



Planning Aid Wales
Cymorth Cynllunio Cymru

Annual Report 2019/20

Supporting community engagement
and involvement in the planning system in Wales

www.planningaidwales.org.uk
Charity Number 1000115
Company Number 2526875 (Wales)



Planning Aid **Wales**
Cymorth Cynllunio **Cymru**

About Planning Aid Wales

Planning Aid Wales promotes and facilitates meaningful community engagement in the planning process in Wales.

Meaningful community engagement can:

Give people a voice and build their skills, confidence, and capacity to influence decisions affecting their local area.

- Improve the quality, appropriateness, and relevance of new development.
- Increase pride in and sense of ownership of the built environment.
- Foster collaboration between developers, planners, and communities, resulting in better schemes.
- Improve the quality and relevance of planning policy by taking local knowledge into account.
- Reduce conflict, speed up and reduce costs in the development management process.

As the community engagement organisation in planning, our role is to build understanding of the planning system, support better engagement in local planning and encourage collaboration between communities, planning authorities and developers.

By giving people a voice in the planning system, we help create a more equal Wales with more cohesive communities.

More information about our Strategy can be found in our current Business Plan 2020-2023:

www.planningaidwales.org.uk/about-us/key-documents-and-policies/business-plans/



Our Services

Our core-funded services include delivering planning training to a range of audiences, developing easy read planning guidance and a free planning advice Helpline.

We also undertake projects and commissions on behalf of Welsh Government, Local Planning Authorities and Community and Town Councils.

Training

Planning Aid Wales can deliver informative and engaging training courses for elected members, community and town councils, community groups and organisations across Wales. Topics include *An introduction to the planning system*, *Responding to planning applications & pre-application consultations* and *An introduction to Place Plans*.

During 2019, Planning Aid Wales began developing a new online training platform to deliver video training to a wider audience. The platform launched in spring 2020.



Planning Aid Wales
Online Training



Community Engagement Services

As an independent third party organisation, we have found time and again that communities are willing to engage with us, even where Local Planning Authorities have encountered barriers to engagement in the past. As part of our process, we encourage active collaboration between local planning authority staff and community groups, thereby building better relationships for future engagement. Our community engagement services include community engagement strategy development, consensus building training workshops, seldom- heard groups engagement and Place Plan support, including training and Place Plan development.

Guidance Development

Planning Aid Wales has developed a number of 'easy-read' planning guidance documents on behalf of Welsh Government and Local Planning Authorities. Examples include placeplans.org.uk and *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites* (see planningaidwales.org.uk/gtguide)



Value for Money

Planning Aid Wales offers exceptional value for money in delivering our activities and services. In 2019/20 we delivered:

Training & Network Events

- 7 training courses to 96 delegates, which represented 48 Community & Town Councils in Wales
- 2 network events with 107 delegates
- 4 bespoke Place Plan events with 39 delegates
- 2 bespoke Responding to Planning Applications courses with 39 delegates
- 7 Planning your Places national events with 137 delegates & 81 Community & Town Councils represented
- 1 bespoke Community-led Housing training workshop for Wales Co-operative Centre with 6 delegates
- 1 planning workshop for Ramblers Cymru staff with 4 delegates

Helpline:

- Number of enquiries: 241
- Number helped by volunteers: 67
- Hours given by volunteers: 68+
- CTCs helped: 11

Projects

- 5 events on Bridgend LDP - 37 delegates
- 2 events for Brecon Beacons National Park LDP – 13 delegates
- 1 event at Cardiff University on Public Participation in Planning – 30 delegates
- 1 event at the Senedd for Celebrations of 40 years of Planning Aid Wales – 40 delegates
- 1 event Brecon Beacons National Park Farm Diversification seminar - 16 delegates
- 3 community consultation Drop-in sessions, 1 evidence collection workshop and 1 stakeholder event for Newtown Place Plan and an online survey - 233 participants

Online guidance - 5,125 users

- Users to the Place Plans website: 1008
- Unique users to the Planning advice pages: 2231
- Unique users to our National Development Framework Guide: 739
- Unique users to our new Gypsy and Traveller Guide: 166
- 975 subscribers received 6 newsletters over the year.

We helped
6,157 people

to engage with planning matters during 2019/20.



428 Trainees



241 Helpline Callers



369 Project Participants



5,119 Online Guidance Users

Some highlights from the past year

Celebrating 40 years of Planning Aid Wales



Planning Aid Wales celebrated its 40th Anniversary at a special event held in the Senedd in October 2019. Julie James AM, Minister for Housing and Local Government, hosted the event and delivered an excellent keynote speech emphasising the importance of community engagement in the planning system.

Highlighting that Welsh Government was proud to have funded Planning Aid Wales for the past 15 years, Julie also explained that “Welsh Government was looking to re-examine the role of consultation, engagement and participation in the planning system and would like Planning Aid Wales to support this exciting journey.”

The event brought together the organisation’s founders, volunteers, and friends. Richard and Sue Essex, who were amongst the founders and early volunteers for the South Wales Planning Aid Service, regaled the audience with nostalgic tales of establishing the service whilst raising a young family and dealing with planning enquiries from their kitchen table.

Richard and Sue highlighted the need for members of the public to have access to a friendly and impartial planning advice service 40 years ago, a need which very much still exists today. They also recognised the value of the proactive training and project work Planning Aid Wales delivers to help raise the capacity of communities to have their say on planning matters.



Shaping Your Community – the Role of Community Plans and Place Plans Planning Aid Wales & One Voice Wales joint conference – June 2019



In June 2019, a successful partnership conference was hosted by Planning Aid Wales and One Voice Wales in Llanrwst.

The inaugural event welcomed Mark Newey, Head of Plans Branch at Welsh Government, who provided the morning's keynote speech highlighting the importance of local planning for our communities and towns. Mark explained that Place Plans “deliver local outcomes, help build consensus and buy in with the development plan process”.

The event attracted over 70 delegates including Local Authority Planning Officers, representatives from Town and Community Councils across Wales, Welsh Government officials and private practice professionals.

The event was interspersed with Practice Workshops run by community planning experts to help delegates make decisions on whether Place Plans or Community Plans were the right approach for their communities, with a series of case studies identified including Newtown and Borth.

The afternoon welcomed Iona Hughes from the Future Generations Commissioner's Office who outlined the aims of the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Journey Checker which sets out the steps public bodies should take during their journey of contributing to well-being goals.

All talks and workshops throughout the day allowed further discussion with delegates and a sense of learning from all parts of Wales.

The event was a great success and it is hoped that a similar conference will be held during the 2020/21 calendar.



Our Work: Case Studies

Community Engagement in Local Development Plans

Planning Aid Wales was commissioned by several Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) between 2018 – 2019 to support the community engagement activity in relation to their Replacement LDP - Preferred Strategy consultations. During 2019, one example is our work with Bridgend County Borough Council.

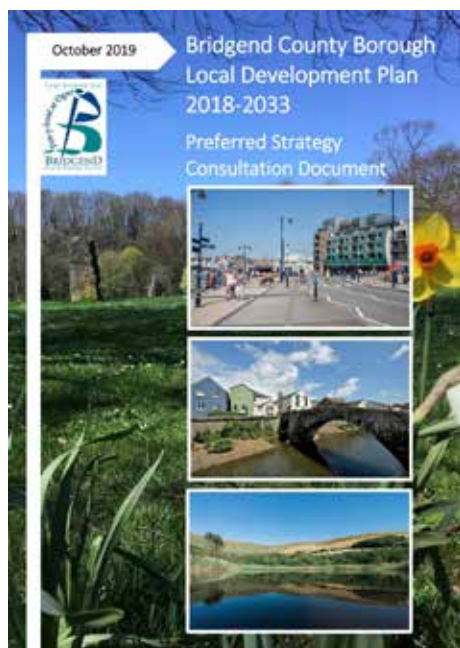
What did we set out to do?

- Increase the community understanding of the LDP process and content of the Preferred Strategy. At the same time increase their ability to engage in the plan consultation and strategic policy making.
- Improve communication between the authority and the community and town councils.
- Reduce the potential for conflict in later stages of the plan preparation.
- Providing the authority with a report containing the planning issues raised by those attending.



How did we do it?

Prepared and delivered community engagement events in line with the LPA Delivery Agreement. The events were primarily targeted at town and community councillors operating within the LPA area.



What difference has it made?

- Support community understanding about social, environmental, and economic issues facing the county over the next 15 years.
- Develop community recognition of the role a local plan can play in managing these different and often competing issues.
- Introduce local communities to strategic options and policies that together identify different scales and possible locations for growth across the local authority area.
- Provide communities with an understanding of the local development plan process and how to get involved.
- Report planning issues, raised by communities, to the LPA.
- Help build stronger relationships between the planning authority and its local communities.

Helpline Advice Case Study

Planning Aid Wales was contacted by a caller in May 2019 seeking advice about submitting comments for a planning application for a fish-and-chip shop near a school in Cardiff.

They had been referred to us through the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. They objected to the application by arguing that numerous pieces of legislation and government policies (including the Well Being of Future Generations Act Wales) confers a duty on local authorities to refuse applications to protect the health and wellbeing of school children.

They believed that refusal on these grounds could set a precedent for other areas to oppose such applications and they had compiled a summary of legislative concerns relevant to the application. There was also a concern about a potential conflict of interest.



What did we set out to do?

- Consider the planning application and the concerns raised by the caller.
- Consider the draft comments the caller had prepared and advise on their suitability and applicability to the application.
- Explain the options available to the caller in terms of speaking at committee.

How did we do it?

- Reviewed the draft representation and application in detail. Advice was provided in terms of what the LPA would consider and under which legislation. While the concerns around public health were noted, it was advised that it was a matter for the LPA to decide how much weight was given to this argument. The content of the Planning Officer's report was also presented and discussed with the caller.
- The Planning Engagement Officer explained that the case would be considered on its own merits.
- The appeal process was explained, as were issues around potential conflicts of interest. It was also explained that planning decisions are made in line with planning policy.

What difference has it made?

The application was refused on the grounds of residential amenity and the applicant decided not to appeal against the decision. The caller got back in touch with us with follow-up questions about the implications of this case, specifically the potential use of 'management conditions' and whether planning committee members can refuse an application on public health grounds. The volunteer dealing with this case was able to satisfactorily answer these questions by explaining about the use of planning conditions and the role of public health considerations in planning decisions.

Community Engagement Brecon Beacons NPA Farm Diversification Event

Planning Aid Wales was commissioned by Brecon Beacons National Park Authority to support the community engagement activity in relation to their work on reviewing the Authority's Farm Diversification Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG).



What did we set out to do?

- Increase the understanding of farming issues in the National Park and content of the current SPG.
- Improve communication between the authority and the farming community.
- Providing the authority with a report containing the issues raised by those attending.

How did we do it?

Prepared and delivered a workshop event to discuss farming issues within the National Park and consider the review of the farm diversification supplementary planning guidance.

The event was primarily targeted at members of the farming community and community councillors operating within the LPA area.

What difference has it made?

- Developed recognition of the role the SPG can play in managing the different and often competing issues relating to farming businesses and the aims of the National Park.
- Provided the farming community with an understanding of the local development plan process and the role of the SPG and how to get involved.
- Reported the planning and farming issues, raised by the farming communities, to the NPA.
- Helped build stronger relationships between the planning authority and its local farming communities.

Volunteers

We rely on our network of around 30 volunteers. Volunteers help out with a wide range of activities, including providing advice to members of the public, delivering training and developing accessible guidance. More information on volunteering is here: www.planningaidwales.org.uk/volunteer

Management Board

For more information about the Management Board, visit our webpage here: www.planningaidwales.org.uk/our-people/management-board/

Financial information

Planning Aid Wales is core funded by Welsh Government. We also generate additional income through commissioned project activities.

Each year the Management Board reviews the financial position and sets an annual budget against its Medium Term Financial Strategy. Through this process, the Board aims in general to balance the books or, where necessary, to seek to achieve a small surplus to build up the charity's reserves for future investment and for mitigating against financial risk. Risk management and reserves policies are set out in the Director's Report which accompanies the final Accounts 2019/20:

www.planningaidwales.org.uk/about-us/key-documents-and-policies/

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Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Online Training Platform



Learn from experts

Our training is developed by chartered town planners.



Planning in plain English

Our courses are written using plain language.



Learn at your own pace

Learn when and where you want.
Review whenever you need to.

New Online Course: *Planning: From Start to Finish*

Our new flagship online course 'Planning: From Start to Finish' has been produced specifically for Town and Community Councils in Wales.

This course is a perfect introduction to or refresher on all aspects of the planning system in Wales.

The course will take around 2 hours to complete in one sitting or can be viewed in parts (the course is broken into 20+ short video sections).

This course provides an introduction to the following topics:

- Overview – how planning works & who's who in planning in Wales.
- Planning Policy – national policy, Local Development Plans and Place Plans
- Planning Applications – how planning applications are processed, how decisions are made and how to respond to planning applications.
- The role of Community and Town Councils in all of the above.



[To learn more, click here >>](#)



Planning Aid Wales
Online Training