



Infrastructure Planning: Community Perspectives Roundtable

12th February 2026



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Event Report

Participant Review Draft v.1

Dear participants,

Thank you again for attending the *Infrastructure Planning: Community Perspectives Roundtable*, held online on 12 February 2026 (12:00–14:00).

This report provides a summary of the discussions that took place and sets out initial observations and recommendations to inform the next phase of work.

A draft version has been circulated to all participants for review. Any comments, corrections or clarifications are welcome and will be incorporated into the final version, which will form part of Planning Aid Wales' funding report to Welsh Government.

To allow time for consolidation, I would be grateful if any feedback could be sent directly to me at james@planningaidwales.org.uk by **Friday 27th February**.

Presentation Slides - Please double-click the image below to view the presentation:



Infrastructure
Planning Roundtable

1. Background

Planning Aid Wales hosted the online roundtable, *Infrastructure Planning: Community Perspectives*, on 12 February 2026 (12:00–14:00). The session formed part of Planning Aid Wales' Welsh Government-funded programme to support communities, councillors and voluntary groups in understanding and engaging with the new national infrastructure planning regime established under the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024.

The roundtable was designed as a facilitated discussion rather than a formal training session. Its primary purpose was to:

- explore participants' awareness and understanding of the new infrastructure planning process;
- surface lived experience of large-scale infrastructure proposals and nationally significant schemes;
- identify areas of confusion, concern or uncertainty; and
- inform the development of future guidance, training materials and online resources.

Participants were advised in advance that their contributions would directly shape Planning Aid Wales' forthcoming work under the "Infrastructure Planning for Communities" programme, including the preparation of accessible guidance materials, a plain-language glossary and further training events.

The session brought together a mixed group of participants, including:

- County councillors from authorities currently experiencing significant levels of infrastructure activity;
- Community council representatives and clerks, including those new to community-level planning engagement; and
- Private sector and Non-Governmental Organisation representatives with experience in infrastructure development and consultation.

This breadth of representation enabled discussion from multiple perspectives, including local authority decision-making, community-level capacity and resource pressures, and developer-side experience of consultation processes.

The discussion was conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The session was recorded solely to support the preparation of accurate notes. Comments are reported non-attributably to reflect the Chatham House-style approach adopted for the discussion.

The event was attended by 14 people (including PAW staff), although 22 people had booked a place.

2. Key Themes Emerging from Participant Discussion

Following a brief introductory overview of the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 and Planning Aid Wales' role, the session moved into four structured discussion segments. Each segment was framed around a single slide question designed to prompt open reflection rather than technical debate. The discussion topics were:

1. What does the word “infrastructure” mean to you?
2. How clear do you feel the new infrastructure planning process is?
3. From your experience, when do communities have most influence in large-scale proposals?
4. What guidance or support would most help communities engage confidently with infrastructure planning?

The themes set out below reflect participant contributions across these four discussion areas. Comments are presented in summary form and are not attributed to individuals.

2.1 Understanding and Clarity of the Infrastructure Process

Participants demonstrated mixed levels of familiarity with the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 and the wider infrastructure consent regime. While some contributors had direct experience of DNS and large-scale infrastructure applications, others indicated they were still developing their understanding of the new framework and planning more generally.

Areas of uncertainty or discussion included:

- The practical difference between pre-application consultation and the formal examination stage;
- How and when influence can realistically be exercised within the process;
- The respective roles of Welsh Ministers, PEDW and local planning authorities;
- The purpose, preparation and weight of Local Impact Reports, particularly where submitted by community councils;
- The relationship between nationally significant infrastructure proposals and local planning policy; and
- The overall sequencing and timeframes within the regime.

There was broad agreement that the process is procedurally complex and that clearer, plain-language explanations — including timelines and worked examples — would be helpful, particularly for community councils with limited professional support.

2.2 Experience of Large-Scale and DNS Applications

Participants with experience of Developments of National Significance (DNS) and other large-scale schemes described:

- The volume and technical nature of documentation;
- Pressure on elected members and community councils to review substantial submissions within limited timeframes;
- Resource constraints at both county and community council level;
- Challenges where multiple infrastructure proposals are brought forward within the same locality.

Some participants expressed concern that the scale and technicality of applications can make meaningful scrutiny difficult without additional support.

2.3 Capacity and Resourcing Pressures

A recurring theme was capacity of community representatives to be able to respond to larger scale and infrastructure applications even within the prescribed six-week timescales.

Participants noted:

- Limited officer support available to community councils;
- The voluntary nature of many community council roles;
- The challenge of engaging with lengthy environmental and technical reports;
- The potential difficulty of preparing formal submissions within statutory deadlines.

There was concern that, without additional guidance or support, some community councils may struggle to engage effectively in infrastructure examinations.

2.4 Points of Influence within the Process

Discussion highlighted differing perceptions about when communities are most able to influence proposals.

Participants observed that:

- By the time statutory consultation occurs, key elements of a proposal may already be well-developed - early engagement with proactive developers is essential;
- Pre-application engagement may vary in quality and approach;
- There is uncertainty regarding the practical impact of representations made at later stages.

Some contributors questioned whether influence is strongest earlier in the process, while others noted that the formal structure of examination provides defined opportunities to submit representations.

2.5 Local Impact Reports (LIRs)

The ability of local planning authorities — and optionally community councils — to submit Local Impact Reports prompted discussion.

Key points raised included:

- Limited awareness among some participants that community councils may submit their own LIR;
- Uncertainty about the expected content, evidential standard and format of such reports;
- Concern about the practical feasibility of preparing an LIR within statutory timeframes;
- Questions about how much weight is given to LIRs during examination.

There was interest in clearer guidance explaining the purpose and preparation, content and form of Local Impact Reports; it was agreed that sample reports and / or case studies would be beneficial.

2.6 Consultation Quality and Perception

Participants discussed experiences of pre-application consultation in the context of large infrastructure schemes.

Issues raised included:

- Perceived variability in the quality of consultation exercises;
- Concern about the accessibility of consultation materials;
- The challenge of responding within the statutory 42-day period;
- Perceptions that proposals may be relatively fixed by the time consultation occurs.

While views differed, there was broad recognition that clarity regarding what aspects of a proposal are open to change is important for maintaining confidence in the process.

2.7 Support and Guidance Needs

Participants were invited to identify what would assist communities in engaging more confidently.

Suggestions included:

- Clear, plain-language explanations of each stage of the infrastructure process;
- A glossary of key terms;
- Short, bilingual, focused training sessions tailored to community councils;
- Practical guidance on preparing representations;
- Support in understanding what constitutes a material planning consideration;
- Advice on managing conflicts of interest and predetermination issues at community council level.

There was general support for concise, accessible materials rather than lengthy technical guidance.

3. Conclusions and Next Steps

The discussion confirmed that there is strong interest among community and elected representatives in understanding the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 and its practical implications. While awareness of the broad structure of the regime is emerging, there remains significant uncertainty regarding process sequencing, points of influence, Local Impact Reports and the practical steps communities can take to engage effectively.

Three overarching conclusions can be drawn from the roundtable:

1. Clarity.

Participants consistently highlighted the need for plain-language explanations of the infrastructure process, including clear timelines, defined stages and worked examples. There is a particular need to distinguish between pre-application consultation, examination and decision-making stages.

2. Capacity.

Community councils and elected members are often operating with limited officer support and within tight statutory deadlines. The scale and technical nature of infrastructure documentation presents practical barriers to engagement.

3. Targeted support.

There is demand for concise, accessible and bilingual guidance materials, including glossaries, checklists and structured training focused on practical participation.

Implications for PAW's Programme of Work

In response to the issues raised, Planning Aid Wales will, by end March 2026:

- Prepare a glossary of key terms associated with Significant Infrastructure Projects;
- Design focused training sessions tailored to community and town councils, including sessions addressing material considerations, predetermination and effective representation;

These outputs will form part of the ongoing *Infrastructure Planning for Communities* programme and will inform future funding proposals, which may include:

- Develop a plain-language overview of the infrastructure consent process, including a step-by-step timeline;
- Produce guidance explaining the purpose, preparation and role of Local Impact Reports, including illustrative examples where possible;
- Consider the form, format and accessibility of resources, with an emphasis on concise and bilingual materials.

Ongoing Engagement

Participants' contributions have directly shaped the direction of this work. Planning Aid Wales will continue to:

- Invite feedback on draft guidance materials;
- Deliver follow-up training sessions;
- Refine resources in light of practical experience as infrastructure proposals progress under the new regime.

The roundtable demonstrated both the complexity of the infrastructure planning system and the willingness of participants to engage constructively in improving understanding and practice. Continued dialogue between community representatives, public bodies and developers will be essential to ensuring that engagement under the new regime is clear, proportionate and meaningful.