



Development Planning Advice Service: Annual Report to Welsh Ministers 2022-2023

1 July 2023

Executive Summary

Our Vision: Proud to be leading the way to a better future for Wales by managing the environment and natural resources sustainably

The land use planning system is a strategic delivery mechanism for achieving Natural Resources Wales's (NRW) vision, objectives and priorities for managing the environment and natural resources sustainably.

NRW is a specialist or statutory consultee in the development management process. This means that applicants, and authorities determining planning applications, should consult us on proposed schemes, which meet one or more of the criteria for where we are identified as a specialist or statutory consultee. When consulted we are required to provide a substantive response within prescribed timescales. As a specialist consultee, we are also required to provide an Annual Report to the Welsh Ministers, which sets out our annual performance in relation to providing a substantive response within statutory or agreed timescales.

In the period 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023 we received 8297 planning consultations and submitted a total of 8193 substantive responses. 99% (8074) of these were submitted within prescribed deadlines.

This performance relates to developments categorised as minor, major and Developments of National Significance (DNS). Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), determined by the UK government are not covered in detail in this report. Whilst there was a slight drop in major and minor applications compared to 2021-2022, it is important to note that there has been an increase in both the number and complexity of DNS and NSIP consultations in 2022-2023. This increase includes large scale and novel energy developments that are increasing as a response to government decarbonisation targets.

The consequences of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) failing water quality targets for phosphorus continues to have a significant impact on developers and Local Authorities, and NRW's Development Planning Advice Service. Good progress has, however, been made across 2022-2023. NRW continues to work collaboratively with the Welsh Government and stakeholders across different sectors to develop new approaches and solutions. In July 2022 we updated our advice to Local Planning Authorities to help them determine a planning application where a development proposal is likely to impact phosphorus sensitive river SACs.

In terms of strategic planning, we have supported Wrexham County Borough Council and Flintshire County Council in the preparation of their Local Development Plans, provided a detailed response to the revised Technical Advice Note 15 Development, Flooding and Coastal Erosion (TAN15), and continued to support the Welsh Government in planning policy development. We also continued to develop our body of guidance for developers and planning authorities to support sustainable management of natural resources through the planning process, such as our webpage guidance on the type of information that an applicant should submit to support proposals for agriculture development.

The rise in large complex applications and the need to engage significant resource in strategic issues such as TAN15 and phosphates in river SACs has led to ongoing increased pressures on our Service. We captured the energy aspects of this rising demand in a Service Level Agreement submitted in 2022 to the Welsh Government, however, to date this has not led to any additional funding and our Service is increasingly needing to prioritise effort as a result.

Recruitment to fill vacant posts has proved challenging so that our Service is often running with high levels of vacancies and turnover. Whilst a 99% response rate has been delivered through careful service management, growing pressures summarised above may mean difficult decisions going forward on the prioritisation, scale and the type of Service offered, unless further resources are forthcoming.

Published by:
Natural Resources Wales
Cambria House
29 Newport Road
Cardiff
CF24 0TP

0300 065 3000 (Mon-Fri, 8am - 6pm)

enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk
www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

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