

**Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy
Response from The Royal Town Planning Institute**



RTPI

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National Assembly for Wales:

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Evidence submitted by RTPI Cymru

Background

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is a membership organisation representing over 22,000 spatial planners; RTPI Cymru represents the interests of almost 1,100 members in Wales. It exists to advance the science and art of town planning for the benefit of the public.

RTPI Cymru welcomes the Inquiry by the Committee. This evidence has been developed by RTPI Cymru's Policy and Research Forum, which has representatives from across the planning community in Wales.

General

The RTPI is committed to promoting the retention and protection of the historic environment and we welcome the opportunity to input into this Inquiry.

The remainder of this paper addresses the planning related issues raised by the questions asked by the Committee.

How appropriate and successful are the current systems employed by the Welsh Government for protecting and managing the historic environment in Wales?

The system for Listed Building and Conservation Area consents are well established. However, the process for determining applications is often long drawn out, with experiences of conflicting advice between Cadw officers and those of a local planning authority (LPA). This is compounded by the present inability of potential applicants to obtain direct advice from Cadw. In order to protect and manage these important assets, it is essential that advice is constructive, joined up, well informed, comprehensive and is provided timely.

The current process can confuse applicants as to what is the correct way to proceed and creates frustrations with the process. Owning such assets brings responsibilities and there are considerable additional costs, however it is also important that the systems are in place which supports such owners. A trigger system for new owners of listed buildings or owners of newly listed buildings providing an explanation about the listing process, guidance over additional controls, sources of help etc could help.

It is necessary that both Cadw and LPAs are adequately resourced to provide an effective service for providing specialist and timely advice. Some LPAs have looked to share specialist officers and this has been shown to work well.

RTPI Cymru believes that consideration should be given to streamlining the consenting regime for Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, whereby planning permission is

given with special consideration and safeguards for the designations. This would help simplify the process and provide coherence to policy considerations. This requires a link between the proposed Heritage and Planning Bills.

How well do the Welsh Government's policies promote the historic environment in Wales (for instance, in terms of interpretation, accessibility, attracting new audiences and tourism)?

Wales' historic environment extends beyond the protected assets such as Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. Urban areas, including parts of towns and cities and villages, often have a strong historical character which if managed and used in an appropriate manner can enhance these areas, providing established quality built urban fabric, and can support their regeneration and vitality. This has particular importance in the economic areas of town and village centres. Historic properties and areas should not be seen in isolation but within the wider context of what makes up the character of all areas. Landscape Character Areas have been used to define the environmental differences and characteristics between areas something similar could be used to define these differences in the built environment both urban and rural.

How well do the policies for the historic environment tie in with wider Welsh Government policy objectives (such as the regeneration of communities)?

The Regeneration Department of Welsh Government and Cadw are increasingly working together with individual local planning authorities to maximise the benefits of heritage led regeneration. Merthyr Tydfil is a positive example of where this is taking place in Wales.

What would be the advantages and disadvantages of merging the functions of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales with the functions of other organisations, including Cadw?

RTPI Cymru has no comments on this point directly. However, we would comment that any organisational set up has the resources to effectively implement the functions. From a planning perspective this would include being able to effectively respond to consultations in a timely manner and are also able to provide advice to applicants.

What role do local authorities and third sector organisations play in implementing the Welsh Government's historic environment policy and what support do they receive in this respect?

Local Authorities and National Park Authorities (NPAs) are key delivery agencies for promoting historic environment policy. The Local Development Plans (LDPs) are important tools for delivering these policies at the local level. They provide policies which set out the local characteristics for the historic environment, including the use of local materials, against which proposals for development and changes of use will be determined against. These policies can extend beyond the 'protected' assets to wider areas.

Local Planning Authorities are also responsible for determining planning applications; they must consult Cadw on Listed Building and Conservation Area applications. Some

are granted 'delegation' from Cadw for certain applications, without the need to notify Cadw.

Local Authorities and NPAs can also be the catalyst for organising local groupings to coordinate regeneration schemes, involving third sector, as well as other key actors in the particular area. Town and Community Councils also play a role to play; a good example of leadership provide by a Town Council is Ruthin.

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