



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

> Building Better Places

The Planning System Delivering
Resilient and Brighter Futures

Placemaking and the Covid-19 recovery

July 2020

> Foreword from the Minister

The Covid-19 Pandemic and our collective response to the issues it raises, is one of the most complicated challenges in a generation. We have all had to do things differently, think more about our actions, and act carefully and sensitively to those around us.

The economic consequences of the pandemic are predicted to be severe, with impacts felt across all sectors, including those in construction and the built environment.

As we slowly emerge from this crisis, we must recognise the needs of our communities and ensure that we retain the best elements of the changes that have occurred around us, including how we have behaved and responded. We need an environmental, social, cultural and economic recovery which is sustainable.

We have all spent more time in our neighbourhoods during the weeks of lockdown and we can all appreciate the difference between having a quality environment to live, work and relax in and how being cut-off from our friends and family can mean that a poor environment, with no or limited access to local goods, services and green spaces can have a severely detrimental impact on our mental and physical health and well-being, as well as our ability to protect our livelihoods.

Now, more than ever, we need to think about places and placemaking. This will be our core value in the work we take forward to bring about recovery in Wales. The regenerative action we take at all levels will be driven by integrated thinking and not short-term expedience which can have negative longer term consequences.

Even in this time of economic hardship for many in the development industry, we cannot fall back on quick-build, poor quality development on sites which are not sustainable. We must learn from the past and ensure that a post Covid world has people's well-being at its heart.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for us to reset the clock and think again about the places we want to live, work and play in. We need to rebuild a greener, cleaner society with

decarbonisation and social justice at its heart which respects our environment, whilst giving people good places to live in, which are accessible on foot, bike and public transport.

Planning Policy Wales (PPW 10) leads the way in this respect and contains the principles and policies needed for us to recover from this situation in a positive manner, putting placemaking at the heart of future development. This guide pinpoints the most relevant policy priorities and actions to aid in the recovery.

This cannot be done by us working alone. The development industry, local planning authorities, public bodies, the third sector and the Welsh Government, need to work together to achieve this, recognising that change is needed. We can grasp this opportunity if we are all committed to the delivery of high-quality development in the right place.

I am committed to ensuring that the Welsh Government plays its role in supporting the vibrancy of places and helping this people-focussed and placemaking-led recovery. This document starts to identify action to achieve this and upon which we must build. We all have our part to play to ensure that the communities of tomorrow benefit from the foresight of today.



Julie James

Julie James MS
Minister for Housing and Local Government

> Introduction

This document sets out the Welsh Government's planning policy priorities to assist in taking action in the recovery period after the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The planning system should be centre stage in the consideration of built and natural environment issues that have arisen from this situation.

Planners have a forward looking and key, co-ordinating role. This is not just about the statutory functions of local planning authorities. Planners' skills mean that they can be proactive at the implementation of policies to aid in the recovery period, identifying opportunities, and bringing people together. Planners are uniquely placed to think systemically and work strategically, to shape the vision for better places and lead positive change.

In this paper we highlight the key existing planning policies and tools which should be used by all sectors in the environmental, social, cultural and economic recovery of Wales, recognising the continuing need for Planners to operate within a wider context of priorities and action at all scales.

The Welsh Government's policy direction towards better places and placemaking has not changed. In fact, the pandemic crisis has highlighted the need for good quality places for people to live, work and relax in. It has further emphasised how important the quality of our living and working environments are and how much more they matter as we require more flexibility to support new working, living and learning needs. Whilst there is undoubtedly a need for economic recovery, which the planning system should facilitate, this should not be at the expense of quality, both in terms of health and well-being and in response to the climate and nature emergencies.

If we forego our policy commitment to quality, we risk repeating previous errors in allowing development on unsustainable sites in areas which did not have the infrastructure or connections to enable us to live active, healthy lives and promote better well-being in every sense.

The Welsh Government will play its role in leading and supporting this agenda. We will use all our powers to reject poor development proposals through the notification direction procedures or our role in commenting on local development plan strategies, policies and allocations which do not support placemaking. We will also encourage early, positive engagement on proposals and plans and use our resources to inspire good practice.

In this respect, the development industry also has its part to play in improving the design and quality of schemes being presented to the planning system. Asking ourselves, "Could I live my whole life here? Will this place meet my needs and that of future generations?" is a good first test. This is then followed by meaningful engagement with communities and the local planning authority on the design of a scheme. Finally, a commitment to following through on infrastructure obligations will go a long way in ensuring that the developments envisioned are delivered and the wider public benefits are maximised.

Local planning authorities should be bold in their visions for the future which they set out in their local development plans. Plans should not roll forward unsustainable spatial strategies or be identical to neighbouring authorities' plans, rather they should actively embrace the placemaking agenda set out in PPW. Each plan should be unique to an area, identifying its character, strengths and areas which need improving and set out policies which improve these.

Welsh Government Policy Support

Welsh Government planning policy officials, with experience and knowledge in a range of policy areas, can provide direct assistance to local planning authorities in terms of policy support, making connections with internal Welsh Government colleagues, and bringing together policy makers to share ideas, encourage innovation and provide support.

Please contact us directly: PlanningPolicy@gov.wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



> Our Commitment to Better Places, Placemaking, Quality Outcomes and Good Design

Good places are the result of good planning which fully embraces placemaking.

Taking a placemaking approach has multiple benefits which not only helps improve quality of life, but also helps us to tackle climate change, reduce our carbon footprint and improve biodiversity and ecological resilience for the future. Our legal obligations under the Environment and Well-being of Future Generations Acts must be recognised and our actions must not be diluted.

The National Sustainable Placemaking Outcomes are set out in PPW and are highly relevant at this time.



Placemaking occurs at the strategic and local levels, through the development plan process and development management decisions; each with their own part to play. Planners have a role beyond the statutory processes to engage with the implementation of plans to ensure that the national placemaking outcomes are achieved in practice. The skills Planners possess can help make change occur.

Design Commission for Wales Assistance

The Welsh Government sponsors the Design Commission for Wales (DCFW) which helps local planning authorities, design teams and developers to deliver better places through good design.

DCFW provides client services for the development of briefs with a focus on placemaking and the application of exemplary policy in practice. It provides training and a free design review service for all sectors. The Commission's services are available throughout Wales, online and in person.

We are working with DCFW on the formulation of a specific strategic design review service for local development plans to ensure that strategic placemaking decisions help achieve the best outcomes.

Early engagement with DCFW is encouraged to get the most effective support.

Contact: connect@dcfw.org and 029 2045 1964.



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Local Development Plans

The Covid-19 response means that we need to plan effectively for future crises and take a long-term view to improve health and well-being for all. In the planning system it is our local development plans (LDPs) which do this the best.

Up to date LDPs are needed to urgently give local effect to local development priorities and national planning policy. They should be produced or replaced as efficiently as possible once local planning authorities are able to. However, this does not mean that they should roll forward policies or proposals on sites which do not encourage good places. They should be distinctive, with a truly local feel and dimension to them which provide a strategic framework for the development of local areas, whilst responding to the opportunity provided by national policy and legislation. PPW provides extensive guidance on the evidence needed to support policies through the plan making process; evidence can be wide ranging, be from existing sources and not necessarily be specifically commissioned for plan making purposes.

Whilst a local development plan needs to reflect national policy, the focus should be on local responsiveness.

For some issues a regional level of consideration is needed. The Local Government Elections Bill will mandate the preparation of a Strategic Development Plan (SDP) in each of the four regions in Wales through a Corporate Joint Committee (CJC).

The Welsh Government will use its engagement with local planning authorities to focus on the issues raised in this document as a basis for our comments on draft policies and proposals. We expect to see innovation and creativity in development plans to achieve better places. We encourage new ideas in policy formulation that build on evidence and information which exists and applies or adapts it to local circumstances. Whilst the sharing of good practice amongst plan making is a good use of resources, it should not produce identical plans to be used in a variety of distinct locations. A placemaking approach demands truly local planning strategies, policies and approaches.

Further guidance on the preparation of LDPs can be found in the *Development Plans Manual*¹.

¹ <https://gov.wales/development-plans-manual-edition-3-march-2020>



National Development Framework

The Welsh Government is expecting to publish the first NDF early in 2021. The pandemic has delayed the process by approximately four months. A national spatial development plan is essential to help shape the recovery by addressing comprehensively social, economic and environmental inequality.



We intend to make a number of changes to the draft NDF based on the responses to the consultation in 2019. We will be inviting the Senedd to scrutinise these changes in the autumn, when we will also publish a consultation report showing how we took the responses into account.

The pause in the process has been an opportunity to reflect on the draft NDF and consider how well suited it is to shaping our recovery from Covid-19. Overall, we feel the draft NDF stands up well to emerging challenges and opportunities, with its priorities for decarbonisation, cohesive communities, vibrant town centres and green infrastructure. The spatial policies support growth in city-regions, in a number of regionally important towns and coastal communities in all regions (the type of places that research suggests may suffer economically as a result of Covid-19) and they support strong, resilient rural areas. Some of the changes we were already planning to make will be particularly important in areas like active travel and digital infrastructure.

The publication of the NDF will fill an important missing part of the planning policy jigsaw. It will give clarity on the spatial priorities of the Welsh Government and the issues we believe to be nationally important. Having the NDF in place will help inform the delivery of Strategic Development Plans through the new Corporate Joint Committees (see above). Supporting stronger regional working will allow LDPs to focus on the locally distinctive issues, and the patterns, trends and sites that need attention.

The NDF will help make LDPs more ambitious and creative; the NDF itself will be part of the evidence base, so less time will need to be spent compiling background papers and more time and effort can go into discussions with communities and developers, and the important work of making better places locally. The recovery from Covid-19 is a part of that task. Through the NDF the Welsh Government will support sustainable schemes that help areas to recover, be more resilient and to thrive following this pandemic.

We know the NDF will be a big change for our planning system, we're looking forward to implementing it with our partners so that it helps achieve positive change in all parts of the country.

Development Management

The Covid-19 situation has demonstrated that decisions can be taken quickly and effectively whilst thinking about the well-being and safety of people. This should continue to be the case for the Development Management process as we begin to return to normal operation of the planning system.

Whilst the Welsh Government is considering what amendments are needed to permitted development rights to assist the recovery, it will not be doing this at the expense of making good places. Development management decisions should focus on creating healthy, thriving active places with a focus on a positive, sustainable future for our communities.

PPW and the NDF can be used directly in the decision-making process, particularly where

an LDP is silent or out-of-date on an issue. The Welsh Government will support decisions taken in this context, particularly in the short-term until an LDP is adopted.

Relevant material considerations should still be used in this process to both approve and refuse applications which do not demonstrate good placemaking. Decision makers should consider widely what is material to a particular application and apply this to their considerations, particularly where the outcome will be a benefit to creating better places

The Welsh Government will support this approach wherever it can be demonstrated to be of benefit to communities, whilst making the decision making process as effective as possible.



Placemaking Wales



Creu Lleoedd Cymru Placemaking Wales

Placemaking Wales is a new partnership of organisations involved in the built environment coming together to help deliver quality across the sector to promote better outcomes for all.

The initial phases of work includes the creation of a charter where the organisations involved commit to promoting placemaking in their work or pledge to deliver it.

Future stages of work include the provision of relevant training for Planners and other professionals, the sharing of good practice and the creation of guidance and resources on specific aspects of placemaking.

Placemaking Wales will be launched by the Minister for Housing and Local Government shortly and will be accompanied by a short placemaking guide with case studies.

If you would like to know more or get involved contact the Welsh Government Planning Division: PlanningPolicy@gov.wales

Climate Change and Decarbonisation

Last year the Welsh Government and many local authorities declared a climate emergency. The severe storms and flooding that afflicted so many communities across Wales earlier this year came as a stark reminder of the urgency that is required to combat climate change and adapt to its effects.

Edition 10 of PPW was published shortly before the declaration of a climate emergency. PPW clarifies that the purpose of the planning system is to build sustainable places that positively contribute towards the health and well-being of current and future generations. This is directly relevant to the climate emergency, with PPW setting out an ambitious and comprehensive policy framework for planning authorities to address the causes and effects of climate change.



A strategic role for the planning system is to direct growth to sustainable locations and prevent the creation of car-dependent developments. This is a key principle in PPW and is supported by the sustainable transport hierarchy, which prioritises walking, cycling and public transport ahead of private motor vehicles.

PPW states that the sustainable transport hierarchy should be used to reduce the need to travel, prevent car-dependent developments in unsustainable locations, and support the delivery of schemes located, designed and supported by infrastructure which prioritises access and movement by active and sustainable transport.

Other relevant PPW policy areas relating to tackling climate change and making more resilient places include:

- the importance of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs), which includes electric vehicles, in the decarbonisation of transport;
- a requirement for local planning authorities to establish targets for renewable energy generation in development plans, as well as to identify spatial areas where renewable energy developments will be permitted;
- severely restricting the extraction of new fossil fuels;
- ensuring biodiversity enhancement (a net benefit for biodiversity), ecosystem resilience and green infrastructure as part of advocating nature-based solutions;
- taking forward measures to embed the principles of a circular economy, particularly in the construction, and use, of the built environment and land, and the sustainable management of mineral resources; and
- directing development away from areas at risk of flooding.

The key message is that a plan-led approach is the most effective way for the planning system to combat climate change. We must identify, plan for and achieve key steps in achieving the switch to a decarbonised and climate resilient society.

Considering Health and Well-being throughout the Planning Process

The Covid-19 crisis has emphasised the importance of considering health and well-being throughout the planning system to ensure communities across Wales are healthy, vibrant and inclusive.

The planning system has an important role in supporting healthier lifestyles and reducing inequalities. This includes both direct and indirect opportunities such as the allocation of land for health facilities, ensuring good design and barrier free development, jobs and skills, improving air quality, soundscapes and protecting and improving access to recreation and natural green spaces. These can provide both physical and mental health benefits, improve well-being and help to reduce inequality.

Many factors and interactions affect health and well-being. Therefore, involvement and engagement with other partners, such as local

health boards, will help to secure a better understanding of health inequalities and their consequences. This informs the production of LDPs which can set local policies to ensure the opportunities and benefits are delivered on the ground.

There are a variety of tools at different scales within the planning system that can help us to better understand health and well-being. For example, Health Impact Assessments, which some local planning authorities already undertake, are one tool that look to ensure plans, policies and proposed allocations are as sustainable as possible.

Health and well-being considerations are woven throughout PPW. Further guidance on how to embed these considerations into planning can be found in *Health Impact Assessment. A practical guide*², *Planning for better health and well-being in Wales*³ and *Creating healthier places and spaces for our present and future generations*.

² https://whiasu.publichealthnetwork.cymru/files/1415/0710/5107/HIA_Tool_Kit_V2_WEB.pdf

³ https://whiasu.publichealthnetwork.cymru/files/2915/3243/8664/planning_for_health_and_wellbeing_in_wales.pdf



> Priorities and Actions for Places - Post Covid-19 Considerations

PPW contains policy statements from the Welsh Government on a variety of planning issues and topics; which remain relevant and should be considered as a whole by local planning authorities and the development sectors. However, in the immediate post Covid-19 phase there will be particular areas of policy which should be the focus of consideration and action, in order to act as a catalyst for a recovery across the pillars of sustainable development.

These considerations fall in to one of three categories:

- 1.** How we experienced the direct impacts of the Covid-19 lockdown period and the permanent positive changes we need to see in places and as part of new development.
- 2.** The lessons we have learned over this time and how we can help to make places more resilient and adaptable to future pandemics, should they happen again.
- 3.** Aiding the recovery after the pandemic has passed and restrictions are eased to ensure it benefits all parts of society and helps us to decarbonise, tackle climate change, reverse biodiversity decline and improve health and general well-being.

PPW demonstrates that policy areas work more effectively when they are considered together in order to get the maximum benefit. We have therefore identified key issues which bring individual policy areas together to ensure that action is the most effective. The 8 issues are:

- Staying local: creating neighbourhoods
- Active travel: exercise and rediscovered transport methods
- Revitalising our town centres
- Digital places – the lockdown lifeline
- Changing working practices: our future need for employment land
- Reawakening Wales’ tourism and cultural sectors
- Green infrastructure, health and well-being and ecological resilience
- Improving air quality and soundscapes for better health and well-being

Each issue draws out the pertinent points of PPW with commentary on specific aspects of the potential post Covid-19 pandemic situation.

Through effective planning we can create a more resilient Wales where social, economic and environmental inequalities are identified and effectively addressed to create a more resilient and brighter future for all. This is a once in a generation opportunity for planning to have a positive effect on the future well-being of people in Wales and these policy considerations should be applied immediately to ensure we affect change in the most positive way possible.

Staying local: creating neighbourhoods

Covid-19 is having a significant impact on our communities and how we live our lives. Through the Covid-19 crisis we have all been spending more time at home and within our local neighbourhoods which has highlighted the importance of where we live and the quality of the environment around us. The crisis has also placed additional emphasis on the importance of well located, secure and affordable homes for people's health and well-being.

The location, quality, size and features of our homes has influenced how we managed through the lockdown. The quality, flexibility and adaptability of our built environment has had a huge impact on how we provide healthcare and education, food and medical supplies. During this time we have also seen the importance of local services and infrastructure with people spending more time in their local neighbourhoods. The continuation of people working from home and more locally is expected to be a long-term trend. We need to plan for these trends and, even more than before, ensure we are building homes and neighbourhoods that are great places to live, with easy access to services and appropriate infrastructure and greenspace.

Local food production and supply chains have become very important in some areas, with the growing popularity of allotments seeing us grow our own food more. This has been coupled with entrepreneurial spirit which has seen communities coming together to distribute this food and support local businesses in difficult economic times. We must support this localism through the planning system by identifying community growing spaces, as well as protecting our Best and Most Versatile Agricultural (BMV) land from development.

Enabling people to live in well-located and well-designed energy efficient homes is a key role for planning. House-building is also an important part of the Welsh economy and delivering new social and market homes can make a significant contribution to economic

recovery and social cohesion. With uncertainty over the impact of the pandemic on the economy and jobs and associated ability to enter the housing market, we must increase housing output by refocussing on building new social housing and ensuring that rough sleepers do not return to the streets.

The planning system's most important role is in guiding how places grow and evolve. SDPs and LDPs have a fundamental role in directing new development, especially housing, to the right locations. Forward planning can also establish key factors to the success of a place, such as the mix of uses, types of housing (including social housing), proximity to facilities and public transport, density, the street network and access to greenspace and nature. These are key aspects of placemaking, which are reflected throughout PPW, with specific policy and guidance in the strategic placemaking and housing sections.

We will expect proposals for new communities (in rural and urban areas) and housing sites to integrate with existing services and infrastructure and, where extra provision is required as a result of the development, for this to be forthcoming. Creativity and innovation will be required in order for various agencies, infrastructure partners and public sector providers to come together to deliver truly sustainable sites. This provision should be identified at the earliest opportunity with relevant information available to communities during meaningful engagement and consultation.

As a spatial plan for addressing the key national priorities in Wales to 2040, the NDF will provide evidence of the need for housing at both a national and regional level and it will demonstrate the necessity for a focus on increasing the delivery of affordable homes. To support the growth strategy of the NDF, new guidance will be prepared to assist local planning authorities shape the growth and regeneration of their towns and cities. This will expand on strategic placemaking principles in the NDF and provide guidance on developing a spatial framework to guide growth and regeneration.

Local Development Orders (LDOs)

LDOs grant planning permission for certain types of development within a specified area, subject to conditions and limitations. A LDO can contribute to local economic development and regeneration, helping make places more attractive and competitive. They simplify the planning process by removing the need for planning applications, allowing developers to progress with more speed and certainty whilst reducing costs.

In town centres, LDOs can help address the problem of vacant properties to achieve more viable and vibrant centres. They can specify what is or is not an acceptable development or use, or impose limitations to exclude certain developments within a use class. They can facilitate change of use, alterations, extensions and infill developments, replacing many minor planning applications which would otherwise be routinely approved.

LDOs can also be used on larger mixed use schemes, housing and employment sites, to bring forward development that conforms to a pre-determined masterplan or design code.

Details concerning the implementation of LDOs in Wales can be found in the *Welsh Government Circular 003/2012 Guidance on Using a Local Development Order*⁴ and *Local development orders: impacts and good practice*⁵. Welsh Government officials can offer further support and advice on the effective use of LDOs.

⁴ <https://gov.wales/local-development-orders-guidance-local-planning-authorities-circular-0032012>

⁵ <https://gov.wales/local-development-orders-impacts-and-good-practice>

Active travel: exercise and rediscovered transport methods

Through the Covid-19 crisis we have seen unprecedented changes that affect all aspects of our daily lives including how and why we travel. Transport, across all modes, has been affected due to the restrictions imposed. We have seen large reductions in motorised traffic on all parts of the road network, reduced patronage of buses and trains, high levels of home working and higher rates of walking and cycling, both for essential journeys and for daily exercise.

For the benefit of our environment, health and well-being we need to build on the positive transport modal shift we are currently experiencing. We need to secure for the long-term the continued shift from the private car to sustainable and active travel modes for our everyday journeys both to and from and within places without causing unintended inequalities. The increased walking and cycling infrastructure that has been temporarily created to accommodate our major shift to active travel during this time could be made permanent in order to continue to support healthy lifestyles and connect communities.

The planning system has a key role to play in continuing to reduce the need to travel and creating places which support sustainable and active travel. The planning system needs

to support developments which are sited in the right locations, where they can be easily accessed by active and sustainable travel modes without the need for a car. It must maximise opportunities for people to make sustainable and healthy travel choices for their daily journeys and leisure.

The planning system must ensure the chosen locations and resulting design of new developments support sustainable travel modes and maximise accessibility by walking and cycling. New development should improve the quality of place and create safe, social, attractive neighbourhoods where people want to walk, cycle and enjoy. We should not be promoting sites which are unlikely to be well served by walking, cycling and public transport. Urban design skills must be brought to bear and better space and capacity built on existing routes as well as new ones.

PPW sets out the sustainable transport hierarchy which should be a key consideration in the preparation of development plans, including site allocations, and used during the determination of planning applications. It promotes the delivery of schemes located, designed and supported by infrastructure which prioritises access and movement by active and sustainable transport modes. The hierarchy should be used to reduce the need to travel and prevent car-dependent developments in unsustainable locations.



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Welcome to
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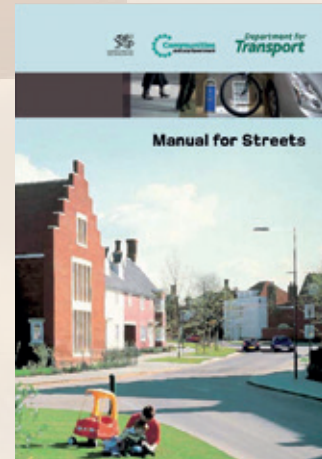
Manual for Streets

With streets and public spaces so important to the social and economic success of towns and cities, as well as the health and well-being of the people living there, we must learn from the current situation and build on this as part of recovery strategies.

With less cars on the road, the 'place' function of streets has taken priority over their 'movement' function. It has been streets and other public spaces, particularly small local parks and squares, where we have been exercising and children playing. It has also been streets where we have been able to interact with other people.

With exercise and social contact so vital to our health and well-being, the pandemic has reinforced the need for well-designed, people orientated streets. This forms the basis of the 'active and social streets' policy in PPW, which is supported by *Manual for Streets*⁶ and its companion guide *Manual for Streets 2*⁷. PPW is clear that the design of streets should be based on urban design principles and not the conventional engineering-led approach in the now superseded Design Bulletin 32.

Planners should continue to challenge orthodoxies, mind-sets and development proposals which are based on outdated practices and standards, such as those in Design Bulletin 32, and promote creativity, joint working and street designs that respond to the guidance in *Manual for Streets*. The Welsh Government will support decisions of this nature to help create better places.



⁶ <https://gov.wales/manual-streets-residential-streets>

⁷ <https://gov.wales/manual-streets-residential-streets>

Revitalising our town centres

The Covid-19 lockdown meant that our retail and commercial centres became deserted except for those people shopping for essential items. Supermarkets and convenience goods stores became the few shops still trading. This was all at a time when some retail sectors were already struggling. The economic consequences have meant that many retailers are struggling financially and this will lead to higher vacancy rates in all of our commercial centres.

Online competition to our town centre retailers was strong before the crisis; this situation will become more apparent as more retailers increase their online presence and more people have become used to doing the majority of their non-essential shopping online.

During this time we have also seen a renaissance of local service provision from smaller retailers or businesses, in both rural and urban areas; this entrepreneurial spirit should be recognised and supported by the planning system.



We recognise that retail and commercial centres are hubs of social and economic activity and the focal point for a diverse range of services and cultural activities/functions, which support the needs of local communities. They are highly accessible to different modes of transport and are the most sustainable locations for new development. This pivotal position in our society needs to be maximised.

The planning system must respond to this situation by ensuring that our retail and commercial centres can operate as flexibly as possible. This begins by setting out a clear

vision for each centre in LDPs as well as establishing realistic and sensible boundaries for the centre, with the identification of sites for redevelopment. This means that the role and function of established shopping areas must be reassessed and sometimes difficult decisions about the future of some of these centres will need to be made. Master planning will be a particularly useful tool in this respect.

Crucial to this will be the use of outside spaces within our town centres and thinking about how we proactively plan for these as the need to retain social distancing measures remains. Creative uses for our open spaces in town centres should be considered, including creating new spaces from underutilised areas such as empty plots and car parks as well as using pavements and highways and urban greenspaces to facilitate open spacious places that will both help businesses operate and people to feel safe whilst socialising.

Our centres should become places where a variety of retail, employment, commercial, community, leisure, health and public sector uses come together in a hub of activity to make them viable as go-to destinations once more. Flexible, local co-working spaces could also be a crucial new element to increase space to work. Residential uses are also key to the vitality of centres, provided that they do not curtail the commercial activities which take place and soundscapes are considered.

Evidence suggests that traditional retailing uses will not be as prevalent and the demand for new retail space will be very low for the foreseeable future, therefore primary retail areas will need to be urgently reviewed. This must be realistic and not done in the expectation that retail occupiers will return in the numbers we witnessed prior to the pandemic. Unreasonable and inflexible policies should be challenged through the development plan process, as much more creative thinking will be needed to reimagine and re-purpose these areas.

Retail Assessments in Development Plans should be replaced by town centre assessments. They should no longer look at retail need alone but encapsulate a wider array of use requirements, particularly in the employment, leisure and public service sectors,

based upon the evidence and vision for the centre in line with the Town Centre First Principle. This should be a comprehensive assessment of requirements, with appropriate sites or policies identified to accommodate these needs in central locations whilst maintaining environmental quality in the public realm, including access to green space and appropriate soundscapes. When establishing what is appropriate within an existing centre, understanding the market's needs will be essential, particularly towards new or emerging potential occupiers.

We need to keep development focussed on our centres which brings more sustainable outcomes, particularly in terms of travel options. Therefore, the sequential test for retail development should continue to be applied and extended to all town centre uses. Our existing out-of-centre locations will need to be carefully managed, particularly where opportunities for new development come forward at these locations. New development here should not perpetuate unsustainable travel patterns.

Digital places - the lockdown lifeline

Staying connected through digital means was one of the few opportunities for social interaction with friends and family and has become mainstreamed as part of our working lives throughout the lockdown period. The quality of our mobile phone and broadband connections became linked to our emotional well-being in a way that many people had not appreciated before.

With homeworking now likely to be more prevalent across the country, having reliable and good quality communication systems in place is more important than ever before to help the economic and social recovery.

The planning system can play a vital role in the provision of electronic communication systems. Although many developments associated with fixed line broadband and mobile telephone infrastructure benefit from extensive permitted development rights, new developments should provide sufficient infrastructure so that our homes and businesses can benefit from high quality service provision from occupation. The planning system can be used to influence the provision of new services in areas where current provision is poor, particularly in more rural areas.



Wherever possible, the provision of digital infrastructure to new developments, such as renewable energy schemes, should be harnessed to improve connections to those people that live in the vicinity.

Planning applications for new digital infrastructure should be recognised as essential to the Covid-19 recovery period and should be given priority for determination by planning authorities. Developers should engage proactively on their plans with communities and planning authorities so that this roll-out can occur as efficiently as possible.

We will continue to work with industry and regulators to ensure that our planning policies and regulations provide the appropriate balance between ensuring electronic communications infrastructure can proceed as efficiently as possible, whilst maintaining the amenity of surrounding communities and the special features of our protected areas and buildings.

We are working with the mobile industry to produce an updated Code of Best Practice for Mobile Operators and to help support the rollout of the *Shared Rural Network* project⁸. These will help to ensure that the planning system runs smoothly in helping to increase mobile coverage across Wales.

We will also keep permitted development rights for mobile network operators under review as well as acting to implement the European Union Directive on small cell antennas by the end of the year to help the rollout of the 5G network.

Changing working practices - our future need for employment land

Our workplaces have undergone a seismic shift during the Covid-19 lockdown with a significant increase in people working from home, particularly in the office-based sectors of the economy. Even when all restrictions are lifted, the impacts of this are likely to have longer term impacts on where we work. People and organisations are becoming familiar with flexible working and the potential benefits and savings (as well as the positive impacts on decarbonisation and reducing unnecessary travel) it can bring. This in turn is likely to

have impacts on the requirements for future workspace and there is potential for significant surplus existing stock.

This all happening in the wider context of the economic impact of the pandemic and Brexit which will have an effect on all industrial and employment sectors.

The planning system will need to adapt quickly to the economic changes which will occur as a result of the pandemic which could largely accelerate trends which had already begun to occur. Economic forecasts will need to be re-examined to ensure that the supply of land for employment uses is adequate and fit for the future, taking into account the need for a choice of sites.

Employment allocations will need to be reviewed in light of these changes and, where change is needed, this should be to the best use of land for placemaking. This may mean sites in urban areas with good public and active travel links being designated for other mixed uses. It may also mean surplus unsustainable sites are removed from development plans altogether.

On strategic employment sites, local planning authorities should continue to assess if these are still needed or how needs may change, and work collaboratively across a region to designate land if there is a realistic prospect of it being developed in the medium-term.

With the rise of homeworking, we will also need to think differently about the flexible workplaces we provide for remote workers to congregate together for the sharing of ideas and access to office environments and facilities. Our retail and town centres are best suited to this and they will be a means of reinforcing the vibrancy of these hubs (see above). This will require innovation by developers and planning authorities, including the identification of suitable sites and buildings in the heart of communities where they can be accessed in a sustainable way.

As well as our national planning policy statements on economic development, we have also have produced technical guidance on employment land reviews⁹.

⁸ <https://srn.org.uk/>

⁹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/economic-development-evidence-base.pdf>

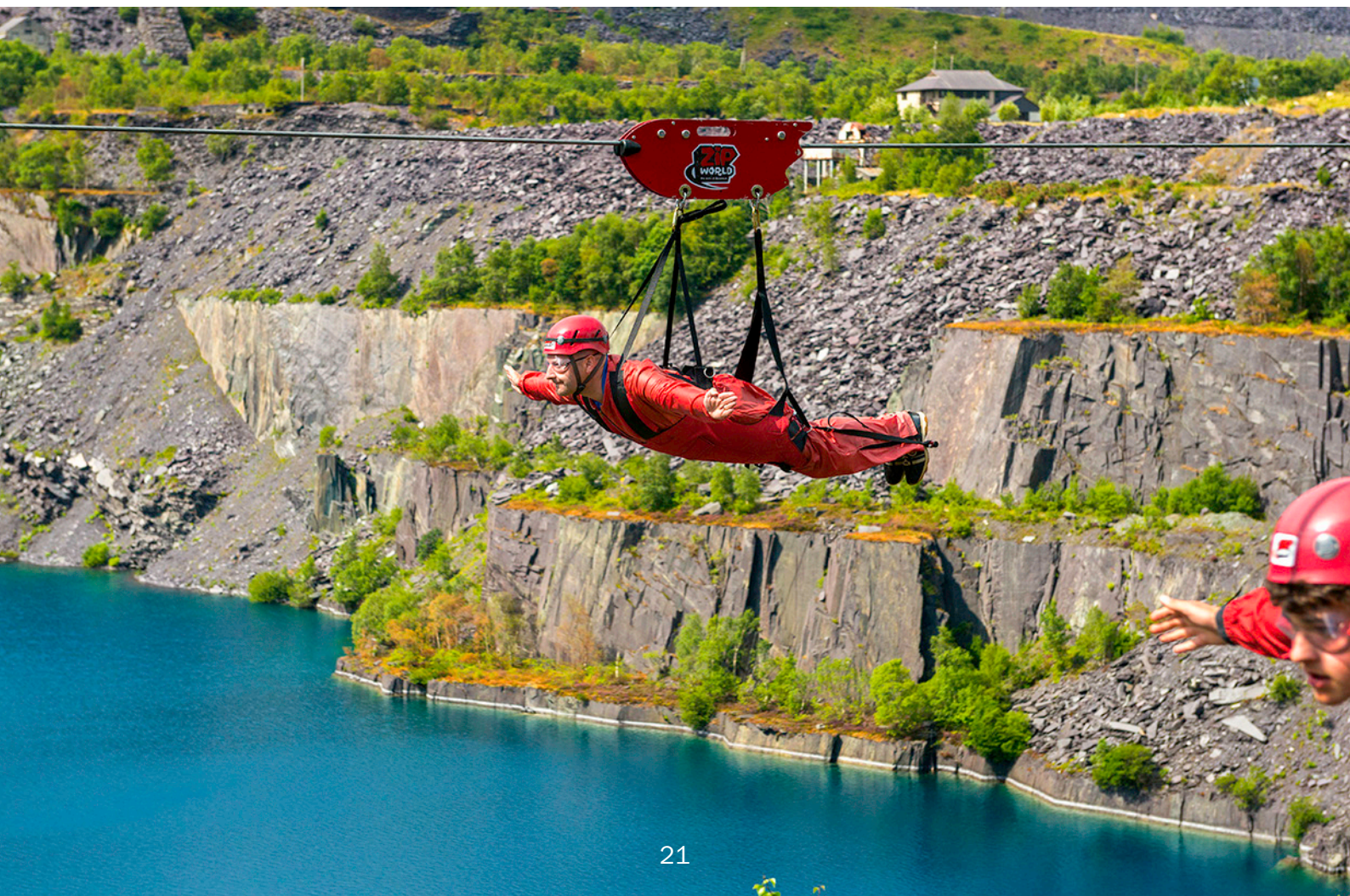
Reawakening Wales' tourism and cultural sectors

'Visit Wales. Later' has been the instruction to tourists who had hoped to explore our beautiful environment, tourist attractions and visitor accommodation in both rural and urban areas. The direct economic impact on the tourism sector will not be fully known for some time, but it is clear that losing out on trade in the peak Easter and summer periods will have significant consequences for many businesses and employees.

The crisis has curtailed cultural activity such as live music, cinema, theatre, visiting museums and formal sport and recreation. Participation and engagement in cultural life is essential for our social well-being, but these assets are also key parts of our local economies. Supporting the continuation of our way of life, be this in urban or rural places, depends on these assets being able to function in ways which protect the health of all those working in or using these assets as well as their vibrancy as local businesses.

The planning system strongly supports a diverse, sustainable tourism and culture industry. It brings jobs and income into Wales and it enables people worldwide to enjoy and experience Welsh hospitality, landscape and culture. We want this sector to resume and recover as soon as it is safe to do so and we support appropriate efforts to build quality and diversity into the visitor and cultural economy. It is particularly important that tourism and culture opportunities that can deliver community benefits to the local area are supported in coastal and rural areas. Tourism and cultural developments may offer a positive way of reusing empty buildings, historic buildings or disused land as part of regeneration schemes.

Cultural and historic assets can help to attract and complement investment in our communities. They can add value for businesses in terms of the wider economic opportunities they might bring. Such value to be gained for new businesses through the wider economic opportunities our cultural and historic assets can offer is likely to make Wales a more attractive



place to invest during the post-Covid recovery period. It is important that any new investment works with our cultural and historic assets to maximise benefits and positively contribute to sustainable development.

As our tourism and cultural assets begin to reopen there will be a need for sensitive social distancing measures so they can still be appreciated in their own right. In a similar way to our town centres, outdoor spaces around tourism and cultural assets will need to be carefully planned and managed to allow associated industries (such as cafes and bars) to operate effectively. Appropriate access to facilities and sites will also require careful thought and management including access by active travel means, public transport and private vehicles.

PPW sets out the positive framework for tourism and culture that encourages the sector to enhance the sense of place in tourist hotspots and to develop new opportunities and cultural experiences in new destinations. The importance of tourism to coastal towns, and its potential role in regeneration projects, is also recognised.

Green infrastructure, health and well-being and ecological resilience

Resilient ecological networks, whilst vital for nature recovery, are also integral to our health and well-being and form part of our response to climate change. The crisis has highlighted the importance of access to green spaces and opportunities to connect with the natural and historic environment. It has highlighted that easy access and proximity to quality greenspace is severely lacking in some areas and to some sections of our communities and actions to reduce such inequalities should be prioritised as part of wider regeneration and improvement activities as a matter of social and environmental justice. At the same time it is notable how, with the advent of fewer unnecessary journeys and increased walking and cycling, biodiversity has the opportunity to thrive.

We must reverse biodiversity decline and enhance the resilience of ecosystems, as well as enable opportunities for social and economic activity based on valuing and

enabling access to the natural and historic environment. The planning system has a key responsibility in securing green infrastructure, which plays a fundamental role in shaping places and our sense of well-being and is intrinsic to the quality of spaces in which we live, work and play.

Action to reverse biodiversity decline and aid nature recovery will often be complementary to that which addresses the climate emergency, protects health and well-being, and provides a foundation for green growth.

The planning system must give preference to the provision of nature-based solutions, including green infrastructure assets and networks as a vital part of our local and national infrastructure and to safeguarding resilient ecological networks and securing a net benefit for biodiversity. Focusing on nature-based solutions as part of development proposals gives us an opportunity to re-balance society in favour of health and well-being and green infrastructure and increase our biodiversity net worth.

The benefits provided by green infrastructure are important at all scales in shaping places and will have benefits in improving health and well-being.

Enabling and providing green infrastructure should mean re-looking at traditional and current uses of space in our cities, towns and villages, to prioritise opportunities in the public realm for connecting with nature and enabling recreation, outdoor community activities and active travel, as well as recognising the wider cumulative benefits of private spaces, such as gardens, and the benefits of improved soundscapes which would result.

Development, including green infrastructure provision, which contributes positively to addressing environmental risks associated with dereliction and past damage can also positively bring land back into beneficial use for communities and for reasons of enhancing ecosystem resilience.

We will produce further guidance on green infrastructure policies in the NDF, which will seek to be empowering and enabling for green infrastructure and ecological resilient networks.

We have informally advocated the provision of guidance to support existing approaches being developed around green infrastructure assessments. This again, would seek to provide a boost and a complement for existing initiatives being developed by local authorities and Natural Resources Wales, and make connections with initiatives such as *Building with Nature*¹⁰, rather than dictate a course of action.

Improving air quality and soundscapes for better health and well-being

The crisis has highlighted the link between air quality and health and the effect of noise (meaning unwanted or harmful sound) on our quality of life. Research already indicates the impact of poor air quality for those with pre-existing respiratory and heart conditions, the young, and older people, who are particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of air pollution on their health. The effect of noise can, in the short-term, disrupt sleep and increase levels of stress, irritation and fatigue, as well as interfering with important activities such as learning, working and relaxing.

¹⁰ <https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/about>

¹¹ <https://gov.wales/air-quality-and-soundscape-review-tan-11>

Photo used courtesy of Caerphilly County Borough Council.

Exposure to loud sounds can cause hearing damage, while exposure to noise in the long term can increase risks of hypertension-related illnesses and cardiovascular disease.

The pattern, and design, of places dramatically impacts on air quality and the quality of soundscapes. This in turn influences how people experience and perceive places.

We must re-consider the use of space in our cities, towns and villages with the aim of reducing exposure to pollution and considering practices such as soundscape assessment and good acoustic design to improve the quality of places. Evolving practice in soundscape assessment and good acoustic design mean factors such as sound are no longer technical 'add ons', rather, along with clean air, form integral qualities of places and their consideration should form part of planning solutions and should result in overall benefits. These are important considerations especially in the context of re-purposing our town centres. We will complete the revision of TAN 11 Noise¹¹ to deliver the policy contained in PPW on air quality, soundscape and noise and we will continue to work with various stakeholders and experts to develop this work.

