



Unlock the Value of Planning

A guide for members elected to local authorities in Wales May 2022

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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 Wellbeing 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.

Visioning

Planning lies at the intersection between communities and local government decision making and has a critical role to play as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic. Now is the time to harness Wales' potential to:

- Address the twin crises of climate and nature and achieve Wales' net zero emissions targets to protect and build sustainable local communities
- Promote a wellbeing economy
- Deliver quality and affordable homes for all
- Tackle poverty and reduce health inequalities

To achieve these outcomes, there is a need to embrace change and provide a clear route map for Wales which can be delivered in the long, medium and short-term. It is vital that all local authority planning departments in Wales are adequately resourced so they can function to their fullest potential, as identified by the Wales Audit Office, in their report, [The Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales](#): "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 underpins effective decision making at the local level and RTPI Cymru is calling on elected members to commit to the following and unlock the value of planning.

Re-invest in the Planning System

What – Ensure adequate resourcing and funding of all local authority planning services to create a world leading planning system.

Why – For the planning system in Wales to fulfil its statutory duties and deliver quality placemaking there is a critical need for more investment. Local planning authority departments are significantly underfunded, and research shows that planning services are suffering most severely of all local government services due to budget cuts. Analysis by the Wales Audit Office shows that "all planning services – policy, development and building control – have, since 2008-09, seen significant cuts in expenditure with budgets having fallen by 50% in real terms, considering inflation. Net expenditure has fallen from £45 million in 2008-09 to £22.8 million in 2017-18. The biggest cut has been to development control budgets where spend has reduced by 59%." [The Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales \(audit.wales\)](#)



The need for investment has been widely recognised across public, private and third sectors. Planning fees should be ring fenced to support the adequate resourcing of the service, in addition regular, small and transparently justified changes to fees. We believe that planning fee increases should be evidence based and supported with clear proposals to improve delivery, but any increases need to be ringfenced to support the delivery improvements in the service.

Local Development Plans (LDPs) are an essential tool for local authorities to use to shape their local areas and deliver their visions. Emerging Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) provide the opportunity for local authorities to collaborate to seize benefits and address issues in the wider area and must be invested in to realise these benefits.

Support Place Leadership

What – Support planning services to deliver place-based leadership through facilitating the Placemaking Principles and place-based approaches and championing the role of Chief Planning Officers.

Why - A place-based approach is about considering all aspects that impact on that area. Planners are the placemaking conduits - the planning service has a critical coordinating role to play in delivering integrated strategies for the economy, infrastructure, and environment as part of a place-based approach.

RTPI Cymru supports the Placemaking Principles as set out in the [Placemaking Wales Charter](#) as a further means to overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries. The Charter calls on all those responsible for the development of places to work and plan together with local communities, to improve the lives of people, support inclusive growth and create thriving sustainable places. This includes improving coordination between policy, plans and funding and enhancing collaboration and communication across all sectors and stakeholders, including local authority departments, key agencies, the private sector and local communities. As the key decision makers for their communities, elected members play an important role in this process by acting as the democratic layer of placemaking and place leadership through active public engagement.

As natural collaborators, planners can ensure that the spatial implications of other local authority functions are considered. The training that a planner has is fundamentally about making connections and seeing the bigger picture; these are invaluable skills to feed into corporate discussions. To support place-based leadership, RTPI Cymru wishes to highlight the vital role statutory Chief Planning Officers can play within local authorities and their important partnership with elected members. RTPI Cymru calls upon Authorities to commit to ensuring that planning expertise is used corporately in local government so that the value of place and its preventative upstream impact on public health and decarbonisation can be embedded within decision making frameworks for investment and integrated service delivery.

Plan for a Zero Net Future

What – Embed sustainable approaches to development within everyday decision making to promote environmentally sustainable lifestyles and nature-positive places.

Why – To address the twin crises of climate and nature there needs to be a coordinated effort made across all sectors of society to transform the way in which we live and to promote low carbon lifestyles. There is potential to create more resilient places through the planning system to promote sustainable patterns of development across all aspects of the economy, society, and environment. RTPI Cymru supports the direction of travel set out in PPW and Future Wales, which places the consideration of the climate and ecological emergency at the heart of the planning system. RTPI Cymru calls on elected members to support planners working in the new planning system in meeting our ambitious net zero targets through local action such as:

- promoting local living
- providing active and sustainable travel infrastructure
- embedding the Reuse First Principle
- delivering sustainable housing solutions
- protecting and enhancing biodiversity
- supporting low carbon infrastructure



Enhance Communities' Engagement in Planning

What – Work in partnership with communities to establish local priorities and sustainable opportunities for the future.

Why – Communities hold the insider knowledge required to actively shape their places and to deliver agreed outcomes which align with the priorities of local people. It is our vision that enhanced community engagement will promote a socially inclusive planning system which improves local prosperity.

Place Plans provide an opportunity to address a wide range of local place-based topics. However, the process and preparation of Place Plans can take significant time, commitment and resource. It is recognised that Place Plans are not appropriate for all communities. Partnership working is key, particularly between communities and local planning authorities and this requires resources and support to ensure a successful, collaborative process with meaningful community engagement and achievable outcomes. Capacity and skills should be invested in across Wales to enable stakeholders to properly commit to and support effective and meaningful community engagement.

Investing in community plan-making activities has the potential to deliver real change so that local issues are reflected in strategic priorities. Therefore, RTPI Cymru calls upon elected members to ensure that appropriate resources are made available to both communities and planning services to support meaningful community engagement.

Glossary

Planning Policy Wales contains the national policy outlining guidance for making planning decisions gov.wales/planning-policy-wales

Future Wales the National Plan 2040 is the national development framework for Wales. It sets the direction for development in Wales to 2040 and has development plan status. gov.wales/future-wales-national-plan-2040

Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) are emerging development plans at a regional level.

Technical Advice Notes (TANs) provide detailed planning advice and need to be taken into account by LPAs in the plan and decision-making process gov.wales/technical-advice-notes

Place Plans are an opportunity for local communities to engage creatively with the planning process and for planners to support in place-making initiatives with local people. www.placeplans.org.uk/

Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

The RTPI champions the power of planning in creating prosperous places and vibrant communities; RTPI Cymru leads on our work in Wales. We have over 27,000 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.

Almost all planners are a member of the 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.