

Wales planning news



MARCH 2017

Headline news

Local Government White Paper proposes regional and sub-regional planning (again)

Welsh Local Government Secretary Mark Drakeford has set out some of the proposals included in the new Local Government White Paper, published following months of discussions between the Welsh Government, local authorities and other stakeholders on how to improve council services.

The White Paper includes proposals on a wide array of matters, including land use planning being undertaken in future on a regional and sub-regional basis. It states:

'The planning system is a key enabling mechanism for a diverse range of priorities including economic prosperity, affordable housing and green infrastructure. It is an important facilitator of well-being. The effective implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the Environment (Wales) Act, Historic Environment (Wales) Act and Planning (Wales) Act, require resilient planning authorities with access to specialist skills.'

As part of its proposals, the White Paper refers to taking 'a systematic approach to regional delivery of planning services', in the context of how this will 'significantly improve service quality, provide greater resilience and enhance opportunities for workforce development and progression'. It

suggests that instead of the Planning (Wales) Act and the preparation of strategic development plans by a Strategic Planning Panel (a single purpose body), regional governance arrangements - such as those linked to City Deals - could be used.

Sub-regional bodies could prepare local development plans, set and collect community infrastructure levy and even process planning applications (including undertaking viability assessments and drafting s106 obligations).

A mandatory 'economic development footprint', which could cover certain planning functions and transport matters, and the option for councils to merge are also among the proposals featured in the White Paper, which is out for consultation until 11 April.

Wales Bill receives Royal Assent

The Wales Bill (now the Wales Act 2017) has received Royal Assent, enhancing the devolution of powers to the National Assembly and Welsh Government in many areas previously falling under the UK Government's remit.

Among these devolved powers, the National Assembly and Welsh Government will now be able to grant consent for new energy schemes, decide whether fracking is to take place, and develop sewerage and water supply policy.

Of particular interest is the new ability for the Welsh Government to determine applications for energy projects of between 50 and 350MW capacity; under previous agreements, these were dealt with under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) regime for England and Wales.

Alun Cairns, Secretary of State for Wales, said:

'The Wales Act 2017 delivers what I've always intended - a clearer, stronger and fairer devolution settlement for Wales based on a reserved powers model'

£20m programme to deliver innovative models of housing

Communities and Children Secretary Carl Sargeant has announced the launch of a new ►►

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



The new regional arrangements will bring councils together to work more effectively in the interests of people and their communities. We [...] want a new relationship between the Welsh Government and our councils; one that is based on mutual respect for the important, and different, roles we each play.

Welsh Local Government Secretary, Mark Drakeford, announcing the Local Government White Paper

THE LICHFIELDS PERSPECTIVE

The new White Paper on governance in Wales puts forward some radical changes, while trying to still ensure that planning services do not become too distant from communities. Exploring such alignment and different ways for how planning authorities could be better resourced is welcome.

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programme that is expected to contribute to reaching the 20,000 affordable homes target the Welsh Government aims to meet by the end of this term of government. The programme will benefit from an initial fund of £20m (over the next two years) and aims to promote 'innovative homes', reducing energy bills and informing the Welsh Government about the type of housing it should support in the future.

Announcing the programme, the Cabinet Secretary said:

'The housing sector in Wales is facing many challenges. We know we need to build more homes, quickly. We know the homes we build have to be cheaper to heat, more environmentally friendly and more capable of responding to the demographic challenges ahead.'

Town centres regeneration to benefit from £10m fund

Cabinet Secretary Carl Sargeant has announced the third phase of the Vibrant and Viable Places Town Centre Loan Fund; the £10m Fund is aimed at supporting town centre regeneration in 12 areas of Wales, including Newport, Neath Port Talbot, and Cardiff. Communities Secretary said:

'This funding will help local authorities regenerate their town centres by helping them find sustainable uses for empty sites and premises such as affordable town centre homes or tourist and leisure attractions.'

'Better and fairer approach' to public access for outdoor recreation needed

The Welsh Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, has announced the intention to develop proposals to improve how current laws deal with public access for outdoor recreation. The proposals should address how to:

- Achieve consistency, in terms of available participation opportunities and how activities are restricted and regulated;
- Simplify designation and recording procedures for public access; and
- Improve advisory forums and the way access rights and responsibilities are communicated.

The Cabinet Secretary's announcement stems from responses to a consultation launched in July 2015, which underlined how the current system of public access is considered 'too complex and burdensome' by many of the 5,800 respondents.

Draft circular for the planning of gypsy, traveller and showpeople sites published

The Welsh Government has released a consultation on a draft circular regarding the planning of gypsy, traveller and showpeople sites; specifically, the circular is aimed at updating guidance on the

planning-related aspects of identifying sustainable sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

If adopted, the circular will supersede (and effectively cancel) advice contained in Circulars 30/2007 (Planning for gypsy and traveller caravan sites), 78/91 (Travelling Showpeople), and 76/94 (Gypsy Sites Policy and Unauthorised Camping); the draft guidance consultation closes on 22 May.

National Development Framework for Wales: timetable to 2020

The National Assembly for Wales Research Service has published a blog post that looks at the National Development Framework (NDF), and sets out its full timetable to March 2020, the expected date of publication.

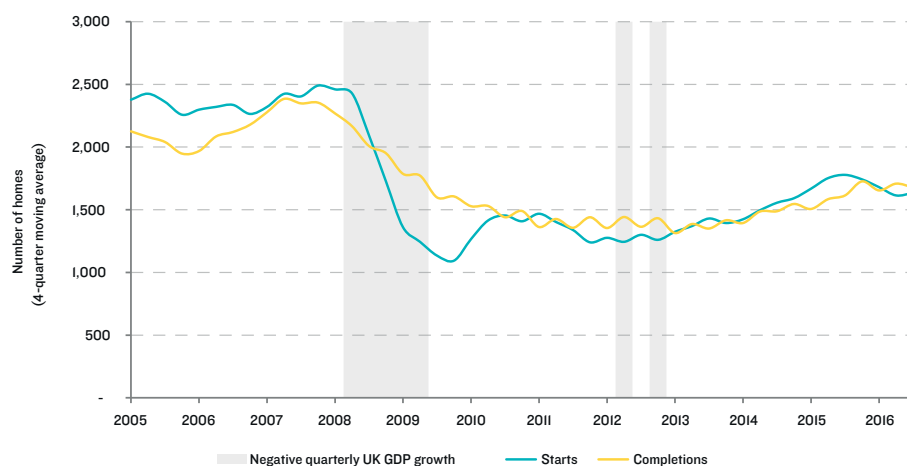
The blog confirms that the Welsh Government has previously summarised the purpose of the NDF as being to;

- state where nationally important growth and infrastructure is needed and how the planning system can deliver it;
- provide direction for strategic and local development plans;
- support the determination of applications under the 'Developments of National Significance (DNS) regime; sit alongside Planning Policy Wales; and
- support national economic, transport, environmental, housing, energy and cultural strategies and 'ensure they can be delivered through the planning system'.

As previously reported, a call for evidence to help inform the development of the NDF closes on 7 March; there will then be two further 12 week public consultations, prior to the draft NDF being considered by the Assembly. One of the consultations – on the main issues and options, and a preferred option - will be from this September to the end of the year. The other will be at the beginning of 2019, on the draft NDF itself.

The intention is that the finalised NDF is published in March, 2020. ■

Figure 1 : Housing Starts and Completions in Wales



Source: Welsh Assembly Government, Lichfields analysis

Since the recession, housebuilding in Wales has shown little volatility. Since 2010, an average of 1,500 homes have been started and completed each year with recent quarters surpassing 1,600 homes. Both of these trends are well below the pre-crash levels of 2007.