

The Wales Planning System

Business Wales: Joint paper to the Council for Economic Renewal by the FSB, CBI and RICS.

FSB and CBI brought to the attention of the Welsh Assembly Government the need for a review of the Planning System in a paper to the Business Partnership Council in October 2008. The purpose of the paper was to outline the need for a strategic review of Wales' planning system.

The paper called for a strategic review of the Wales planning system from a business perspective, taking into consideration:

- Is there a need for a Wales Independent Planning body?
- Is there a need for a Wales Planning Strategy i.e. a Land Use Plan?
- Is there a need to review the powers of the National Park Authority?
- The resources of planning departments, should there be specialist planners shared between Local Authorities?
- Is Planning Officer Training effective?
- How is consistency between councils, and indeed between council departments, achieved?

The Welsh Assembly Government responded by commissioning a review, by GVA Grimley, into the Planning Application System in Wales. Following the set of recommendations from this report Roger Tym & Partners have been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to review of national planning policy and guidance for economic development. This piece of work is underway, and the recommendations will potentially be submitted following the May election to the new administration.

Business Wales would welcome:

Feedback into the findings of both reviews thus far, summarising findings, and how recommendations will be taken forward.

We would also welcome a commitment to this strategic review of the Planning System continuing, so this initial work is built upon.

In particular we would like information on the status of the proposed Infrastructure Plan, so that business organisations are engaged in this process, and are able to input into what is needed from an Infrastructure Plan

We would welcome a clearly defined Infrastructure Plan, as the Spatial Plan is not a land use plan and does not support planning policy, and we can see the need for a more strategic approach to ensure Wales is geared towards economic development opportunities.

So what should an Infrastructure Plan include?

We think the Infrastructure Plan could potentially be positive for infrastructure development, as short term budgets and policies which can alter every four years depending on the Government at the Welsh Assembly, means that we are continuously playing catch up with infrastructure in Wales. To get private sector growth and jobs, businesses need a certain policy environment. Wales needs to plan our national infrastructure reforms over the long-term to give businesses the confidence to invest.

We feel that Infrastructure budgets, more than any other, need to be long term and forward thinking in terms of commitments, so that businesses are better placed to plan for future growth and the public sector maximises the benefits that can flow from collaborating with the private sector. Detail on how this will be consulted on, who will be part of the process and what will be its remit would be welcomed. We would recommend a cross-departmental panel of business stakeholders to work with the Assembly Government to develop the plan.

The following infrastructure issues all underline the need for continued reform of our planning system:

- If the Spatial Plan is retained, it needs to be strengthened to complement an Infrastructure Plan.
- Energy is a critical factor of any Infrastructure Plan, including grid infrastructure, security of supply along with greater support for industrial on-site energy generation and micro generation to support long-term growth and the transition to a low-carbon economy.
- Road infrastructure improvements and development over a long term period will be essential, and will support business decisions regarding location as well as transport options.
- Rail infrastructure upgrade commitments need to be part of any Infrastructure Plan.
- Improvements to public infrastructure need to be given a strategic focus within the new plan.
- Economic Development strategic sites and areas need to be looked at and mapped, so that businesses looking to invest are able to factor in existing supply chains as well as growth opportunities.
- Consultation with the proposed UK Infrastructure Plan as it develops
- Robust and comprehensive data to underpin the plan will be essential.

Further information on how the recommendations from the National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee work would be implemented in the proposed National Infrastructure Plan would also be appreciated.

To summarise, Business Wales would:

- Welcome a commitment that the current Planning Review work will continue to build on and learn from the extensive work of the last few years, and not adopt a blank sheet of paper approach.
- The work and findings thus far to be pulled together into a paper, including the effect of the Referendum outcome, and findings of the National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee work.

We are effectively asking for a stock take of work and findings so far, and future commitment to continue with this important process of reviewing the Planning System and improving its effect on economic development.