

August 17th 2007

Mrs Rosemary Thomas,
Head of Planning Division,
Welsh Assembly Government,
Parc Cathays,
Caerdydd,
CF10 3NQ

Dear Rosemary,

PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE – UK GOVERNMENT'S PLANNING WHITE PAPER

I refer to the consultation on the above White Paper which ends this week. I also refer to your letter of the 23rd May which sought to clarify how the proposals relate to Wales.

Planning Aid Wales seeks to work with others to ensure a fair, transparent and responsive planning system in Wales. The necessity of sending out your supplementary letter demonstrates to us that in this instance this consultation on the Planning White Paper is not as transparent as it should be and has led to real difficulty understanding which parts relate to Wales. It is particularly disappointing that the Paper's publishers appear to regard its applicability to other nations apart from England as an afterthought, as demonstrated by having consideration of the devolved administrations as part of a final chapter on devolution, transitional arrangements and implementation. We call on WAG, therefore, to press on the UK Government to ensure that a proper structure and protocol is put in place in future for the proper consideration of any proposals relating to spatial planning that affect other nations apart from England.

Notwithstanding the above comment, we still remain concerned about the ability of the public in Wales to understand and appreciate the implications of key elements of the White Paper (UK wide policy statements and the proposed Infrastructure Projects Commission). We would therefore suggest that a further consultation takes place explaining how these reforms, and any other proposed reforms to the planning system in Wales, will work. This would be in keeping with the Assembly Government's objectives of producing planning policy in a more inclusive, democratic and socially accountable way.

We also consider that further clarification is needed as to whether UK wide policies in particular areas include Wales or not. In our view certain policies (for example, international air transport) do need to be produced at a UK level in order to put Wales specific policies in an appropriate context. In the instances where they do include Wales, then the Welsh Assembly Government should desirably become an equal partner in policy setting, as distinct from a consultee. In Wales the relationship with Planning Policy Wales, the Technical Advice Note system, the Wales Spatial Plan and local development plans must also be made clearer.

This would be particularly important at the level of the Wales Spatial Plan, where it would be necessary for UK-wide policy statements to acknowledge and respond to the spatial dimension of that document.

In relation to major energy infrastructure projects, Planning Aid Wales sees no justifiable reason why decisions on such projects cannot be taken by the Welsh Assembly Government within the context of an agreed UK wide policy. It therefore supports WAG's call, recently reaffirmed by the Minister for the Environment, Sustainability and Housing, that such decisions should be devolved to it rather than the proposed IPC.

The remainder of the White Paper specifically refers to reforms in England only. However, although we understand that you are actively considering whether such reforms are needed in Wales, we would also support RTPi Cymru's call for The Assembly Government to initiate a more fundamental review of the Welsh planning system, both to assess its 'fitness for purpose' to meet existing conditions, and how the planning system may better contribute to the Coalition Government's economic, social, environmental and spatial planning objectives for Wales.

I do hope you find the comments helpful, and please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further clarification.

We have no objection to these comments being made public.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elwyn Thomas', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Elwyn Thomas, Chief Executive, Planning Aid Wales