

Wales planning news



DECEMBER 2017

Headline news

Chancellor's housing-focused Autumn Budget

On 22 November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered the 2017 Autumn Budget, which mainly focused on productivity, infrastructure, and housing investment and policies.

The Chancellor underlined the expectation that, by the end of this Parliament, housing supply would reach 300,000 new homes per year. In order to achieve this goal, the Chancellor pledged to make available £15.3bn of new support for housing over the next five years, introducing planning reforms to ensure more land is available for housing, and densities are increased in cities and towns. He has also extended the National Productivity Investment Fund to £31bn.

Many of the planning-related proposals will be detailed in consultations that are yet to be launched at the time of writing, including one in response to the community infrastructure levy (CIL) review which will feature the removal of restrictions on s106 pooling, the speeding up of procedures to set and revise CIL, and changes to the indexation of CIL rates, amongst others.

Also of interest to Wales, the UK Government has announced the intention to begin formal negotiations for a North Wales Growth Deal, while it is also considering proposals for another in mid-Wales. Moreover, the Department for Transport continues to develop proposals for potential rail schemes in Wales, including station improvements at

Cardiff Central and Swansea, and reduced journey times between Swansea and Cardiff, and between South Wales, Bristol and London.

Finally, as part of the Barnett formula, the Welsh Government is to receive £1.2bn through to 2020-21; for the first time the funding includes a 5% Barnett 'boost' (amounting to £67m), as agreed in the Welsh Government's Fiscal Framework. However, the Welsh Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford, has commented on the Autumn Budget, saying that this was a missed opportunity to provide additional investment in infrastructure.

Industrial Strategy White Paper builds on strengths in Wales' aerospace, steel, technology and life science sectors

The newly published UK-wide White Paper, 'Industrial Strategy: building a Britain fit for the future' plans 'to boost the economy, build on the country's strengths and embrace the opportunities of technological change'.

Specifically for Wales, the Strategy says it will build on existing strengths and create new opportunities in its 'world-leading reputation in the aerospace, steel, technology and life science sectors'.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns marked the launch of the Strategy on an Airbus Campus visit, saying:

'From the growth corridors which will facilitate more cross-border working, to the commitments to exploring city and growth deals to cover every part of the country, this is a strategy that plays to our economic strengths and address some of the big challenges we face.' ■

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



[...] we called on the UK government to commit to important infrastructure projects in Wales, including the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. Once again the UK government has failed Wales by failing to invest in key projects.

Wales Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford, commenting this year's Autumn Budget

THE LICHFIELDS PERSPECTIVE

The Welsh Government still needs to fully recognise how market housing projects are an important source of affordable homes. The new Housing and Regeneration Minister's stated commitment to increasing supply is encouraging; this must be for both market and affordable homes, as only together will they contribute to addressing the housing need that many councils are still not meeting.

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Welsh Government's cabinet reshuffle

On 3 November, Welsh First Minister Carwyn Jones announced a cabinet reshuffle to provide 'a balance of experience and stability, with new drive and energy'.

Rebecca Evans has been appointed new Minister for Housing and Regeneration, while responsibility for Local Government (previously held by Mark Drakeford, Secretary for Finance) has moved to Alun Davies who has become the new Secretary for Local Government and Public Services.

Lesley Griffiths (Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs), Ken Skates (Secretary for Economy and Transport), and Dafydd Elis Thomas (Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport) were confirmed in their posts, while Hannah Blythyn has been appointed Minister for Environment.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, which were laid before Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales on 31 October, came into force on 30 November.

The Regulations extend to England and Wales (including the adjacent territorial sea), and also to Scotland and Northern Ireland (including the adjacent territorial sea), as specified in Regulation

The main purpose of the Regulations is to consolidate amendments made to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010; however, they also introduce minor amendments that reflect changes to other relevant legislation, including town and country planning legislation.

6% rise in affordable homes in Wales

Figures published by the Welsh Government show that in 2016-17, Welsh local authorities delivered over 2,500 new affordable housing units; this represents a 6% increase on the previous year's figures.

The statistics do not include homes delivered through Help-to-Buy, which amount to almost 1,900.

The newly-appointed Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Rebecca Evans, has welcomed the news saying:

'I am committed to increasing the housing supply in Wales and have an ambitious target of building 20,000 affordable homes during this term of government. I am therefore pleased to welcome today's significant progress.'

Committee recommends Growth Deal for mid-Wales

The Welsh Assembly's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee has published a report that looks into the potential of City Deals, and how these regional agreements and deals fit within the wider Welsh and UK economic strategies. City Deals are already in place for Swansea Bay and Cardiff, while a Growth Deal is proposed for North Wales.

However, the Committee has pointed that currently there are no plans for a similar deal which could cover mid-Wales (although this was later mentioned in the Budget 2017, see headline news), as local authorities and business leaders in the area highlighted that they felt ignored. A Growth Deal for mid-Wales features among the Committee's 11 recommendations that the Committee has submitted to the Welsh Government for consideration.

The Chair of the Committee, Russell George, said:

'A mid-Wales deal would complete the jigsaw for an ambitious vision. We believe that funding aimed at improving transport infrastructure, digital connectivity and developing new job opportunities would be of huge benefit both to the area and to the country as a whole.'

Draft regulations and national standards for the implementation of sustainable drainage systems published

The Welsh Government has launched a consultation on draft regulations and orders for sustainable drainage systems (SuDS); statutory instruments and national standards are needed to implement Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, in

relation to the use of SuDS serving new developments.

A summary of responses and the Welsh Government response to the previous consultation on SuDS (which closed on 11 August 2017) have also been published, together with the new consultation document.

The latest consultation closes on 15 February 2018.

Pre-application community consultation: best practice guidance for developers

The Welsh Government has published guidance highlighting best practice in undertaking pre-application engagement; the document has been prepared to be used by developers.

The guidance aims to provide advice for carrying out consultation on major development schemes and ensure that the relevant legal and procedural requirements are met; it also identifies how developers can benefit from undertaking consultation that goes beyond the minimum statutory requirements.

Law Commission review of planning law in Wales

A review of planning law in Wales is underway; the Law Commission has been looking at both legislation and case law, with the aim of ensuring that Wales' specific needs are met - and to improve accessibility for stakeholders and the public.

A Scoping Paper was published by the Commission in June last year; responses have informed the review and a public consultation has now been launched on the Commission's 'detailed and substantive' proposals for simplifying and consolidating planning legislation.

'Planning Law in Wales: Consultation Paper' is accompanied by a 25-page summary document to help navigate the (500 page) paper. Responses to the consultation have to be submitted by 1 March 2018. A final report will be published next summer that will inform a new Planning Bill; this will be 'the principal element in a new Planning Code for Wales' (see Table 3-1 of the Paper for what the Bill might cover). ■