

Cymorth	Planning
Cynllunio	Aid
Cymru	Wales

Annual Report

April 2012
to
March 2013



86 volunteers

9 courses delivered

almost 700 hours spent helping communities

over 700 people helped

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS
BUDDSODDI Mewn Gwirfoddolwyr

Planning Aid Wales Annual Report April 2012 to March 2013

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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



I am pleased to introduce the 2012-13 Planning Aid Wales Annual Report.

The report highlights a variety of achievements of the service over the past year and illustrates the breadth and depth of work carried out by the charity.

As the planning system continues to develop in response to political, economic and social change, the need for a service providing impartial planning advice and information to those parts of society which have no other source of help available remains of critical importance. Helping communities to engage effectively with planning helps to create a fairer society and also enables the planning system to operate more effectively.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'P. W. Kingsbury'.

Peter Kingsbury

Chair of Planning Aid Wales

We are grateful to Welsh Government for recognising the contribution made by Planning Aid Wales and for its ongoing support. I believe that the service will be well placed to play an important role in helping to deliver an improved planning system following the implementation of a new Planning Act in Wales in 2015.

I wish to acknowledge the vital contribution made by our volunteers in sustaining the service, and in particular the advice Helpline. These are people who give up their spare time to freely share their professional expertise with some of the more disadvantaged members of society and communities. In addition, the contribution made by my fellow directors in steering the organisation forward in what are often choppy waters is worthy of thanks.

I am very pleased that the contribution of the hundreds of volunteers who have supported Planning Aid Wales over recent years has been recognised by the award of Investing In Volunteers status in 2012.

Finally, I wish to thank the staff team for their support to me and the other directors and for their dedication to ensuring that Planning Aid Wales provides a service of the highest quality to all its users.

Working with communities



Planning Aid Wales aims to help communities engage constructively with planning.

Over the past year we have continued to work with a range of communities not traditionally involved in planning. These have included disability and access groups, gypsies and travellers, community allotment groups, as well as other community groups in areas of deprivation.

We have developed a community outreach strategy to explain why targeted community outreach work is needed in planning and the key principles which will guide our approach. An action plan sets out activity areas for Planning Aid Wales to focus effort on over the coming year.

A training video with supporting toolkit has been prepared to help local community groups take part in Local Development Plan examinations.

Supporting community and town councils

Working with One Voice Wales, the umbrella group for community and town councils, we are delivering an ongoing programme of training events for local councillors wanting to learn more about planning. Over the past year we delivered nine training sessions, providing information on how best to get involved in Local Development Plan preparation and how to respond effectively to planning applications. Feedback from the training sessions has been very positive.

We have also been working with the Society of Local Council Clerks, delivering two workshops for its Welsh members focusing on opportunities for local councils to engage constructively with planning and the most effective routes for community involvement.

Working with access groups

In partnership with Disability Wales we delivered a training course for access groups aimed at building their understanding of planning, with a particular focus on the role of Design and Access Statements.

An audio version of our guidance publication 'Access Statement Guidance' has also been produced and can be downloaded from:
www.planningaidwales.org.uk/how-paw-can-help/information/publications/access-statement-audio

Supporting Gypsies and Travellers

Planning Aid Wales has set up an all-Wales network of people involved in Gypsy and Traveller planning issues. Members include planners, community development workers and others from a variety of backgrounds who are already helping Gypsy and Traveller communities in different parts of Wales.

The network allows its members to share knowledge and to support Planning Aid Wales volunteers working on Gypsy and Traveller issues.

Our volunteers have also helped secure planning permission for two gypsy and traveller families over the past year.

Community gardens and allotments

We have been working with the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens to provide planning information for groups involved in community garden and allotment projects.

A factsheet, '*Allotments, community growing and the planning system*', has been produced to give planning guidance for people thinking of setting up community growing projects in Wales.



Information and advice

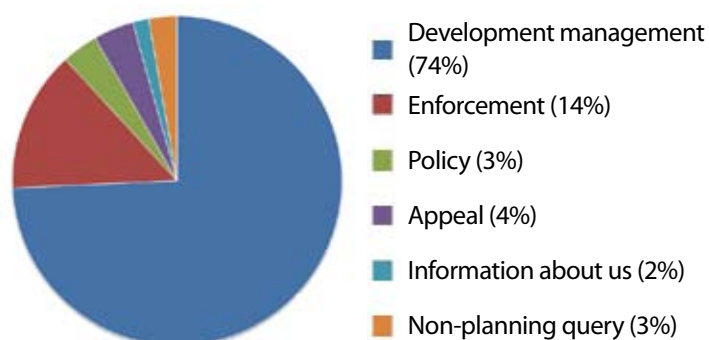


Figure 1

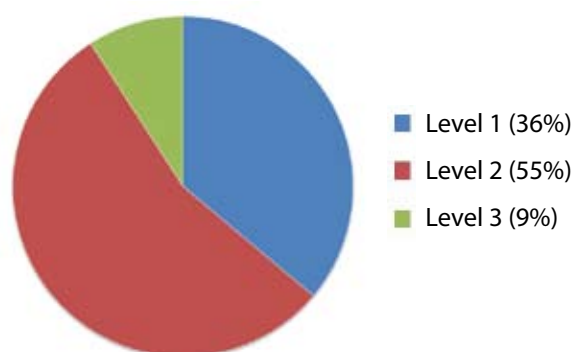


Figure 2

Planning Aid Wales continues to provide a high quality Helpline advice service with assistance from our network of qualified planning volunteers.

Between March 2012 and February 2013 we received 288 requests for information and advice on a wide variety of planning matters - see Figure 1 above.

We also assisted 13 community groups with a combined total of 422 members.

Eligibility criteria help to make sure our limited resources are directed to those people who most need them. We are not able to help people who are likely to gain financially from a planning decision - these callers are referred on to a list of certified planning consultants.

Figure 2 above illustrates the eligibility of our clients over the past year. Level 3 clients are the most eligible.

Some casework examples

Over the past year, Planning Aid Wales has:

- explained the process of Local Development Plan preparation to Mrs F, including how to object to an alternative site;
- advised Mr J. on the planning appeals process, helping his efforts to preserve a historic building;

- advised a community group objecting to a telecommunications mast of the relevant planning considerations;
- advised Mr C. on how to apply for planning permission after he received an enforcement notice;
- informed the owner of a small business that he may have the right to appeal against non-determination of a planning application.

Feedback

This is what some of the people we have helped say about our service:

"I've used Planning Aid Wales for years now and am very grateful for its existence."

"It brought peace of mind to a stressful situation and enabled a more informed approach to the planning officers in my local council."

"The advice was very helpful. I was definitely pointed in the right direction!"

"The empathy and insight - obviously gained by experience and humanity."

"Very approachable and down to earth. Came back to me with supplementary information."

Working with partners

Planning Aid Wales has worked with a range of partner organisations over the past year. The following gives a flavour:

Welsh Government

- Responded to planning for sustainability and national regeneration framework consultations (see: www.planningaidwales.org.uk/about-us/consultation-responses).
- Represented on the Wales Planning Forum.
- Contributed a planning dimension to the Independent Living Project.
- Representation on a 'sounding board' group considering a draft LDP Process Refinement Exercise report.

One Voice Wales / Society for Local Council Clerks

- Delivered a programme of capacity-building training events for community and town councillors.
- Presented at regional and national conferences.

RTPI Cymru

- Presented at the Wales Planning Conference and the Wales Enforcement Conference.
- Participated in a panel debate on planning reform.
- Contributed to 'Cynllunio' magazine.

Town and Country Planning Association

- Presented at a roundtable discussion event on planning reform.

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

- Produced a planning advice fact sheet for community growers in Wales.

Disability Wales

- Delivered 'Way to Go' planning training modules.

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

- Achieved Investing in Volunteers accreditation.

Flintshire County Council

- Developed options for community engagement during LDP preparation.

Carmarthenshire County Council

- Developed a project to build closer working relationships between the local access group and planning team.

Cardiff University

- Developed options for establishing a joint social enterprise entity.

RSPB

- Recognition in the publication '*Planning Naturally*' of our innovative work with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority to help engage local communities in LDP preparation.

Valuing our volunteers



Volunteer recruitment

We have welcomed twelve new volunteers over the past year, giving us a network of 86 committed volunteers. Many thanks and good luck to departing volunteers Allan Archer, Katherine Salter, Matthew David Johnson, Sean Cunniffe, Stuart Willis, Brian Davies, Kathleen Norton, Hannah Machin, John Rhys Davies, Clare Pugh, Rhys Lloyd Jones, Nicola Caie, Iona Eirian Thomas, Owain Williams and Christopher McCarty.

We rely on experienced planning volunteers to support our information, advice and training services. We also welcome community volunteers to assist with other activity areas such as outreach projects, attending events and marketing. During the year we involved more volunteers in a broader range of activities than ever before.

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, visit www.planningaidwales.org.uk/volunteering

Volunteer experiences

Here's what our volunteers have to say about their experiences:

"Planning Aid Wales has given me valuable insight into the planning system in Wales. I undertook research and helped develop a range of guidance publications. I would highly recommend volunteering at Planning Aid Wales to a recent graduate interested in gaining experience of the planning system."

(Christopher McCarty, office volunteer)

"I mostly do telephone consultations with people who are usually some distance away. I try to combine straightforward planning advice with other tips, but sometimes the role is more therapeutic - dealing with people's feelings is an important part of the role. I think planners should be immensely proud of Planning Aid Wales."

(Jon Talbot, planning volunteer)

Volunteer activity

Over the past year our volunteers collectively contributed almost seven hundred hours of their time to helping increase public engagement with planning. Of this total, 142 hours were spent assisting callers to the Helpline and a further 532 hours were given to a wide range of other activities such as preparing guidance documents, delivering training and through office placements.

Investing in Volunteers

In October 2012 Planning Aid Wales was awarded Investing in Volunteers status, the charter mark for good practice in volunteer management. The assessment report said:

“Planning Aid Wales has clear volunteer roles and requirements and volunteers felt that their contribution was well recognised. The volunteers interviewed commended the training and its quality, regarding it as a vital element of their volunteer experience, helping to improve their knowledge and competencies. There are clear policies in place, library support facilities, training and support available from within the organisation to assist the volunteers.”

We are currently working to a volunteer development plan to improve our volunteers’ experiences even further.

Volunteer management

We place a very high value on the contribution made by our volunteers and want to continually improve their volunteering experience. Over the past year we have:

- achieved Investing in Volunteer status.
- developed an activity programme to encourage volunteers to get involved in a greater spread of activities.
- improved our annual volunteer questionnaire.
- passed on 47% of all Helpline cases to volunteers.
- delivered a programme of volunteer training events.
- issued a regular volunteer newsletter.
- introduced a volunteer awards scheme.



Raising our profile



Marketing and promotion

Over the past year we have raised our profile among a variety of groups and organisations including Wales Council for Voluntary Action, One Voice Wales, the Society of Local Council Clerks, Welsh Government and Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru. We have also begun a programme of work to build stronger links with local planning authorities. A marketing strategy has been prepared to focus our marketing efforts over the coming year.

We have continued to produce a quarterly Community Newsletter, providing news and information on outreach and project work, training for community councils and other local groups, as well as case studies describing the range of work we get involved in. The newsletter is distributed to a wide range of individuals and groups across Wales. Past and present editions can be found at:

www.planningaidwales.org.uk/about-us/newsletters

Website development

The Planning Aid Wales website has been updated to include a more intuitive 'about us' section, a broader range of planning guidance publications in different formats and more intuitive local authority map pages providing contact details and up-to-date information on Local Development Plan progress.

Attending and organising 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; One Voice Wales annual conference; the Society for Local Council Clerks annual conference and the Carmarthenshire County Council annual training day for Community Councils.

Appendix 1: Financial information 2012/13

Statement of financial activities, year ended 31st March 2013

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2013 £	Total 2012 £
Incoming resources				
Activities in furtherance of the charity's objects				
Grants received	135,000	-	135,000	135,000
Donations	105	-	105	76
Fundraising events	50	-	50	267
Bank interest received	66	-	66	104
Other income	17	-	17	1,270
Fees receivable	3,987	-	3,987	11,538
Total incoming resources	139,225	-	139,255	148,225
Resources expended				
Direct charitable expenditure	145,790	-	145,790	145,337
Management and administration	2,246	-	2,246	2,170
Total resources expended	148,036	-	148,036	147,547
Net incoming resources for the period	(8,811)	-	(8,811)	708
Funds brought forward	44,659	15,857	60,516	59,808
Funds carried forward	35,848	15,857	51,705	60,516

Balance sheet as at 31st March 2013

	2013 £	2012 £
Fixed assets		
Tangible assets	1,860	1,518
Current assets		
Stocks	300	300
Debtors	1,920	1,901
Cash at bank	50,205	59,509
	52,425	61,710
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(2,580)	(2,712)
Net current assets	49,845	58,998
Total assets less current liabilities	51,705	60,516
	=====	=====
Funds		
Unrestricted	35,848	44,659
Restricted	15,857	15,857
Members' funds	51,705	60,516
	=====	=====

The above figures are taken from the 2012/13 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

Peter Kingsbury, Chair

Gayle Wootton, Vice Chair

Owain Wyn, Treasurer

Lucie Taylor, Chair of Staffing and Audit Committee

Allan Archer

James Griffiths (to July 2012)

Ian Horsburgh

Katherine Hughes (to July 2012)

John Mattocks

Kathleen Norton (to July 2012)

Jane Shatford

Emma Langmaid, RTPI Cymru nominee (from August 2012)

Alison Thomas, RTPI Cymru nominee (to August 2012)

Lawrence Dowdall (from April 2012)

Christopher Kimpton (from April 2012)

Francesca Sartorio (from April 2012)

The staff team

Elwyn Thomas, Chief Executive

James Davies, Planner and Case Manager

Sioned Pearce, Development and Training Officer (to October 2012)

Owain Williams, Development and Training Officer (from January 2013)

Kay Sharman, Finance and Administrator Office

Angharad Hobbs, Planning Assistant