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August 17 2007

Mrs Rosemary Thomas,  
Head of Planning Division  
Welsh Assembly Government,  
Parc Cathays,  
Caerdydd  
CF10 3NQ

Your ref  
Our ref. WPPP2007 – 06

Dear Rosemary,

#### **PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE – UK GOVERNMENT’S PLANNING WHITE PAPER**

I refer to the consultation on the above White Paper which ends this week and to your helpful letter of the 23<sup>rd</sup> May clarifying how the proposals relate to Wales.

The Institute centrally has helped draw together a wide ranging response to the White Paper, with contributions from both its members and from a range of other key stakeholders of the planning system, and, mirroring the White Paper itself, has produced a high level response and a number of “daughter responses” covering individual proposals in more detail. I enclose a copy of the high level response document. If you require copies of the daughter responses please let me know.

The high level response includes consideration of the implications of the proposed reforms for the devolved nations, including Wales. The response to these elements in part reflect the discussions held in Wales through RTPI Cymru’s Policy and Research Forum. I would like to take the opportunity therefore to focus on our views on the implications of the proposals for Wales.

The Forum noted that, whilst decision making around major infrastructure projects is typically devolved in Scotland and Northern Ireland, significant scale projects currently remain as reserved matters in Wales: for example, decision making on energy projects over 50MW, where the lack of a Welsh process has led to the arguable exclusion of community and Welsh national interests from policy consideration. The White Paper proposes that planning decisions on major energy infrastructure projects be transferred from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the infrastructure planning commission but with a greater role for Welsh ministers in the formulation of UK-wide policy and the appointment of the commissioners. The Forum sees no justifiable reason why decisions on major energy infrastructure projects cannot be taken by the Welsh Assembly Government within the context of an agreed UK wide policy and therefore supports WAG’s call, recently reaffirmed by the Minister for the Environment, Sustainability and Housing, that such decisions should be devolved.

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RESPONSE TO PLANNING WHITE PAPER

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In relation to the formulation of national policy statements, the forum considered that it must be better clarified whether such policies include Wales or not. In our view policies do need to be produced at a UK level in order to put Wales specific policies in an appropriate context. If they do include Wales, then the Welsh Assembly Government should desirably become an equal partner in policy setting, as distinct from a consultee. Just as in England it would be necessary to clarify the relationship between the policy statements and other national policy such as PPSs and then the relationship with the development plan, so in Wales the relationship with PPW and the TAN system, with the Wales Spatial Plan and local development plans must also be made clearer. This would be particularly important at the level of the Wales Spatial Plan, where it would be necessary for national policy statements to acknowledge and respond to the spatial dimension of that document.

As referred to earlier the remainder of the White Paper specifically refers to reforms in England only. However, we understand that, in addition to the recently announced proposals on micro energy generation, you are actively considering other reforms of the system in Wales and it has been suggested that these will focus around householder applications, microappeals and call ins, which we would welcome. We would also welcome a new updated policy statement showing how the planning system can improve its contribution to sustainable economic development, similar to the type of statement proposed for England.

However, we would also like to suggest that the reforms may need to go further. The suggested reforms for England are built on the reforms introduced in 2004 and on major reviews such as Barker and Eddington. Similarly, the Scottish Executive produced a comprehensive report on the future of the Scottish system a few years ago. The Forum considers that the planning system in Wales has developed significantly over the past five years. Furthermore, key reviews of Planning Research Wales, the processes used to develop national land use planning policy, and Planning Policy Wales, have either recently been completed or are being programmed for the near future. The proposals by the Coalition Government on affordable housing and climate change also contain proposals that may have significant impact on the planning system. The Forum therefore considers it timely to call on the Welsh Assembly Government to initiate a more fundamental review of the Welsh planning system's both to assess its "fitness for purpose" for existing conditions and the Coalition Government's economic, social and environmental and spatial planning objectives for Wales.

I do hope you find the comments helpful but do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further clarification. We have no objection to these comments being made public.

Yours sincerely,

Owain Wyn  
Interim Welsh Planning Policy Adviser

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