

November 2018

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015



This Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and requires all public bodies to think more about what they are doing and why. The aim is to give current and future generations a good quality of life and do this by thinking and reacting to the impact of long term decisions.

The challenges that have been identified as needing to be confronted are many and include climate change, jobs, sustainable development and growth. To this end RML are especially but not exclusively involved in designing and supervising the construction of new highways.

Improvements to existing highways and the construction of new highways enhances connectivity between communities and therefore improves the productivity in existing businesses and encourages the establishment of new ones. I would suggest that these improvements can be viewed as having positive impacts on future wellbeing.

Constructing anything involves disturbing existing conditions. In designing these highway improvements a detailed technical and environmental analysis of the existing highway system and the proposed improvements is a fundamental part of the build-up towards a complete project. In these analyses the scope of RML's work frequently extends across topics such as landscape, cultural heritage and ecology and we;

- survey and record the existing conditions in the area likely to be affected,
- take into account the impact that the proposed works will have,
- provide a detailed consideration of measures to mitigate these impacts,
- protect fauna and flora that exists on the margins of the working areas,
- relate to and add value to what already exists in the local environment,
- provide a management programme, monitor it and report on progress.

We aim to ensure that our work makes a positive impact on the local community and the environment which the community enjoys.

We view explaining our aims and objectives to the people in communities who are affected by any proposed works as an important feature in all of this. Helping the 'man in the street' develop an understanding of what is proposed in respect of the environment and therefore on the future quality of his life in the short, medium and long term is important too. This aspect is doubly important because all the elements of what we propose are both time and seasonally related. Indeed our decisions

regarding the environment look to the long-term and will hopefully contribute to strengthening one's feeling of cynefin, and ownership of a 'home place'.

Kind regards

**Ivor**

Managing Director

Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd

## RISING SPIRITS

In February last year I wrote about 'Diffusion' the process by which information and skills move between communities. I commented that preaching to the converted was an old trick that had been perfected by those who were risk averse and that, in contrast, preaching in a foreign land or to non-believers could be frustrating or risky and even dangerous at times. Back in February I had used as my theme Emerson's famous quote about the world beating a path to the door of the man who preached a better sermon. I must have preached a good sermon on occasions about working with other disciplines although I found some engineers were less than friendly. I can confirm that being recognised for your contribution to your profession is very special and when clients tell you that as well and bring to your door interesting things to do then all is indeed well.

Time has slipped by since I produced that note and I must say that by and large all is well in my world of work because things have got better. The spirits of my colleagues, along with mine, are rising. A rising tide lifts all boats and our rising spirits may be because there is a general increase in activity in our part of the industry. Last winter slowed things down a bit but I would think that the long summer has redressed the balance, I hope so anyway.

I have noticed a real change in our business environment since about October 2016. Long running tender processes have at last reached a successful conclusion for us and so have applications for planning permissions on behalf of clients. Although I must ask why some such things, especially in respect of planning decisions, take so long to reach a conclusion. Many applications raising environmental concerns typically seem to require 24months for consideration.

New opportunities have presented themselves too, including:

- Providing environmental managers on varied projects, demand for these specialist services is becoming important.
- Producing method statements, risks assessments and environmental assessments for both large and small projects.



- Repair of landslips which are usually in difficult physical situations and environmentally sensitive locations.
- Highway improvements through historic and sensitive landscapes, although I must admit that I consider all landscapes are sensitive. You should always tread carefully wherever your work takes you.
- Work to make our trunk roads in Wales 'Green Corridors' to address a new government policy involving environmental sustainability, wellbeing and tourism.
- Preparing applications for planning approval and permits for a wide range of developments. Be aware, one has to submit more and more information in the early stages of an application.
- A client ringing up on a Friday to tell Andrew "I am too busy will you do it for me"? Andrew did 'it' straight away whatever 'it' was.

Idris and I have mentioned before how we will stand on our heads for our clients, it does work you know.

Kind regards

**Ivor**

Managing Director

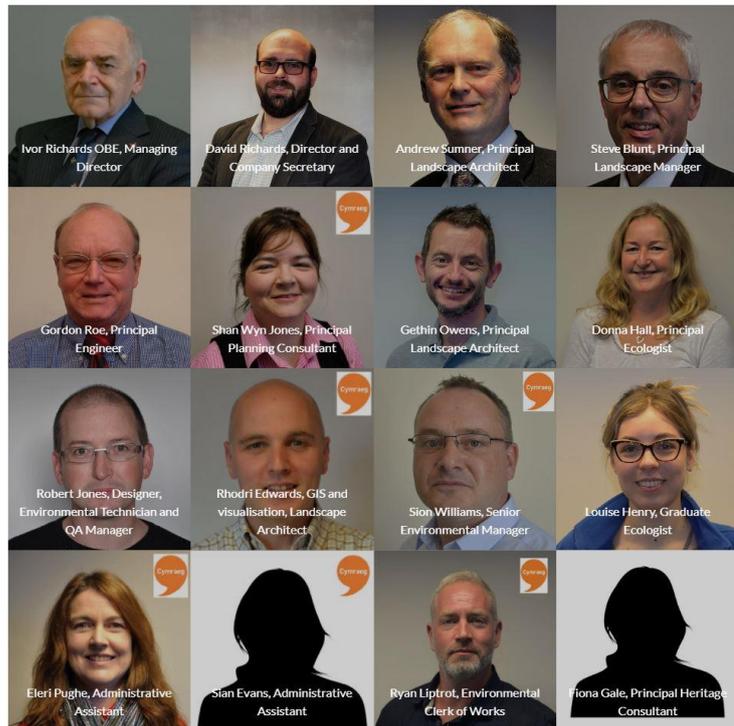
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## WHY IS DIVERSITY SO POPULAR?

Some newspapers are full of discussions about the social importance of diversity. One can argue, as many people do, that diversity of minds and attitudes is essential if progress is to be made but others say that diversity dilutes aims and objectives and creates a lack of focus. I dare say that you can think of a few notorious cases where diversity amongst people and ideas was derided with the most horrendous human results. Anna Bramwell discussed politics and ecology in 'Ecology in the 20th Century' and comments at length on how the two topics crossed and still cross in the most surprising and disturbing ways.

What diversity does do in work is increase the burden on team leaders if they are to develop a team spirit and produce results that are valued and valid. The chairman (an engineer) of a consultancy that I worked for did not think much of diversity. I have mentioned before how in 1984 I was instructed to sack all the environmentalists that I had appointed. Perhaps my old boss had a point but I did not agree, times were changing fast.

Teams involved in all aspects of civil engineering now have to be diverse. This contrasts markedly with structural engineers who can be much more focussed on the design and performance of structural elements and geotechnical engineers who have the luxury of being focussed on just soil and rocks and



their performance as engineering materials. Civil engineers on the other hand contend with sites that are unique; the aspect of a site is important, weather conditions can change several times a day, soil can be suitable one moment and is unsuitable the next in an engineering sense, soil that has been pushed-and-messed-about is meant to perform like a cultivated soil, animals doing their own thing and vegetation being capricious. On some sites these events can all happen together which can send the most level headed of people into despair.

Typically, biologists and ecologists have multiplied to occupy a vacant space that existed alongside civil engineers. At RML we are 'minding the gap' by being diverse professionally and linguistically.

But how does one obtain and provide well-directed and timely information in respect of any environmental issues, whether it be soil, fauna or flora? How do you differentiate between facts and firmly held beliefs or prejudice? You may be landed with the role of Contract Manager or Environmental Coordinator. Well, if you are in charge, there are some simple steps that can be taken;

- Explain what you require in simple English; avoiding any acronyms;
- Give supervisory staff the authority they need in order to see that site work is carried out appropriately;
- Receive regular reports on all of the activities.

The result of all of these diverse thoughts and actions may well be a happy client, contractor, regulator and casual observer, all of which is good for business and the professions.

Kind regards

**Ivor**

Managing Director

Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd

## TREADING CAREFULLY

To handle a situation with care and respect.

Constructing new highways can cause a great deal of disturbance in a short period of time but the work also creates opportunities for making a positive impact on the land on which they are built.

The technical requirement of a new highway in terms of its performance as a reasonably safe place in which to drive vehicles, ride cycles and walk are well documented, well understood and have stood the test of widespread, long term use. The aim is to improve safety still further.



Traditional highway designs called for solutions that were totally engineering in their focus with 'landscaping' limited to marginal strips of land often limited to slopes of cuttings and embankments. When budgets were overrunning it was 'the landscaping' elements that were the first things to be reduced, this limited approach was also applied to the management of these marginal areas.

In 1985 RML were asked by the landscape advisor in the Welsh Office to examine why many highway slopes in Wales were devoid of a cover of vegetation or at best covered with only poorly performing vegetation. We were asked to do the work because we were "Different from most others and were thought of as problem solvers". In 1988 RML reported on their researches and site trials. Our conclusions were that the engineering approach to design and management of highways resulted in there being little appreciation of the great differences that could exist across Wales in terms of the local environments, the local ecosystems and how they should be investigated and managed. The aim was to improve performance and reduce costs.

We have all come a long way since those early days when sustainability was only then being invented and environmental concerns were coming to the fore for the first time in people's thinking and expectations. Most people now expect us to tread carefully.

For quite some time the management of highways has provided evidence that new highways in particular cause severe problems when flight paths of barn owls for example are interrupted by the line of a new road. Many other animal, as well as owls, are naturally creatures of habit and will cross a new road despite the dangers involved. Because of the longitudinal character of roads they also intercept natural routes for local migration along rivers and streams as well as woodlands and hedgerows.

RML have been asked to begin considering our trunk roads in Wales as longitudinal 'Green corridors' which can mitigate these negative impacts and contribute to our cultural and landscape heritage as part of the effort to improve wellbeing. And at the same time provide a distinct welcome to visitors.

Kind regards

**Idris**

Chief ranter and problem solver

Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd

## WALKING ON GRASS

'Please walk on the grass' - Tommy Thompson's Message on a sign erected in Toronto's Edwards Gardens, which attracted national and then international attention for its 'hands-on' approach to public parks.

A group of people with a great interest in exploiting the large areas of 'green space' in London are busy developing the idea that London should become a City National Park. One aspect regarding public open spaces that concerns them is that many publicly managed green parks that were established with the best of intentions are now not providing us with what we need as city dwellers in the 21st century. Walking on the grass in these areas is most important and the fundamental first thing that people should do, but 'walking on the grass' can appeal to and stimulate a much broader range of sensations. This wider stimulation is what all of us should be aiming at including a sense of ownership of these spaces, a 'home space' that young people can carry with them in later years.

A sense of ownership attached to a feeling of pride will come about if communities are more closely involved perhaps than they are at the moment.

I have spoken before about our earliest attempts at making our land reclamation schemes visitor friendly. This in itself was ground-breaking. We recommended that attention to details where the public came into contact with our work was critical if we were to get a ready acceptance of the enormous changes that we were making in a local environment. People generally welcomed change

but they wanted some personal payback too. Our approach was that people should use these new places and derive some pleasure from their usage.



So for example we made sure that footpaths were visitor friendly for humans, including those with prams and pushchairs, planted-up areas were 'visitor' friendly for fauna and flora, stiles and gates were splinter free. Kissing gates were found to be more fun and much more effective than those that relied on latches.

Kind regards

**Ivor**

Managing Director

Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd

55 WELL STREET, RUTHIN, DENBIGHSHIRE LL15 1AF

Tel +44(0)1824 704366, Fax +44(0)1824 705450

email: [rml@rmlconsult.com](mailto:rml@rmlconsult.com) web: [www.rmlconsult.com](http://www.rmlconsult.com)

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