

RTPI Cymru Wales Planning Conference 2016

Seminar 2: Is Strategic Planning the solution to the housing numbers game? - Dr Neil Harris and Dr Brian Webb, Cardiff University.

This is a summary of the key points from the breakout seminar held at the Wales Planning Conference 2016.

Defining 'the project'

In order to provide the background and context to the presentation, Dr N. Harris defined the following report and its objectives.

The report, "*The Process for Developing Robust Housing Evidence for Local Development Plans*" was produced for the RTPI Cymru by Cardiff University with the following objective:

"To identify issues in the interpretation of housing projections and make initial recommendations for improvement as appropriate"

Key themes of the report

Dr N. Harris continued, outlining the structure and findings of the report. The report followed five themes and listed several identified issues that affect Planning for housing requirements.

The following five themes are explored in the report:

1. Household projections
2. The role of Welsh Government and interpretation of Planning policy
3. Localised projects and local evidence
4. Examination of Local Development Plans
5. Monitoring of Local Development Plans

Findings and possible solutions

- There is limited expertise
- Housing markets and figures cut across Local Development Plan areas
- Cross-boundary issues
- The difficulty in dealing with the future due to multiple variables and uncertainties

During this section, Dr N. Harris outlined changes to the Planning system such as amendments to Planning Policy Wales and the introduction of Strategic Planning which could be solutions to the issues identified in the report. Reference was also made to the sharing of good practice, publication of new data and the opportunity for development and training.

Taking forward Strategic Development Plans in Wales

The key issues for taking forward Strategic Development Plans in Wales were discussed. Dr N. Harris outlined the role of the Local Authority, composition of the panel and the boundary of Strategic Planning in Wales.

Defining Strategic Planning areas in Wales

The second part of the presentation held by Dr B. Webb outlined a research project that was conducted in collaboration with the Welsh Government that aimed to:

"Contribute to the dialogue around strategic planning areas in order to help add rigor, robustness and defensibility to the process of their designation and therefore to the areas themselves."

Objectives

Dr B. Webb highlighted that the project had three inter-related research objectives:

- a) Explore the qualitative and quantitative evidence that may be drawn upon in order to construct strategic planning areas.
- b) Through exploration of different options, develop a method of using this evidence to generate different options for identifying a strategic planning area.
- c) Assess the appropriateness and usability of the methods by (a) exploring how they might be applied

Methodology

Stage 1	Conceptual consolidation
Stage 2	Analytic structuring
Stage 3	Identification of data
Stage 4	Weighting, synthesis and mapping of data
Stage 5	Final boundary delineation and institutional suitability check

Dr B. Webb noted that the appropriateness and usability of the method was first tested out in the Cardiff, then applied to the Swansea Bay region and North Wales region in order to assess the robustness and sensitivity of the method when applied in a different locations.

Possible solutions and continuing issues

Solutions; Dr N. Harris outlined possible solutions to the issues identified. Reference was made to pooling of expertise to gain better data, better variants and better scenarios, pooling of resources for examination and the alignment and integration of strategic housing, employment and transport issues.

Issues; Dr N.Harris noted that Planning will still have uncertainty of the future and will still be driven by politics. It was also highlighted the difficulty in synchronising the National Development Framework, Supplementary Planning Documents and Local Development Plans.

Short Discussion / Q&A

The presentation was followed by a short Q&A regarding whether "*strategic planning the solution to the housing numbers game?*" In summary, discussions noted that Strategic Development Plans will result in similar concerns that are currently facing Local Development Plans in Wales. It was also noted that Strategic Development Plans will increase the 'cost-based thinking' that Local Authorities are currently experiencing.

Personal view – As a student, this seminar was very informative. The seminar highlighted that although complex, Strategic Planning needs to be comprehensive, addressing both practical needs at local-level and Policy, Planning and practical needs at regional-level.