

Planning: A Guide for Local Planning Authority Members in Wales



Royal Town Planning Institute

The **Royal Town Planning Institute** (RTPI) is the professional body for town and country planners. It exists to advance the science and art of town planning for the benefit of the public. It represents over 24,000 spatial planners; RTPI Cymru is part of the RTPI and represents the interests of around 1,100 planners in Wales.

Almost all planners are a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), as the professional body for town and country planners, whether they work in the public or private sectors. Chartered Town Planners use the post-nominals letters MRTPI, this indicates that they have undergone a rigorous independent assessment of their professional competence and abide by a Code of Professional Conduct and commit to keep their skills up to date.



Planning is one of the most important tools available to Local Authorities and Members to shape their communities and places. It carries real responsibility for delivering for the whole community for today and the future.

Planning has an important role to play in delivering Local Authorities' corporate goals and supporting the seven Well-being Goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Planning proposals (whether allocations in a plan or applications) envisage change and change often generates a sense of fear in some quarters which makes planning quite a challenging topic for members often facing conflicting pressures.

What is Planning?

Planning operates at all scales, from some of the biggest decisions in Wales (where to site underground nuclear waste, where to route overhead power lines, the best routes for pipelines and roads) to the most important small scale decisions (the siting of signage, telecommunication masts, satellite dishes). All decisions small and large form fundamental aspects of a working community, and all decisions are made within the planning system.

Planning is about getting the right things built in the right places, about the spaces around buildings, how we move around and protecting important spaces.

Fundamentally, planning is about sustainable land use – – influencing and regulating the use of land in a way which meets the present and future needs of the economy, local communities and people whilst minimising any impacts upon the natural environment and features of historic importance. Making these decisions is what makes your job challenging and exciting.

Planning takes account of wider, long-term public interests including the environment, economic growth and prosperity, good health and well-being, enhancement of heritage, conservation, local culture and community identity, including the Welsh language.

But planning is not the answer to all of the issues facing communities in Wales – for example it can facilitate the provision of green spaces for play and exercise, but it can't cure childhood obesity.

Planning is long term – buildings stand for a long time and therefore your decisions also need to stand the test of time. We can all think of examples of poor decisions can leave long-term tangible and harmful impacts on the environment, communities and the economy.



It requires difficult decisions about potentially unpopular but necessary projects, such as waste disposal projects or energy generation schemes – we need places for our recycling to be processed and sites for energy generation to keep the lights on.

Planning also deals with the present - most people's experience of planning is through proposals to build or change a building. The management of development is a positive tool for local planning authorities. It can promote the land use changes that are needed to support the local economy and community life, whilst acting in the wider public interest to avoid any unacceptable impacts of development proposals.

Planning (Wales) Act 2015

The planning system in Wales is undergoing significant changes to the way it operates, as changes set out in the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 are implemented. A National Development Framework (NDF) has been introduced, along with new Strategic Development Plans (SPDs) and Place Plans.

A Plan Led System

In Wales we have a plan-led planning system. There are a hierarchy of Plans making up the 'Development Plan'. These guide development in Wales.

Local Development Plans

The LDP guides development (such as housing (inc social housing and travellers sites), shopping, offices, manufacturing) in a Local Authority area. These are written and implemented by the Local Planning Authority (LPA), consulting with the community, including interest groups, businesses and landowners.

Once prepared these plans go through an examination process to consider the 'soundness' of the plan. Once adopted, they are reviewed every four years. An Annual Monitoring Report is prepared by the LPA in the Autumn.

It's the plan which sets out how your Local Authority sees the area changing and outlines the policies against which proposals will be assessed. It also sets out what areas need protection or enhancement. For you to influence the future of the area – the LDP is an important place to start.

You can help your local community influence the future of their area, by encouraging everyone to participate in the plan-making process by expressing their views.

It is also important to look beyond your boundaries. People move across them daily for business, pleasure and learning. Working with your neighbouring authorities will help you to meet their needs and get the best solution for your community.

Place Plans

There is also new provision for Place Plans, which are an opportunity for the community to come together and discuss the future of their local area, resulting in a Place Plan. These plans should reflect the aspirations of communities as a whole and make links with LDPs and Well-being Plans. There is an opportunity to align Place Plans with reviews of LDPs which in turn could help to inform financial planning. Place Plans will be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the LDP.

National Development Framework

The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 sets out a requirement for the Welsh Ministers to produce a National Development Framework (NDF). The NDF will set out the Welsh Government's national land use priorities and provide a framework for Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans. The Welsh Government currently preparing the first NDF which will replace the Wales Spatial Plan.

Strategic Development Plans

Evidence has shown that in some areas in Wales LPAs have found it difficult to address strategic planning/ larger than local issues when preparing Local Development Plans (LDPs). The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 makes provision for Strategic Development Plans (SDPs), but does not specify where they should be prepared, although Cardiff City Region, Swansea Bay and A55 Corridor have been discussed as potential areas.



Day to day Planning

Planning also deals with the present and most people's experience of planning is through proposals to build or change a building.

Local Planning Authorities are required to support development through the planning system and the development management process. However, this doesn't mean that Members always have to say 'yes' to planning proposals. As a Member you are able to work with applicants to agree a mutually acceptable project and meet the vision and need identified in your plan. If a development isn't acceptable for sound planning reasons, Members can say 'no'.

As a Member, it is important that you encourage developers and communities to come together as early as possible in the planning process, and even before. Sometimes objections are because communities don't understand what is being proposed or why the proposal may reflect the policies that control local development. Are there ways that negative aspects of a proposal can be alleviated? You can help find a solution.



The Role of Members

You play an important leadership role in planning for your area. You have a role in reaching the long-term goals through positive planning and taking difficult decisions on behalf of your community.

You have a role to represent the future needs of your local community – sometimes this means taking unpopular decisions, but in the longer term it may well be in the community's interest.

It is important that you follow your local authority's code of conduct; your role in taking planning decisions has to be transparent; your decisions and behaviour are accountable to the public, you must be able to explain the basis of your decisions.

Members on planning committees and portfolio Members have specific responsibility for planning. However, planning is important to all Members of the Authority and can help deliver other local objectives.



Support is available

Planning can be a difficult area of responsibility for Members, but there is support available to you. Within your Authority, officers will be able to advise you. Members will get the best professional advice on planning matters from Chartered Town Planners.

We would encourage you to take up every opportunity for training and briefing on planning; your Authority and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) will provide some. There is also the Wales Planning Conference organised by RTPI Cymru, held every year.



PIPA – Independent support for Members

The Politicians in Planning Network (known as PIPA) aims to influence national planning policies and to press decision-makers to address current planning-related issues effectively. Members of PIPA play an important part in developing policy, knowledge and good practice. The Network is free to join and is a valuable resource



aimed at the needs of politicians involved in planning.

For further information go to: www.rtpi.org.uk/politicians_in_planning_network/

Wales Best Places

Wales' Best Places was a competition run by RTPI Cymru, to celebrate some of our most attractive and inspiring places and the role planners have played in helping to protect or shape them for Welsh communities.

The top 10 best places in Wales from over 200 nominations from the public are:

- Aberaeron, (Ceredigion)
- Caernarfon, (Gwynedd)
- Cardiff Bay Inner Harbour, (Cardiff)
- Denbigh, (Denbighshire)
- Gower, (Swansea)
- The Hayes, (Cardiff)
- Llandudno Promenade and Mostyn Street, (Conwy)
- Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre, (Merthyr Tydfil)
- Snowdonia, (Snowdonia National Park)
- Tenby, (Pembrokeshire Coast National Park)

Following a public vote, Aberaeron was crowned the overall winner.



Planning is an important and rewarding function and one which will help you fulfil your aims of being a Member – delivering for your community's future.

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