

Supporting the
Economy -
Consultation on
Proposed Changes
to Planning Policy
Wales

DLP BRIEFING NOTE 79

Prepared by
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Planning Policy Wales 4 (2011) provides the overarching planning policy for Wales, however notably chapter seven on economic development has not been updated since 2002. The Welsh Government (WG) now aims to facilitate economic renewal partly through the planning system, particularly given the economic conditions that the country currently faces. A report was commissioned in 2011 entitled Planning for Sustainable Economic Renewal and the recommendations from that report form the basis for this new consultation on revising PPW.

The WG have a statutory duty to promote sustainable development; the definition has three components: social, economic and environmental. The consultation document acknowledges that it is often the case that the economic element can be overlooked within the context of sustainable development.

Local Authorities are encouraged to take a **'whole economy approach'** in a shift away from focussing more on the traditional 'B' class elements of the economy. The draft chapter states that:-

"For planning purposes the Welsh Government defines economic development as development of land and buildings for activities that generate wealth, jobs and incomes. Economic land uses include the traditional employment land uses (offices, research and development, industry and warehousing) as well as retail, leisure, and public services."

This would appear to be a similar approach to PPS4 in England in terms of its breadth.

The draft chapter recognises that the planning system ought to support economic growth - and that planning policies should ***"aim to ensure that the growth of output and employment in Wales as a whole is not constrained by a shortage of land for economic uses. Planning authorities should aim to facilitate the provision of land that the market requires, except where there are good reasons to the contrary."***

However rather than let the market control the use of land, the draft also explains that *"wherever possible"* LPAs should try to guide and control economic development to facilitate and promote social and environmental sustainability, including the familiar principles of co-ordinating development and infrastructure, aligning jobs, services and homes, reducing the need to travel by car, regenerating previously-developed land and delivering regeneration and opportunities to disadvantaged communities.

The draft also recognises that the economy is not defined by political administrative boundaries; mention of "travel-to-work patterns" and "regional and sub-regional economies" is encouraging and seems to pre-empt the possibility of city region planning in Wales. Furthermore:-

"Effective planning for the economy requires planning authorities to work strategically and co-operatively steering development and investment to the most efficient and most sustainable locations, regardless of which local authority area they are in."

In addition, the consultation announces that a Technical Advice Note (TAN) will follow that will provide guidance on preparing and using Employment Land Reviews. This new PPW chapter expects these to be undertaken by LPAs and subsequently kept under review.

The draft chapter emphasises that **economic benefits should be given equal consideration with social and environmental issues in the decision-making process and that in some circumstances the benefits could even outweigh other considerations.**

The use of Supplementary Planning Zones and Local Development Orders are encouraged, particularly in areas that have Enterprise Zones.

The importance of the rural economy is recognised, particularly those of small-scale enterprises and also new businesses. The draft chapter notes that locations within settlements and with public transport access would be preferable, but also states that:-

"some industries may have specific land requirements which cannot be accommodated within settlements. The absence of allocated employment sites should not prevent authorities from accommodating appropriate small-scale rural enterprise in or adjoining small rural settlements. The expansion of existing businesses located in the open countryside should be supported provided there are no unacceptable impacts on local amenity."

The draft chapter also encourages the 'green economy'.

Amongst the long list of things that development plans should do for economic development are the following:-

- propose specific locations for industries that are detrimental to amenity or may be polluters;
- concentrate retail and offices (and other development that attracts large numbers of people) in city, town and village centres; and,
- include criteria-based policies for flexibility and development proposals on locations not specifically allocated.

In relation to development management, LPAs are encouraged to take positive and constructive approaches as well as take into account benefits and factors such as the number and type of jobs expected to be created or retained, how the development may help redress economic disadvantage and how it contributes to wider spatial strategies.

Draft paragraph 7.6.2 states that:-

"Planning authorities should look favourably on applications for economic land uses which are not in accordance with the development plan if the economic benefits of the development are demonstrated to outweigh any adverse impacts."

Two further positive aspects of the draft PPW are that Economic Development Officers should be consulted on relevant planning applications and that it recognises that economic and residential land uses can be compatible.

The consultation seeks responses to fifteen specific questions about the draft chapter and initial framework for the new TAN as well as inviting further comments. The deadline for responding is 5 March 2012.

DLP Planning act for a wide range of clients, many of whom are involved in economic development. The draft chapter appears to take positive action towards economic renewal, although it is likely that local authorities and other bodies may try to tone down the chapter. If you would like to discuss the issues and implications of the chapter further, please feel free to contact your local office.

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