

Wales planning news



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Headline news

New economic action plan to drive competitiveness and 'growth with purpose'

'Prosperity for All: the Economic Action Plan' was launched by Economy Secretary Ken Skates on 12 December, 2017.

The new Action Plan has been developed in line with 'Prosperity for All', the national strategy for Wales that was published on 19 September 2017 that sets out the aims of the Welsh Government, proposed changes to be made, and the details of 'a new approach to delivering priorities' - all in the context of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Economic Action Plan focuses on three 'Thematic Sectors' - 'Tradable Services', 'High Value Manufacturing' and 'Enablers' - together with four 'Foundation Sectors' (tourism, food, retail and 'care').

With specific reference to planning, the Plan's executive summary refers to how the Welsh Government will 'mandate regional land use planning across Wales [...] to underpin decision making for land use and transport planning'.

In the Action Plan itself, this regional approach is explained further, in the context of how 'Prosperity for All' makes a commitment to 'a Regionally Focussed Model of Economic Development'. A new 'place-based' approach is therefore to be taken in

the three Welsh economic regions - North, Mid and South West, and South East - that are already used for 'other footprints' (including Regional Skills Partnerships and local government collaboration). Chief Regional Officers have been

appointed, to lead each of the three regions in 'strategic planning on a range of issues from land use to housing to skills'.

Close cross-border collaboration with the UK on strategically important projects is also referred to in the Action Plan, as a further justification for creating 'strong regions'.

In addition, the 'vital role' of building good quality, affordable new homes is highlighted as part of the Action Plan, as having 'a direct and positive impact on the economy'; it is made clear that a shortage of suitable housing 'can act as a barrier to attracting and retaining skills to support economic and secure housing is important to individual health and well-being, reducing the prospects of poor outcomes in these areas influencing economic development'.

Wales' transition to a low carbon economy is also referred to as presenting 'unique challenges as well as opportunities' - 'the key is developing a coherent response that supports business to decarbonise, whilst retaining and building a competitive edge'. The Action Plan states that this will involve planning, preparing and taking action to support a more energy efficient future: the intention is that the first Low Carbon Delivery Plan will be published by April 2019. This will be followed by the National Development Framework in 2020, which will 'set out where nationally important growth and infrastructure is required and how the planning system can help to deliver it'. It is also stated:

'It will provide direction for Strategic and Local Development Plans and support the determination of Developments of National Significance.'

The Action Plan underlines how for land use planning, the Government intends to:

- encourage and support 'an institutional culture within local planning authorities that promotes and nurtures businesses'; ►►

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



We live in an age of unprecedented change alongside huge opportunity. Fired by the fourth industrial revolution, the way we live, work and spend our leisure time is transforming before our eyes. We must get ahead of that change to equip our people, businesses and places to face the future with confidence. Our new economic action plan seeks to do just that.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates, launching 'Prosperity for All: the Economic Action Plan'

THE LICHFIELDS PERSPECTIVE

'We are now seeing very clearly how the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is firmly shaping emerging policy and guidance in Wales - centrally and locally - most recently in relation to Wales' economy, piecing together a future land use strategy for Cardiff, and how to go about appraising transport projects.'

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- encourage businesses to take up statutory pre-application services 'to deliver a shared aim of achieving appropriate development that meets the needs for sustainable economic development for both current and future generations';
- ensure that as part of local government reform, planning services are 'sustainable and have access to the specialist expertise necessary to support timely and effective decision making'; and
- consult on arrangements for a new streamlined infrastructure consenting process during 2018.

Welsh Assembly votes to abolish Right to Buy

Welsh Assembly members have voted on and approved the Abolition of the Right to Buy and Associated Rights (Wales) Bill (on 5 December 2017 - 35 votes in favour, 19 against and no abstentions).

The Bill will now be taken forward for Royal Assent; as set out in the Bill's Explanatory Memorandum, its prevention of sales will come into effect one year from that date for existing stock and after two months for new homes.

New transport appraisal guidance - 'future-fit' to support well-being

The Welsh Government has published Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG) 2017 (on 13 December 2017).

The new guidance aims to build on WelTAG 2008 principles and sets out best practice for the development, appraisal and evaluation of proposed transport interventions. It has been developed by the Welsh Government with the intention of ensuring that public funds are invested in a way that ensures they maximise their contribution to the well-being of Wales, as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Transport solutions are therefore to be low- or zero-carbon, to mitigate air pollution, and to 'catalyse the green economy and make people, goods and services mobile in ways that do not cost the earth'.

Long-term positive trend despite fewer new homes built

In a Welsh Government 'topical questions' session on 13 December, David Melding AM asked whether given the recently released new house building figures for Wales, the Cabinet Secretary would confirm 'why the number of new homes built in Wales each year is shrinking?'. He pointed out that for September 2016 to 2017, the figure of 6,830 was 'a drop on the previous year, which was 6,900' – the target being 8,700—8,700 and this being a situation that was 'simply not acceptable' when the target should be for '12,000 homes a year in Wales between now and 2030—not 8,700, which you are pitifully missing as a target anyway'.

Minister for Housing and Regeneration Rebecca Evans AM replied in considerable detail:

'We have a long-term positive trend in house building in Wales, and the reality is that the number of new dwellings started in Wales increased by 2 per cent in 2016-17, compared to the previous year, and this is the second highest annual number recorded since the start of the recession in 2007.

Well, Welsh Government, as you'll be more than aware, is committed to pursuing all avenues in order to create and build homes, particularly affordable homes, with our target of 20,000 over the course of this Assembly, but also homes for market sale as well. There are a number of ways in which we're doing that. We recognise the important role that the SME sector will play in terms of meeting our housing aspirations, so we've announced recently an additional £30 million for the Wales property development fund, and that will support SME developers to build homes, and that was a sector that we know took a particularly bad hit in the aftermath of the recession [...] That's in addition to our commitment to spend £1.4 billion on housing over the course of this Assembly, so there's no doubt that Welsh Government is certainly putting its financial resources behind this and working with all sectors in order to build homes, learning from what we did in the previous Assembly in terms of the housing supply pact we had with Community Housing Cymru. That helped us achieve our target of delivering 10,000 affordable homes. We have a pact, now,

with Community Housing Cymru and the Welsh Local Government Association, but also a pact with the Home Builders Federation and the Federation of Master Builders as well, so we're constantly trying to explore how we can work with new partners to increase house building across Wales.'

Cardiff Council consultation on economic priorities

Cardiff Council has published 'Building more and better jobs: Consultation Green Paper', aimed at developing a new spatial strategy for Cardiff.

The Paper sets out the City Council's vision for five specific zones: the city centre (where office-led mixed use development would be expanded southwards); Cardiff Bay (a 'High Line' development could create a more attractive route into the Bay from the city centre); Cardiff West (sport-related facilities would be enhanced); Cardiff East (a new industrial zone would be created); and Cardiff North (an innovation campus and science park are proposed).

The consultation paper states the City Council's purpose clearly, and in the following terms:

'Whilst development is becoming increasingly mixed use in nature, our intention is to concentrate investment, building on the city's recent successes, to achieve critical mass and to realise agglomeration effects.'

43% of Wales' electricity provided by renewables in 2016

According to the Energy Generation in Wales 2016 report published in early December, Wales is making 'good progress' towards its clean energy targets.

43% of the country's electricity consumption in 2016 came from renewable energy (32% in the previous year).

The report provides an estimate of the sources of energy generation in Wales, details of the number of projects and installed capacity to the end of 2016. While Solar PV is the most common renewable technology (81% of renewable projects), onshore wind has 'the largest installed capacity of renewable technology, with a 54% increase in capacity since 2014.' ■