

Wales planning news

OCTOBER 2017



Headline news

New national strategy published by Welsh Government

The Welsh Government has published 'Prosperity for All', a new national strategy aimed at delivering its key priorities for the rest of the current Welsh Assembly term.

The Strategy covers each of the main aims for Wales, as previously identified in the Programme for Government, 'Taking Wales Forward' 2016-2021:

- 'Prosperous and Secure';
- 'Healthy and Active';
- 'Ambitious and Learning'; and
- 'United and Connected'.

The Strategy refers to the new National Development Framework that will set out a 20-year land use plan for Wales, 'guiding strategic development and supported by the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales'. A 'bespoke infrastructure consenting process' is to be established, 'which is responsive to business and community needs, to support sustainable economic growth', and to decarbonise Wales' energy supply.

The new Strategy also identifies five 'cross-cutting government priority areas' - including housing and skills - which the Government expects to have the greatest potential for making an effective contribution to long term prosperity and well-being.

Of relevance to land use planning, Government intentions are to:

- 'harness the opportunities of major infrastructure projects, such as Wylfa Newydd and Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon';
- 'reduce emissions and deliver improvements in air quality';

- 'introduce the new National Infrastructure Commission for Wales';
- 'require co-ordinated planning of new homes, facilities and infrastructure';
- 'deliver a single National Transport Plan'; and
- 'deliver the South Wales Metro' and 'continue to develop the North Wales Metro'.

In relation to housing, one of the five identified priority areas, the Strategy underlines how the Welsh Government will require the 'co-ordinated planning of new homes, facilities and infrastructure by local authorities, health bodies, housing associations and other key partners. In addition, the intention is to:

- deliver 'our target of 20,000 new affordable homes by 2021';
- 'accelerate our support for new and innovative housing designs';
- 'end Right to Buy and Right to Acquire';
- 'unlock the potential of SMEs to build homes'; and
- 'link new housing with major new infrastructure developments, for example the Metro and Wylfa Newydd'.

The First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, in commenting on the Strategy's publication, said:

'This strategy takes our commitments in Taking Wales Forward, places them in a long-term context, and sets out how they will be delivered in a smarter, more joined up way that cuts across traditional boundaries, both inside and outside government.'

Welsh Secretary argues for less centralisation of powers in Cardiff

On the 20th anniversary of the referendum that created the Welsh Assembly, the Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns, has argued that too much power has been 'centralised' in Cardiff. ►►

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



Planning decisions affect every area of a person's life. They determine where homes are built, where services are provided, and the quality of the local environment; and they promote sustainable economic growth and access to open space. The right planning system is critical to delivering our objectives in this strategy.

The Welsh Government's National Strategy, Prosperity for All

THE LICHFIELDS PERSPECTIVE

There is a clear shift in the Welsh Government's approach to land use planning that we will be monitoring and commenting on for clients. Increased rates of housing delivery remain high on the agenda and it is clear that the Welsh Government needs to effectively address the decline in housing land supply among Welsh local authorities. This must be done in a way that addresses Wales' housing need and its economic growth aspirations.

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Alun Cairns said:

'I think it's fair to say that the devolution of powers from Whitehall to English cities has created a new dynamic, and Wales needs to respond to the challenge [...] Centralising powers in Cardiff doesn't answer the needs of all parts of Wales. So there could well be the need for greater devolution to authorities, to individuals across the whole of Wales rather than keeping them in Cardiff Bay at all stages.'

Additional funding for SME construction companies

Welsh Secretary for Communities and Children, Carl Sargeant, has announced additional funding for the Wales Property Development Fund.

A further £30m will be awarded through the loan fund (run by Finance Wales), which is aimed at supporting small and medium-sized (SME) construction companies in accessing affordable finance, with the goal of helping more local companies build new homes.

Carl Sargeant said:

'We have a challenging target of delivering 20,000 affordable homes over this term of government. In working to meet our target, I want as many homes as possible to be delivered by SMEs, creating new capacity in this sector. I want to see people thinking innovatively about how we can do things differently to address the challenges we all face.'

TAN 8 database 2017: review of on-shore wind farm development

The Welsh Government has published Technical Advice Note (TAN) 8 database 2017 which provides a summary of on-shore wind farm developments in Wales (of 5MWa or more) that are currently being considered, have been approved or are already operational.

The summary table distinguishes between schemes of up to 50MWa (determined under planning legislation), and projects beyond that threshold (which were the responsibility of the UK Government until March 2016).

Thresholds and criteria for 'Developments of National Significance'

The Welsh Government has published a report that compares new and existing categories of development to understand whether they should be included within the 'Developments of National Significance' (DNS) regime.

The 13 categories that the study considers span from open cast coal mining and new roads' projects, to large scale commercial, leisure or retail development, and new settlements.

The research has analysed evidence in the form of case studies of planning applications that fall within the selected categories of development from between 2006 and 2016. The objective of the case study research was to identify the key causes of delay in the planning process for developments which are considered of national interest. The report makes a number of recommendations on the retention, amendment or removal of existing prescribed thresholds to the Welsh Government, as well as recommendations on the inclusion of additional categories of DNS projects.

Ambitious targets for clean energy announced

Welsh Secretary for Environment, Lesley Griffiths, has announced new ambitious targets for electricity generation from renewables in Wales, after this has trebled to 32% of the overall electricity use since 2010.

The Secretary for Environment said that she wanted Wales to generate 70% of its electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030. She said:

'Firstly, I am setting a target of Wales generating 70 per cent of its electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030. Secondly, I am setting a target for one Gigawatt of renewable electricity capacity in Wales to be locally owned by 2030. Finally, by 2020 I expect new renewable energy projects to have at least an element of local ownership.'

Energy in Wales debated in Westminster Hall

A Westminster Hall debate on energy in Wales took place on 14 September; the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales, Guto Bebb, took part on the UK Government's behalf.

The debate mostly focused on small module nuclear reactors (in relation to the Trawsfynydd scheme) and the tidal lagoon in Swansea; on the latter, the Under-Secretary of State said:

'It is important to deal with the issue of the tidal lagoon at the outset. People want a tidal lagoon to be developed at Swansea. They can see the potential of the technology, and that the lagoon offers an opportunity for economic regeneration in Swansea and other parts of Wales. All Members in this place should support that. [...] My point, as the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) conceded in his speech, is that the funding of a tidal lagoon is a complex calculation that must be done by Government. [...] The construction of a tidal lagoon has the potential to deal with those issues [i.e. floods], but I argue that flood defences are a devolved issue, not an energy generation issue.'

In advance of the debate, the House of Commons Library published a debate pack on energy in Wales.

Innovative solutions needed to resolve mobile 'not spots'

The Welsh Assembly's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee has published a report calling on the Welsh Government to take into consideration innovative ways to connect the last parts of Wales that do not have direct broadband access (some 4% of Wales), and to consider reforms to the planning regime with the aim of improving mobile coverage across the country.

On planning matters in particular, 'Digital Infrastructure in Wales' recommends that the Welsh Government reforms the planning regime, in order to allow the installation of telecoms masts that cover a wider geographical range. ■