

Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

Wales Conference 9 June 2016

I am delighted to address conference today so soon after my appointment as Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs.

Whilst I am new to this portfolio, I am not new to the planning sector. In my previous role as Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, with responsibility for housing, I worked closely with my predecessor Carl Sargeant to deliver homes and regenerate communities, fully recognising the essential role of planning.

Before last month's election, the RTPI made 10 asks of the next Welsh Government Of which I am sure you are all aware.

Today I set out my asks of the planning system, and I hope we can work together to deliver them.

My 5 asks are:

- A visionary and evidence based planning system
- A connected planning system
- A planning system that helps to deliver
- An efficient planning system
- A valued planning system

The previous Welsh Government delivered much of the underpinning legislative framework through the new Planning (Wales) Act and supporting secondary legislation. The tools are now in place. Collectively we need to take positive action to implement the change.

I will talk about each of the asks in turn.

A visionary and evidence based planning system

Development Plans are the heart of our planning system. I fully recognise the time, effort and financial resources they require. Whilst three quarters of our local planning authorities have up to date adopted plans, 7 have not and I urge them to get on with the job.

In Wales we are rightly proud of our sustainable development credentials. Local Development Plans are an essential component. We can't move towards a more sustainable Wales without them. The **Well-being of Future Generations Act** will only serve to increase the prominence of Local Development Plans as the essential vision and policy to guide the future development of our communities.

During this Assembly, we will provide our vision for Wales by adopting a new National Development Framework, setting out our main policies and investment priorities.

I urge Local Planning Authorities to make use of the available legislation to start work on Strategic Development Plans. There is a clear opportunity to use these to set out a shared vision across a region and inform and guide regeneration initiatives such as City Deal and the Metro. In this way, we can maximise opportunities and capture value for our communities and businesses.

A connected planning system

The last Assembly was characterised by a heavy legislative workload which will lead to significant change over the next five years. I have already mentioned the Planning and Well-being of Future Generations Acts. Other legislation, including the Environment and Historic Environment Acts, will also have a significant impact on your work as planners.

Planners are well placed to piece together this legislative jigsaw, identify opportunities and interpret impacts at a local level. You each should play a key role in the Local Well Being Plan process currently starting, by applying community engagement skills honed through the LDP process.

The Environment Act introduced a new system of natural resource planning which will integrate with the land use planning and marine planning. The skills you possess will help us to make a success of the new planning processes, especially on the boundaries between them.

A Planning system that helps to deliver

The Welsh Government values the planning system as an essential tool to help deliver national and local objectives.

Our manifesto set out our priorities for this Government and planning will have a role to play in helping to deliver many of them.

We will continue to ensure everyone has access to an affordable home and to this end a target to build 20,000 affordable homes this term has been set. We will also explore the barriers to house building, including investigating whether land banking plays a role in constraining housing supply.

We will also step up our response to climate change. The forthcoming Carbon Reduction Budgets required by the Environment Act will mean we will all face complex policy choices over the scale and location of renewable energy proposals, the location of development and efficiency of buildings.

We will continue to improve the prosperity of Wales, with the aim of providing better jobs closer to home. Planning will have a key part to play in this through providing appropriate sites and premises for businesses and helping to regenerate communities and town centres.

Planning will remain a very important implementation tool and I urge you to redouble your efforts to ensure planning really delivers for Wales.

A planning system that is efficient

A key ask of the planning system has been to increase the efficiency with which planning applications are determined.

I do not share the view that efficiency will inevitably lead to a reduction in quality. The changes which we have introduced to frontload the planning application process through statutory pre application advice and community consultation means we can have both.

Please use the new pre application process to identify those projects which would benefit from the Design Review Service provided by the Design Commission. I also encourage all authorities that have not received design training support from the Commission to do so.

Earlier this year, we published the first all Wales Performance Report. Whilst it is difficult to draw conclusions from a single year, it is apparent the process has encouraged authorities to evaluate the delivery of their planning service and, in some instances, invest in them. I intend to continue and further refine the annual performance reporting process.

A planning system that is valued

Looking in from the outside I believe that more needs to be done to fully explain the value of the planning system to the people of Wales.

Throughout this speech I have demonstrated why the planning system should be valued by communities, businesses, politicians and planners.

The planning system has protected our most cherished natural assets and buildings. It has supported the provision of homes and jobs and helped to regenerate our deprived communities and town centres.

However, in many people's minds, including some planners, senior managers and politicians, planning is only about regulating the activities of others.

If we want a more sustainable Wales we all need to recognise the value of planning, including the economic value that it creates.

I look forward to working with the RTPI to explore how we can measure and explain the value of planning, including making the case for investment in the planning service.

Today, I have briefly set out my initial view and asks of the planning system which I hope we are able to work together to achieve.

In the spirit of ***Together for Wales*** I look forward to working with you over the coming months. I hope you have an enjoyable and productive day.

Diolch yn fawr

Thank you