



Plan the Wales We Need

Planning is central to life in Wales

Wales faces many challenges. The pandemic has had a significant impact on all our lives and the economy. Whilst there are many uncertainties around how we will emerge from the pandemic, it is likely that many of the issues which Wales already faced will continue and even be compounded.

Areas of Wales have traditionally faced complex place-based issues, including a decline in economic growth, changes in our high streets, poverty and inequality, the delivery of quality housing in the right locations and the resilience of Wales is frequently tested by severe weather events.

The role of planning is to look to the long term and act in the long-term public interest, making a balance between competing interests and setting the framework and decisions for a sustainable future.

“The way we plan, design and build our communities and infrastructure for the future is critical in addressing long-term challenges and ensuring well-being nationally and locally.”

Future Generations Commissioner 2020

Planning offers an established and effective process to facilitate a sustainable future for Wales. However it needs to be invested in and strengthened to be able to deliver expectations.

In 2019 the Auditor General concluded that:

“Planning Authorities are not resilient enough to deliver long-term improvements because of their limited capacity and the challenge of managing a complex system.”

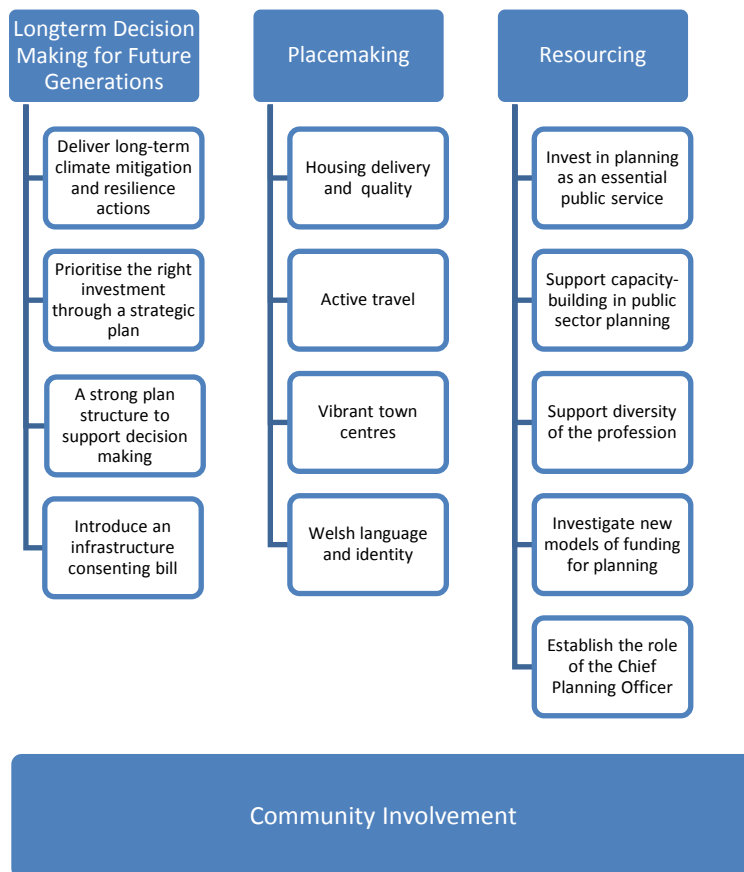
The planning system sets the context for development and creates the enabling conditions for a sustainable and healthy built environment. Planning shapes the environments where people work, live and interact. Through strategic spatial planning, the system can ensure that all residents and businesses have a good level of access to services and infrastructure, resources are appropriately accounted for in development decisions, and that new developments make efficient use of resources and technologies. Planning can also address potential negative impacts of development which can be harmful to human health.

Plan the Wales We Need

Wales' current and future generations face multiple place based and interrelated issues.



Planning services can be positioned to enable the solutions.



Wales is in a strong position. There is a strong national planning policy framework and has the world-leading Well-being of Future Generations Act.

There is increasing recognition that the planning system and Wales' sustainable development ambitions are intrinsically linked. Planning sets the context for the built environment, shaping the way people live, work and interact. Good planning can support ambitious economic, housing, health and environmental objectives; on the other hand, places that are not strategically planned may lack resources, infrastructure and economic opportunities.

RTPI Cymru is making the following asks of the Parties in Wales for the next term of Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament:

Long-term Decision Making for Future Generations

Deliver long-term climate mitigation and resilience actions, including biodiversity enhancement.

The planning system can prevent locking-in inefficient, high-carbon infrastructure that will be used for decades. Through stringent climate requirements, the planning system has the potential to avoid significant carbon lock-ins from fossil-fuelled infrastructure that make it difficult to shift to lower-carbon pathways. This will be critical to supporting the net-zero transition.

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.

Invest in and seize the opportunities from Future Wales – the National Plan 2040 to prioritise the right investment decisions.

Spatial planning can positively support the economic performance of Wales through influencing factors that determine productivity, by defining the future role of key settlements and strengthening their interrelationships, by providing enhanced connectivity etc.

Future Wales – the National Plan 2040 (the National Development Framework (NDF)) is an essential new addition to the development plan in Wales and will aid Welsh Government, other public agencies and private investors to make strategic investment decisions for Wales. Future Wales will play an important role in identifying infrastructure projects at a time where there is uncertainty around the future of planned projects, infrastructure finance and as Britain leaves the European Union.

Support and use the hierarchy of plans to make long-term decisions, including supporting the delivery of SDPs.

Equally, bringing forward Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) at a regional level will enable us to address the more complex regional spatial issues that cross boundaries and may require different responses across Wales. This strong plan framework is vital to the balanced recovery of Wales and for long-term decision-making.

It is important to recognise the spatial distinctiveness of places in developing policy. Future Wales – the National Plan 2040, SDPs and Local Development Plans (LDP) can together facilitate an integrated approach with other areas of policy, linking decisions on economic development with those on housing, climate change, energy generation, transport, and other infrastructure, providing a spatial framework for investment at different scales across Wales and facilitate joint working and maximise benefits on the ground. Place Plans can also add value at the local level for those communities which have them. The policy framework would be strengthened by emphasising the importance of these links and the use of the evidence that they provide.

Introduce the Infrastructure Consenting Bill

The regulatory framework to support the change in the infrastructure consenting regime needs to be brought forward to provide an effective process for making decisions on large infrastructure, providing clarity to support needed infrastructure and balancing this with the needs of communities.

Placemaking

It is vital that our initial response to the pandemic does not overlook existing good work and that we retain quality and standards in the short term, for long term benefits, by not compromising the quality and design of development to achieve short term fixes. The Placemaking Charter Wales provides a useful focus in this respect, promoting the important principles of placemaking - people and community, location, movement, mix of uses, public realm and identity.

Housing

Support and invest in the delivery of quality homes in the right places across Wales.

Without the planning system, Wales is unlikely to meet affordable housing targets. It is estimated that an average of 7,500¹ new homes will need to be built each year to meet housing needs, of which 3,500 will need to be affordable homes. To achieve ambitious national targets, planners will need to identify where housing, including affordable housing, is needed, enforce quality standards, ensure new homes have good access to amenities, support community cohesion, and coordinate developer contributions.

The planning system supports delivering ambitious targets for suitable and affordable housing. Planning can support delivery of affordable housing, which may not be delivered through the private sector, even where total supply issues are remedied.

High quality homes, safe living environments and access to opportunities for exercise and recreation enable population health. Public Health Wales prioritises environmental and social conditions which affect public health. Key planning-related priorities in the Public Health Wales 2018-2030 strategy, include creating cleaner air, improving mental health conditions and reducing childhood health inequities. Well-planned places, particularly those with access to green infrastructure and that enable community cohesion, are important for supporting the mental and physical health of residents. Access to greenspace is particularly important for childhood development; having high access to greenspace in childhood can reduce risk of developing mental health diseases later in life by up to 55%.

Active Travel

Continue to enable the delivery of active travel.

Planning systems can play a key role in encouraging active travel through identifying new opportunities and facilitating infrastructure investment. Active travel is currently impeded by a lack of safe and accessible infrastructure with safety factors being reported as a key factor for deterring people from cycling. Providing active travel infrastructure requires community engagement to identify where active travel is most needed, spatial planning, funding for infrastructure and stakeholder coordination. Active travel helps deliver a range of benefits including reducing pollution caused by private car usage, provide health benefits from being active and reduces congestion with its economic negativity.

¹ Welsh Government: Estimates of housing need: 2019-based <https://gov.wales/estimates-housing-need-2019-based#:~:text=During%20the%20first%205%20years,over%20the%20first%205%20years>.

Vibrant town centres

Support the delivery of vibrant town centres.

Town centres are vital economic, community and social hubs. The closure of non-essential businesses, as a result of the pandemic, has had a significant impact on high streets and town centres. Several major retailers went into administration as income collapsed. Others are restructuring and renegotiating leases. However, industry figures show that local corner stores and independent grocery stores experienced a 63% boost in trade in the three months leading up to 17 May, along with a 75% increase in online grocery sales in the last month of this period.

It is essential that a town-centre first approach is maintained by taking a holistic, plan-led approach to the integration of high-quality homes, including affordable homes, and the repurposing of vacant commercial space for uses which support community resilience and environmental sustainability.

Welsh Language and Identity

Invest in and roll out a common methodology to carry out linguistic impact assessments.

The Welsh language is an important part of Wales' identity and this is important in placemaking. The development of robust policies and mechanisms would enable LPAs take significant account of the Welsh language in land use decisions to support Cymraeg 2050.

Resourcing

Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in Wales are under increasing pressure to deliver more services with fewer resources. LPAs have seen their budgets cut by more than 50% in the last five years. These budget cuts place local authorities under intense pressure and make key health, social and economic services unaffordable. Moreover, these cuts are exacerbating inequalities.

A well resourced, plan-led, positive planning service can deliver corporate objectives, which, if properly encouraged and effectively organised can bring together objectives across services and help achieve local and national sustainable development and climate action goals.

Planning services are under particular pressure and scrutiny. Total expenditure on planning services have fallen by 50% in Wales since 2008-09. These budget constraints have forced LPAs to prioritise meeting statutory obligations around development management over plan-making. Compounding these budget cuts, LPAs are under pressure to quickly address applications and deliver housing targets. The system is sometimes perceived as an impediment rather than an enabler of housing development due to the uncertainty and complexity of the current development management process.

High-quality planning is needed to efficiently meet the needs of people in all areas.

Invest in planning as an essential public service.

Like any good public service, the planning system requires resources and capacity to deliver outcomes efficiently, effectively, and equitably. Financial support to increase the number of public sector planners employed, funding for specialist knowledge and investing in efficiency-saving digital technologies can help support the shift from a largely reactive, regulatory planning system, to a proactive and strategic planning system.



Support capacity-building in public sector planning and bring forward a Bill on Planning Law Consolidation.

Strategic plan-making requires technical skills and a deep understanding of community needs and priorities. Prioritising strategic planning includes non-financial actions, such as freeing up resources by reducing needlessly burdensome regulations and changing performance targets to measure quality instead of speed or efficiency.

Recommendations from the Law Commission on a consolidation bill for planning should be taken forward. This will reduce the burden of the complexity of the current planning legislation contained in multiple Acts.

Support diversity of the profession and introduce a chartered town planning apprenticeship.

This would help reach groups who are traditionally not attracted to university education. This will assist in strengthening the profession, accessing untapped talent and help build a profession that is representative of the society we work in. In Wales this is particularly relevant to BAME and Welsh speaking communities.

Investigate new models of funding for planning

Funding available for non-revenue generating plan-making activities, could be greatly expanded in size and scope to incentivise quality outcomes, joint working, community participation, the digitisation of part of the planning process, and climate ambitions. Implement actions to invest in local planning services, including the ring fencing of planning fee income and investigate models full cost recovery.

Establish the role of the Chief Planning Officer

Corporate management teams provide leadership, vision and priority setting for areas, by shaping the strategic operational direction and investment decisions of local authorities. The implications of these corporate decisions on new investment, infrastructure, development activity, local services and policy delivery are significant, particularly at this time. The RTPI believes that making the role of the Chief Planning Officers a more prominent and strategic position within local authorities would positively influence the outcomes of planning and support good growth and a balanced recovery.

Community engagement

Promote and support community engagement in plan making at all levels.

Planning can support local neighbourhoods to shape development, retain their identity and encourage community involvement in the planning process. Tools to enable communities to engage in informing policies should be invested in to strengthen plan making.

It is important that a range of engagement mechanisms are used to reach as many parts of communities as possible. New mechanisms for digital engagement to be used more will facilitate engagement with many groups who traditionally do not engage with the planning process, including young people.



RTPI Cymru
Royal Town Planning Institute
Sefydliad Cynllunio Trefol Brenhinol

RTPI Cymru
Studio 107 Creative Quarter
Morgan Arcade
Cardiff
CF10 1AF

e-mail: walespolicy@rtpi.org.uk

Tel: 020 7929 8197

www.rtpi.org.uk/wales

Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

RTPI champions the power of planning in creating prosperous places and vibrant communities; RTPI Cymru leads on our work in Wales. We have over 25,000 members, with 1,300 in Wales, in the private, public, academic and third sectors.

Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social and environmental challenges. We are the only body in the United Kingdom that confers Chartered status to planners, the highest professional qualification sought after by employers in both private and public sectors.