

Wales Planning Conference 2014

Seminar 7 – Shape my Town, Design Commission for Wales

This summary of the key points from the breakout seminar held at the Wales Planning Conference 2014 has been compiled by students at Cardiff University.

Amanda Spence of the Design Commission for Wales presented the Commission's new 'Shape my Town' initiative.

'Shape my Town' is an online toolkit designed to equip people to play a part in shaping places that matter to them. The online resources help people set up a 'Town Team' which can explore aspects of their town. The resources also take people through various stages leading to preparation of a plan by the community. The 'Shape my Town' initiative is timely in relation to the proposal by Welsh Government to introduce Place Plans as part of the planning system in Wales.

The discussion focused on the following key areas:

- The proposals for Place Plans, if developed along the lines supported by 'Shape my Town', were considered to be **more intuitive than the system of neighbourhood development plans (NDPs) being delivered in England**. Place Plans were thought to be of real value, providing additional status to bottom-up, community-based forms of planning.
- The **challenge of engaging people from all sections of society** and all age groups was raised. It was highlighted that Shape my Town includes resources for helping people to publicise and promote their 'plan-making' activities, including organising events that can help build networks and relations in a neighbourhood.
- A question was raised of **how to engage people without raising unrealistic expectations within the community**. Managing community expectations was seen to be important to avoid eventual disappointment with what can be achieved within the short and medium term. The Shape my Town materials encourage people to identify small, realistic changes – people were encouraged to propose 'small changes that can make a big difference'.
- The familiar **challenges of involving 'hard to reach groups'** and overcoming apathy were also discussed.
- The potential for **community and town councils to raise funds through precepts** was also noted, providing scope for some resources to help deliver Place Plans and similar initiatives.
- Some participants raised questions about **the ambiguity of the status of Place Plans** and similar plans developed by the community.
- Place Plans, or community plans developed through initiatives such as Shape my Town, were considered to have **value in guiding spending of CIL monies**.

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