

Cymorth	Planning
Cynllunio	Aid
Cymru	Wales

Annual Report April 2011 to March 2012



Planning Aid Wales Annual Report April 2011 to March 2012

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Planning Aid Wales – helping communities engage with planning

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Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Foreword



It has been another successful year for Planning Aid Wales.

I am particularly pleased with the work we have been doing to get communities thinking proactively about how they can have an impact on land uses near where they live, for the long term.

The work we carried out with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, I am certain, can be rolled out elsewhere in Wales.

Dialogue building between planning stakeholders is something Planning Aid Wales has unique potential to advance due to our independent and impartial status. I am sure we will do lots to raise further awareness of this in coming months.

I am also pleased that we are carrying out increasing amounts of work with communities in more deprived areas who have never encountered the planning system before.

I believe building trust and confidence in the planning system, amongst the general population, is the way forward not just for Planning Aid Wales, but for the planning system in Wales as whole.

I would like to thank the staff and my fellow directors at Planning Aid Wales, for all their hard work this year. It is very rewarding to look over the work we have completed and to know that I am part of a group of people that contribute so positively to planning in Wales.

The staff, in particular, deserve a special thank you, for their dedication to achieving the objectives of Planning Aid Wales.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucie Taylor".

Lucie Taylor

Chair of Planning Aid Wales

Working with communities



Community engagement training for planners

Planning Aid Wales helps communities engage with the planning system by building knowledge, capacity and confidence. We aim particularly to help communities that are economically or socially marginalised.

Over the past year staff and volunteers have worked with a range of target groups not traditionally involved in planning. These include disability and access groups, gypsies and travellers, and community groups in deprived areas.

We have also worked to address planning issues with 34 community groups, and delivered 13 training and capacity building events for communities over the past year.

We have established a community outreach working group to drive forward this important work. It is developing a community outreach strategy which will define target communities and work programmes aimed at helping them engage with planning.

Training materials for community and town councils

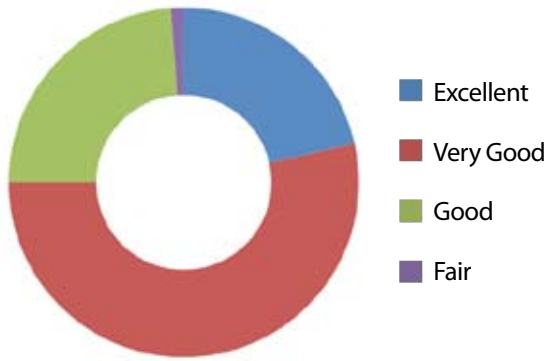
Planning Aid Wales is preparing a suite of distance learning materials for community and town councillors to work through in their own time.

A suite of Actions Packs covering the relevant planning issues has been piloted with very positive feedback. These will be available shortly to download for free from our website.

We have also delivered nine training events over the past year for local councillors covering a range of planning issues, with very positive feedback:

'The training session right through was interesting and interactive. The facilitator was very knowledgeable.' (May 2011)

'I have been given the ability and confidence to make a fair response to the plan in my area.' (March 2012)



*Training evaluation summary,
April 2011 to March 2012*

Communities First

Planning Aid Wales aims to help individuals and groups in deprived areas engage with planning. To raise awareness of our services among Communities First partnerships in Wales, we delivered a workshop at the Communities First annual conference, developed contacts with overarching partnership board co-ordinators in South Wales, and mailed out our community newsletter to partnerships across Wales.

We also responded to a consultation on the future of the Communities First programme, supporting proposals for a more strategic structure which will help us build links with local partnerships through overarching co-ordinators.

Engaging communities in development planning

Following work we undertook to support the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in engaging its local communities in preparing a Local Development Plan, the Chair of the authority said in a letter to other authority members:

'We should be proactive in promoting the lessons learnt, and benefits of community engagement, both within the National Park Authority, to the residents of the Park, and to the wider planning audience. This should be an example of best practice and the lessons should be properly communicated as a good news story.'

Working with Access Groups

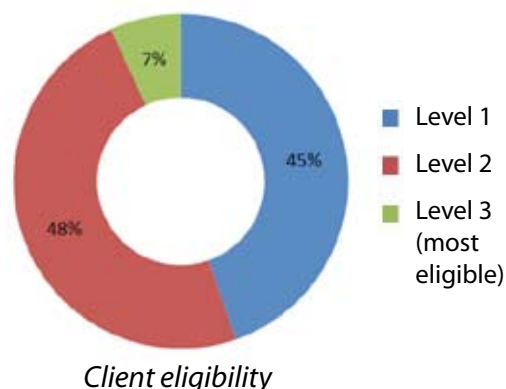
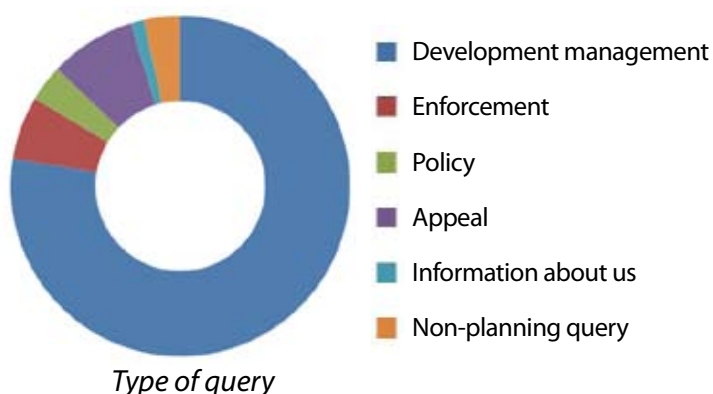
We published a new guidance publication entitled *Access Statement Guidance* and mailed out multiple copies to all Welsh planning authorities and a range of other audiences. It can be downloaded from our website at:

www.planningaidwales.org.uk/how-paw-can-help/information/publications



Community stakeholders participating in the Local Development Plan process

Information and advice



Planning Aid Wales provides an impartial Helpline advice service with the help of a network of qualified casework volunteers. Between April 2011 and March 2012 we responded to 380 requests for assistance covering a wide range of planning issues. We also assisted 34 community groups with a combined total membership of over 700 people.

Eligibility criteria help to channel our limited resources to those people who most need them. The diagrams opposite show the eligibility of Helpline callers over the past year and the types of query received.

Some feedback

After a volunteer gave advice about the appeals process and helped prepare comments on an appeal for an office development, Mrs P. said: *'I found out about Planning Aid Wales by word-of-mouth. Best bit of advice I ever had.'*

After a member of staff commented on a draft appeal statement prepared by Ms W., she said: *'It was very useful having impartial advice on a subject most people are not familiar with.'*

After a volunteer attended a meeting of a community action group in Cardiff, the chair of the meeting said: *'Your volunteer was absolutely brilliant - busting myths, shedding light and encouraging people to get involved in objecting to and supporting planning applications as well as commenting on the Local Development Plan.'*

After a member of staff explained the planning process and options for objecting to a large housing development, Mrs D. said: *'It was most useful to speak to a person I could actually understand.'*

Some casework examples

Over the past year, Planning Aid Wales has:

- explained material planning considerations to a community council to help them comment on a planning application;
- advised a group of residents on how best to save a local industrial site;
- helped an individual with dyslexia to structure her comments on a national planning policy consultation;
- encouraged an individual to write to his local planning department to ask why a bat condition had been included in his planning permission;
- advised a community group which had recently refurbished their village hall for use as a café on how make a change of use application;
- explained the role of Design and Access Statements to an individual and put him in contact with the local access group for support with an access issue in his village.

Working with partners



Planning Aid Wales Management Board discussion

With the **Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru**, we organised a joint Senedd Reception event in November 2011 for Assembly Members and key planning stakeholders.

To raise awareness of the breadth and value of our work, we produced a briefing note describing our work to engage communities in planning and three case study write-ups describing distinct projects: the community and town council training programme; strategic community engagement in the Brecon Beacons, and; Access Statement guidance preparation. These can be downloaded from our website at:

www.planningaidwales.org.uk/about-us/recent-work

We also developed responses to the following **Welsh Government** planning consultations:

- Review of directions requiring planning applications to be referred to the Welsh Minister (June 2011)
- Draft Technical Advice Note 20: Planning and the Welsh language (June 2011)

- Communities First: The future (September 2011)
- Draft Practice Guidance: Realising the potential for pre-application discussions (September 2011)
- Improving the planning appeals process (November 2011)
- A strategic monitoring framework for the planning system: Measuring progress towards a sustainable Wales (January 2012)
- Towards a Welsh Planning Act: Ensuring the planning system delivers (February 2012)

Our responses can be downloaded from: www.planningaidwales.org.uk/about-us/consultation-responses

In January 2012, we signed up to the Welsh Government's **Sustainable Development Charter**. Our support for the Charter is underpinned by planning being one of few mechanisms that can help to deliver sustainable development through better environments, stronger communities and a more resilient economy.

Doing more with our volunteers



Recruiting new volunteers

We welcomed nineteen new volunteers over the past year, giving a network of around ninety people. Experienced planning volunteers support our casework and training services and also mentor less experienced volunteers. Community volunteers assist with community outreach activities, help out at events and assist with marketing. A list of current volunteers is available here: www.planningaidwales.org.uk/about-us/volunteers

We provided office placement opportunities for two graduate planners over the past year. Both gained valuable work experience which helped them to secure permanent employment in the planning profession.

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in putting your skills in planning or community engagement to good use, please visit www.planningaidwales.org.uk/volunteering.

Many thanks and good luck to departing volunteers: John Lambert, Clive James,

Iwan Lloyd Hughes, Barry Lomax, Angharad Hobbs, Stephanie Irvine, Heather Williams, Catrin Jones, Ffion Bevan, Elaine Thomas, Justin Waite and Sarah Martin.

Some volunteer experiences

Volunteering with Planning Aid Wales can give new and useful perspectives on public involvement in the planning process:

'Volunteering for Planning Aid Wales is extremely worthwhile and rewarding. It has allowed me to gain insights into the issues people have in relation to the planning work carried out by local authorities. In particular, volunteering has allowed me to understand the barriers people may face in influencing the formulation of policy. I can use this in my everyday work to ensure that I better engage and better consult members of the public and other interested parties so they can actively participate in the planning process.'

(Brian Davies, planning volunteer)

'During my placement with Planning Aid Wales I had the opportunity to research a wide variety of planning issues. I also learnt how to produce accessible guidance for the public on planning issues, gained insight into the difficulties members of the public face when engaging with the planning system, and kept up-to-date with changes to national planning policy. Volunteering has given me the opportunity to develop my knowledge and skills, and has given me valuable experience in planning.'
(Stephanie Irvine, office volunteer)

Volunteer activity

Over the past year, our volunteers collectively gave almost 800 hours of their time to helping increase public understanding and involvement in planning. Of that total, casework volunteers spent more than 300 hours advising Helpline callers on a wide range of planning issues. A further 481 hours were spent on other activities such as preparing guidance publications, delivering training and through office placements.



Investing in Volunteers

We registered for the Investing in Volunteers charter in March 2011 and submitted for final assessment in April 2012. We hope to be awarded the charter mark in mid-2012.

Volunteer management

We value our volunteers and aim continuously to improve our support for them. Over the past year, we:

- issued a comprehensive caseworker guide for volunteers taking on Helpline cases;
- published a comprehensive volunteering policy and also mentoring and lone working policies;
- upgraded the volunteer area of our website;
- passed on more than half of all Helpline calls to volunteers;
- introduced a new information pack for people interested in volunteering;
- delivered a programme of volunteer training events.

Volunteer training and networking

Over the year we delivered a volunteer training programme including four induction training events for new volunteers, a caseworker training evening, a facilitation training course and training on how to work with gypsy and traveller groups.

The training programme for the coming year will focus on building volunteers' skills to deliver training and assist with community outreach activities.

Raising our profile



Marketing and promotion

We have targeted our marketing efforts to build awareness of Planning Aid Wales among key target audiences including local planning authorities, a range of stakeholder organisations, disadvantaged communities and Assembly Members.

We have promoted our work through a range of organisational bulletins and newsletters including: Age Cymru, TPAS Cymru; Cynnal Cymru; the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action; Voluntary Action Merthyr; the Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru; Gwent Association for Voluntary Action, and; the Society of Local Council Clerks.

Website development

The Planning Aid Wales website has been updated. There is a more accessible and user-friendly homepage, a section giving contact details for the 25 local planning authorities in Wales and showing progress with Local Development Plan preparation, and a comprehensive links area which directs users to additional sources of online information and a wide range of relevant organisations.

Attending key events

Over the past year we have mounted display stands and run workshops at a number of key events and conferences including: the Wales Planning Conference; Communities First annual conference; One Voice Wales annual conference and the Tenants Participation Advisory Service annual conference.

Annual Review 2010-11

A concise version of our 2010-11 Annual Report was produced in the form of an A3 foldable flyer and circulated to target marketing audiences.



Planning Aid Wales website improvements

Appendix 1: Financial information 2011/12

Statement of financial activities, year ended 31st March 2012

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2012 £	Total 2011 £
Incoming resources				
Activities in furtherance of the charity's objects				
Grants received	135,000	-	135,000	127,000
Donations	76	-	76	128
Fundraising events	267	-	267	162
Bank interest received	104	-	104	106
Other income	1,270	-	1,270	145
Fees receivable	6,278	5,260	11,538	6,701
Total incoming resources	142,995	5,260	148,255	134,242
Resources expended				
Direct charitable expenditure	145,068	309	145,377	142,552
Management and administration	2,170	-	2,170	1,942
Total resources expended	147,238	309	147,547	144,494
Net incoming resources for the period	(4,243)	4,951	708	(10,252)
Funds brought forward	49,229	10,579	59,808	70,060
Prior year adjustment	(327)	327	-	-
Funds brought forward – restated	48,902	10,906	59,808	-
Funds carried forward	44,659	15,857	60,516	59,808

Balance sheet as at 31st March 2012

	2012 £	2011 £
Fixed assets		
Tangible assets	1,518	1,053
Current assets		
Stocks	300	300
Debtors	1,901	2,661
Cash at bank	59,509	58,810
	61,710	61,771
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(2,712)	(3,016)
Net current assets	58,998	58,755
Total assets less current liabilities	60,516	59,808
	=====	=====
Funds		
Unrestricted	44,659	48,902
Restricted	15,857	10,906
Members' funds	60,516	59,808
	=====	=====

The above figures are taken from the 2011/12 final accounts which are prepared by an independent qualified accountant. Full accounts are available on request.

The Planning Aid Wales Management Board oversees the financial management of the organisation with the aim of supporting and growing Planning Aid Wales on the basis of a sound financial footing. The Board has an adopted reserves policy designed to maintain a prudent level of reserves for continued operation, in accordance with Charity Commission guidelines.

The table refers to restricted and unrestricted funds. This distinguishes between funds which can only be spent on specific items normally associated with project funding, and those for which there is no constraint on their use.

Appendix 2: Management Board and staff

The Management Board

Lucie Taylor, Chair

Gayle Wootton, Vice Chair

Owain Wyn, Treasurer

Peter Kingsbury, Chair of Staffing and Audit Committee

Allan Archer

Laura Dagless (to July 2011)

James Griffiths

Neil Harris (to July 2011)

Ian Horsburgh

Katherine Hughes

Tony Humphreys (to July 2011)

John Mattocks

Kathleen Norton

Jane Shatford (from January 2012)

Chris Potts (RTPI Cymru nominee, to July 2011)

Alison Thomas (RTPI Cymru nominee, from August 2011)

The staff team

Elwyn Thomas, Chief Executive

James Davies, Planner and Case Manager

Sioned Pearce, Development and Training Officer

Angharad Hobbs, Planning Assistant

Kay Sharman, Finance and Administration Officer