

## **Planning Aid Wales**

### **Consultation response to '*Reforming local government: Resilient and renewed*'**

**To:** [RLGProgramme@Wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:RLGProgramme@Wales.gsi.gov.uk)

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#### **1. About Planning Aid Wales**

1.1 Planning Aid Wales is the charity supporting communities and planning authorities to work better together in shaping places. We are core funded by Welsh Government but retain a high degree of freedom to act independently on behalf of communities.

1.2 Planning aid is about giving people the information and support they need to understand and engage positively with planning. We work to help local communities in Wales to understand and engage more effectively with planning. We do this by explaining the planning process from a community perspective and building capacity for constructive community engagement.

1.3 We also work with local planning authorities and Welsh Government to encourage more effective community involvement in the planning process.

1.4 When responding to consultations such as this, our aim is to identify potential barriers which might prevent effective or manageable community involvement in planning.

1.5 Our responses to specific consultation questions are given in italics below:

#### **Consultation Question 1**

**The Welsh Government believes that it is appropriate to consider 'tests' to frame thinking around regional working.**

- a) **Do you think the 'tests' set out are helpful in guiding thinking?**
- b) **Are there other tests or considerations that might also be used?**

*Planning Aid Wales is particularly interested in the Planning Service delivered by local authorities and the effectiveness of measures to increase public participation in planning. We suggest that the effectiveness of public engagement should be one of the 'tests' of the new regional arrangements. In terms of the Planning Service, this would require demonstration of ease of access to planning information, and the impact of community engagement measures on both the formulation of planning policies and decisions made on planning applications.*

## **Consultation Question 2**

**In this White Paper the Welsh Government has set out a number of areas which it believes should be required to be delivered on a regional basis.**

- a) Do you agree that these areas should be delivered regionally?**
- b) What practical considerations should we consider in taking these proposals forward?**
- c) What other 'ancillary' powers would be required to ensure the effective exercise of the functions exercised regionally?**

*In relation to the land use planning issues raised in paragraphs 2.3.8 to 2.3.15, Planning Aid Wales agrees that some local planning authorities lack the resources and / or expertise to provide the optimum service for planning functions. Joint Planning Boards (JPBs) would seem appropriate and these can include National Park Authorities as per the 2015 Planning (Wales) Act. However, there could be a danger of producing an over-complicated structure and range of services to be dealt with at this level.*

*In terms of structure, the proposal is for a 3 tier structure of development plans without local government reform. The question is whether the creation of some JPBs and some single local planning authorities is sufficiently clear to enable the general public to clearly identify which organisation holds responsibility for plan-making.*

*In terms of services, if only plan-making functions are dealt with at the sub-regional level (through joint development plans, however prepared), this could be confusing. For example a community council could be consulted by one body for comments on planning policies in an evolving development plan, and by another body on a planning application.*

## **Consultation Question 22**

**The Welsh Government believes there should be minimum expectations on Councillors for interacting with their local constituents. Do you agree or disagree? If so, what should these minimum expectations be?**

*Planning Aid Wales recognises the vital importance of elected councillors acting as 'bridges' between the local communities they represent and relevant local authorities or community councils. However, we also see evidence of confusion regarding the respective roles of local authority members and community councillors, in terms of who represents local community interests in planning, and how. We see local government reform as a potential opportunity to help clarify the necessary distinction between these two different roles.*

### **Consultation Question 27**

**The Welsh Government believes there are things that can be done now to help build resilience and renewal in the sector in the short to medium term and would welcome comments on the list of actions at paragraph 6.1.6. Views on any other actions which could be taken are also welcomed.**

*Planning Aid Wales sees considerable potential within community councils for them to engage with the local government reform agenda. Some of the larger community and town councils might take on additional responsibilities as part of a phased programme, provided each can demonstrate its commitment and capabilities.*

*Encouraging community councils to work with the relevant planning authority to develop Place Plans for their area would help to develop their understanding of planning, and also their expertise in influencing the process to benefit local communities. The aim should be to build capacity in the community council sector to enable constructive contributions to plan-making and decision-making as statutory consultees.*

*We would be happy to share a proposition we are currently developing which will seek to raise the capacity of larger community and town councils in Wales to engage creatively with the planning process. This might also seek to establish benchmarking standards and / or minimum expectations.*