations and historic regions of Europe which are committed to self-government, social justice and peaceful democracy. Its aim is to achieve a united Europe which fully respects the rights of the peoples who comprise it. All European cultures should enjoy the same right to develop freely within the Union.

DPPE-EFA works within the existing institutions to influence the evolution of the EU. It supports:

- A European Union of free peoples based on the principles of subsidiarity and belief in solidarity with each other and other peoples of the world
- The defence of human rights, the principle of self determination
- Protecting the environment and sustainable development
- Creating a fair society with policies for social cohesion and equal opportunities for all citizens
- Parliamentary democracy

9.10 Global Issues

Increasingly we see the National Assembly representing Wales' views and interest in the global context. Decisions taken by organisations such as the World Trade Organisation

are of enormous significance for all of us. The European Union is an increasingly powerful player.

We foresee and support the growth of common European foreign and security policies.

Plaid Cymru is committed to the promotion of sustainable development to build a more equal and peaceful world.

Specifically, we call for:

- The abolition of all nuclear weapons and reduction in military expenditure everywhere
- Implementation of Jubilee 2000's call for Third World debt cancellation
- Strengthening the Rio process and implementation of Agenda 21
- Reform and strengthening of the United Nations
- Reform and democratisation of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

10. Taking Wales Forward

We are committed to the task of ensuring that the National Assembly works effectively for the good of Wales and its people. To do this, the elected members will have a duty to ensure that the Assembly's powers are used to the full. However, we believe that the National Assembly needs additional powers to deliver the full programme of economic and social regeneration that we would like to see.

In our 1997 manifesto, the Best for Wales, we set out what a Parliament for Wales could achieve. Scotland now has just such a parliament - with the necessary law-making and tax-varying powers.

One of our priorities for the National Assembly therefore will be to demonstrate how a similar constitutional arrangement for Wales would benefit our nation. We will press for the acquisition of additional powers by the National Assembly as a matter of urgency. This is a matter of practical necessity in enabling the implementation of policies to meet our people's needs.

We see the establishment of the National Assembly and its subsequent strengthening as part of an evolutionary process in which the relationship between the countries in the UK is fundamentally redefined. This is part of a wider, global process as Europe itself moves towards increasing union and expansion.

We therefore look forward to a system of government which matches the needs of 21st century Wales. We wish Wales to participate fully in shaping the European Union and

play an active role within it. Subject to public approval, Wales should achieve full national status within the new Europe. We accept the need for certain broad economic, environmental and social issues to be decided at a European level. However, we believe that the principle of subsidiarity must prevail at all times - it is a key part of our philosophy that decisions should be taken as close to the community as practicable.

The way ahead for Wales is now clear. We need to build rapidly on the political gains of the late 20th century. The future context itself may be difficult to foresee with any precision, but the overall trends are clear. The European Union is emerging as one of the world's major political and economic blocs. Wales needs its own voice in our European home. The task of Plaid Cymru, the Party of Wales, is to develop the role of the National Assembly in that direction.