



RTPI Cymru

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RTPI Cymru Asks for National Assembly for Wales Elections 2016

Planning is one of the most effective tools available to Government to shape communities and places. It carries real responsibility for delivering for the whole community for today and the future.

Now, more than ever before, it is the planning system that guides how we live, work and relax. Planning is about creating places, it shapes our villages, towns, cities and countryside and is vital to the nation's economic wellbeing.

The Welsh planning system has earned considerable respect for its approach. The duty to promote sustainable development has served the planning system well in Wales. Planning Policy Wales – the central national planning policy framework – embeds sustainable development in planning, and this must continue to be its starting point.

When planning goes wrong, there are implications for everyone. A good planning system is essential to enable, and not hinder, sustainable economic growth, community wellbeing, and a healthy environment.

Elected representatives and planners, working together, seek to strike the right balance between the rights of individuals with the needs of the wider community. This can sometimes prove contentious but the system we have manages this effectively and democratically for the benefit of everyone.

RTPI Cymru is making ten asks of the Parties in Wales for the next term of the National Assembly for Wales:

1. Embed new legislation and make the planned system work;
2. Ensure the provision of a quality home for everyone in Wales who needs one;
3. Coordinate policy by focusing on places;
4. Support communities to shape the place they live;
5. Ensure that planning authorities have the resources they need;
6. Promote the quality and strength of town and city centres;
7. Set out a clear and integrated framework for energy;
8. Better integrate infrastructure and development;
9. Ensure that the natural environment is protected and enhanced;
10. Promote a more equitable and resilient economy.

Ask 1: Embed new legislation and make the plan-led system work

A future Welsh Government should continue with the reforms in the Planning (Wales) Act, and continue to make the plan-led system in Wales work and ensuring Local Planning Authorities prioritise the adoption of their Local Development Plans (LDPs) and keep them updated.

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- Establish plans for long term sustainable development for communities across Wales;
- Provide increased certainty for investors;
- Focus on delivering a positive planning service, which is clear in its requirements.

The Planning (Wales) Act received Royal Assent in July 2015 and its development involved extensive engagement with the wider planning community in Wales including those that use it. Given the content of the Act, along with other related Acts and Bills, a future Welsh Government should focus on embedding the measures rather than introducing any new changes. For the planning system to deliver it needs stability and further new reforms would impede this.

Continual change to the system can arguably cause disruption to investment in the houses and jobs that Wales needs and damage community well-being. They can also confuse members of the public and investors. Stability is essential for investor and community confidence.

The plan-led system in Wales should continue to be supported and developed. The plan-led system offers the fairest and most robust way of planning for the long-term. Two-thirds of LDPs in Wales are now adopted, with further close to submission and even adoption; these combined with the new National Development Framework and Strategic Development Plans, will provide a resilient framework for supporting Wales' long term objectives.

Ask 2: Ensure the provision of a quality home for everyone in Wales who needs one

The Welsh Government must take a bigger role in delivering housing supply through:

- funding infrastructure;
- delivering development;
- assembling land;
- at a regional level, directing how many houses need to be built, so as to allow LDPs to identify appropriate locations locally to meet need;
- improving guidance on housing requirements so that LDPs can identify sufficient sites in suitable locations.

The National Development Framework and particularly Strategic Development Plans should be developed to play an important role in coordinating this.

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- plan more effectively to enable homes to be delivered where they are needed;
- link the visions in development plans with delivery;
- deliver quality places, not just houses.

As a partner in the Homes for Wales campaign, we stand with other leading national organisations calling on the next Welsh Government to publish, in its first year of office, an ambitious long term plan that sets out how they will end the housing crisis in Wales. Its aims must be to ensure the provision of a quality home for everyone in Wales who needs one. End the Housing Crisis - Build a Stronger Wales



There are many ways in which this crisis can be tackled. These must include looking at the role of existing stock, and considering how small and large scale housing developments can play a part. Solutions should also address housing mix, affordability, environmental protection, climate resilience, the impact on the Welsh language and demographic change. There is no single solution, given the complex nature of the crisis. An overarching strategy from the next government is therefore crucial.

Ask 3: Coordinate policy by focusing on places

The future Welsh Government must think about how its decisions play out across places. It needs to break down silo-based approaches to funding, policy and delivery. To do this:

Welsh Government should establish a Cabinet position for Places to ensure approaches support cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods. Key to this will be better aligning development plans, well-being plans, place plans, investment plans, and infrastructure.

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- ensure that public services integrate efforts to support a place to develop with how its services will be provided;
- support sustainable economic investment;
- play an important role in helping achieve better outcomes for communities;
- maximise preventative spend by helping to integrate and take long term perspectives.

We need a stronger, more integrated approach to the use of land. Policy-makers need locally-sensitive and timelier intelligence to understand long-term challenges (such as inequality, demographic change and climate resilience) in order to inform effective decision-making at various scales.

Spatial planning needs to go well beyond merely allocating land for different uses. It must take full account of other policies and how they interact, such as transport and health. Likewise these other policies need to incorporate a much greater degree of analysis about the communities they affect. The widespread lack of place-based, strategic and integrated thinking in policy is a major deficiency, and has contributed to and exacerbated some of the challenges we face today.

Ask 4: Support communities to shape the place they live in

The Welsh Government must support planning authorities, communities and community organisations to engage in early discussion on the future of their place so they can influence emerging plans and strategies.

The Welsh Government should also continue to support Planning Aid Wales in their support of communities in the planning system.

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- champion local visioning and local action on place development and improvement through engagement;
- frontload community engagement in the planning process so as to encourage positive debate, visioning and exploration of constraints;
- encourage effective engagement between developers and communities;
- work with other built environment professionals to build community capacity for local visioning;
- help raise awareness of places and planning through the Curriculum.

The future Welsh Government needs to support communities to have an influence on how their place develops in the future.

This ask supports our Ask 3 (Coordinate policy by focusing on places) – a focus on local places which could provide an effective mechanism for more integrated policy-making. Well-being plans, as introduced by the Future Generations Act, if integrated with Local Development Plans, can be powerful instruments in achieving this. At another level, well resourced Place Plans can provide an effective method of engagement with local communities to support the delivery of Local Development Plans, which are the established framework for providing direction for where development should be delivered.

Ask 5: Ensure that planning services have the resources they need

A future Welsh Government must invest in the planning service including its own delivery, the Planning Inspectorate and vital support services provided to planning by Natural Resources Wales and the Design Commission for Wales. It should also develop a system that incentivises continuous improvement by local planning authorities, which requires local authorities to resource their planning services.

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- provide a robust framework for decision making on investment;
- further improve performance;
- de-clutter planning processes and procedures, especially on impact assessments and consenting regimes;
- improve development plans' project management;
- maximise preventative spend by helping to integrate and take long term perspectives.

The future Welsh Government has to recognise that planning is an important means of promoting sustainable economic growth. This means that it depends on the planning service having the resources it needs to provide an effective service. Too often local authorities fail to recognise the role that planning plays in delivering and is a service which faces continual cuts. since 2010, planning and development services in local government have received local government cuts year on year. This is extraordinary considering that vital investment is needed in housing, jobs and climate resilience.

Ask 6: Promote the quality and strength of town and city centres

A future Welsh Government must:

- *ensure that a Town Centre First duty is included in Well-being Plans;*
- *retain the focus of Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) on town centres;*
- *explore approaches to more flexible planning in town centres.*

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- have a positive role in supporting town and city centres to thrive;
- become increasingly creative in looking to ways to support town and city centres;
- recognise that the success of town and city centres can rely on their links with other places and on what is happening outside of the centre.

Town and city centres are important to sustainable living and well-being. They provide accessible centres for the delivery of services, including public services. They are an important economic driver for many areas.

Ask 7: Set out a clear and integrated framework for energy

Welsh Government must integrate its National Energy Strategy with the National Development Framework to provide a clear evidence base and policy framework for decisions with the spatial elements of this provided through the National Development Framework and National Marine Plan:

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- more effectively connect the land use planning regime with the marine planning process and, as part of this better integrate the National Development Framework and National Marine Plan;
- recognise that there is need to look at all aspects of energy and particularly renewable energy;
- put in place an evidence base and policy framework to allow planning authorities to be able to make robust decisions on energy.

Any future Welsh Government needs to move towards making Wales a low carbon country. Planning can have an important role to play in this but for it to work effectively it needs to be involved early in the processes to help establish the capacity to deliver energy projects and energy efficiency measures.

Devolution of energy consenting over 50MW must be progressed through the Wales Bill to ensure that a single policy regime to applied in Wales.

Ask 8: Better integrate infrastructure and development

Using the new National Development Framework and strategic development plans, a future Welsh Government must promote connectivity and undertake infrastructure appraisals to maximise the effectiveness of investment in infrastructure and service provision and development and use City Deals and Enterprise Zones to support this.

Financial instruments, such as City Deals and Enterprise Zones, should be directed to those local authorities with adopted Local Development Plans and therefore the ability to deliver in a planned and coordinated way to the benefit of communities and investors.

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- integrate different policy regimes effectively to maximise their positive influence;
- more effectively direct development to locations that need investment and support sustainable development ambitions in a strategic context.

A future Welsh Government should embrace strategic planning and integrate infrastructure to support existing and new development. Current mechanisms for valuing the costs and benefits of major transport infrastructure projects often fail to capture the true potential effects of such investments, this results in a funding gap between the developers' viability and the sustainable transport infrastructure which should be put in place for major development. In certain cases land value uplifts offer an untapped potential source of funding that could be used to reduce the public burden of such projects. Such projects should only be planned in conjunction with other key policy priorities, such as large scale housing development and climate change adaptation, so that their business cases are improved and other policy outcomes maximised.

Ask 9: Ensure that the natural environment is protected and enhanced

A Welsh Government must ensure the planning system continues to recognise the importance of the natural environment when setting policy and promoting understanding of the environment's essential role in contributing to the economy and social priorities.

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- enable developments to work in harmony with the natural environment;
- promote development in the right place
- plan for measures which help adaptation to climate change, including managing flood risk;
- give investors confidence.

Planning that protects natural environments, safeguarding the landscapes and places we will value in the future must be supported. Wales' environment and its natural resources are one of its particular strengths and even economic advantages.

Ask 10: Promote a more equitable and resilient economy

A Welsh Government must ensure a well-resourced planning system that is able to respond to economic opportunities that bring benefits to Wales whilst balancing environmental and social impacts.

This will enable planners and the planning system to:

- respond to investment proposals effectively;
- maximise the long-term positive benefits from economic investment;
- give investors confidence.

A strong and innovative planning system lies at the heart of a successful, equitable and resilient Welsh economy giving clear direction to areas which can accommodate sustainable forms of development. Economic value should be recognised in all parts of Wales and not just restricted to urban areas. Rural areas offer economic opportunities such as valuable landscape and economic resources for supporting tourism, as well as natural resources including agriculture, forestry and water resources.

About the RTPI

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) holds a unique position in relation to planning as a professional membership body, a charity and a learned society. RTPI Cymru represents the RTPI in Wales. We have a responsibility to promote the research needs of spatial planning in the UK, Ireland and internationally.

For further information:

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