



Llywodraeth Cymuned Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

What sort of
Countryside do
we want?

Wales Planning Research Programme

Executive Summary



The Wales Planning Research Programme

This research project has been commissioned and undertaken as part of the Welsh Assembly Government's Wales Planning Research Programme (WPRP). The Programme has been established to meet the need for evidence based land use planning policy development within the context of the Assembly Government's principles and priorities.

The Planning Division of the Assembly is responsible for managing the Wales Planning Research Programme and ensuring that any research undertaken meets the priorities and needs of the Assembly Government. The research is undertaken predominantly by external commission, or collaboratively, with other organisations. The Division works closely with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on land use planning research and also draws on research undertaken by other bodies.

Separate research programmes have been established to inform work on Mineral Planning Policy development and the Wales Spatial Plan.

What sort of Countryside do we want?

The key objectives and long term priority themes for the Wales Planning Research Programme were established by the Land Use Planning Scoping Study (2000):

Key Objectives

- To focus on distinctive Welsh issues
- To support the development of planning policy
- To provide management information for land use planning policy development and
- To develop best practice guidance.

Long term priority research themes

- Sustainable development
- Rural planning and
- Spatial planning

A User Group has been set up to advise on the content and direction of the programme.

A Wales Planning Research Newsletter is produced annually and expressions of interest received in response to this are included on a database which is used to assist / inform the procurement of research contractors.

Further information on the WPRP, and research in progress and published may be accessed at <http://www.wales.gov.uk/subiplanning/topics-e.htm#research>.

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The University of Wales, Aberystwyth

Institute of Rural Sciences

Contract No 249/2002



BY
**THE INSTITUTE OF RURAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF WALES, ABERYSTWYTH**

And
LAND USE CONSULTANTS

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The aims of this study were to:

- investigate rural communities' aspirations for the countryside;
- investigate the aspirations of others who use the countryside for recreational and other uses; and
- investigate how the planning system and the Assembly Government's planning policy can foster sustainable development which meets these aspirations.

Literature Review

Five key themes emerged from the review on planning for the countryside which set the context for the research. First, the changing role of the countryside from a centre of production to one of consumption has brought with it a re-conceptualisation of "rural" concomitant with a multifunctional and integrated countryside. Second, that there is no one size fits all approach to solving what are now well documented countryside problems. Actions must be flexible and locally derived and integrated with improvements to organisational structures. Third, the planning system, whilst having a pivotal role in countryside matters, represents only part of any solution and it has yet to fully grapple with the social, cultural, environmental and economic implications of the sustainable agenda. Fourth, the public have a key role to play in the formulation of policies for the countryside. However, this is problematic due to the short term and top down nature of much participation which rarely exceeds tokenism. Fifth, studies looking at the kind of countryside that is wanted reveal powerful attachments to local landscapes in both aesthetic and functional terms. Complexity and diversity, traditional landscape features and a working landscape are highly desired components. Development is supported so long as it respects the qualities of particular places at a local level. Negative reactions were recorded for the current pace and scale of landscape change through the perceived homogenisation and industrialisation of the countryside, together with a sense of frustration at the perceived marginalisation of the public from planning decisions.

Methodology

The methodology elicited the views of the public, communities and professionals together with an evaluation of planning strategies and documents. This enabled a direct comparison of how far the public agenda for the Welsh countryside matched the current theory and practice of the Welsh planning. The method was informed through a simple four fold classification of Wales at ward level into rural, rural fringe, urban fringe and urban.

1. A household survey: Eight wards were selected at random; 2 corresponding to each rural/urban classification. A standard questionnaire was devised which addressed the themes listed above. A random sample of 75 residents was undertaken for each ward making a final sample of 600.

2. A stakeholder survey: 105 stakeholders were consulted with 22 written responses. A seminar was used to progress the wider findings of the project.
3. An internet survey: This was made available via the Institute of Rural Sciences home page and publicised throughout various email forums in Wales. This replicated the household survey and 128 responses were obtained.
4. Community visioning exercise: Eight communities were selected, 2 corresponding to each rural/urban classification. A purposive sample of residents was taken on a field trip to assess/discuss 3 previously selected viewpoints surrounding the community.
5. Analysis of Planning Policy Wales for its approach to rural development and analysis of development plans from the community exercise for their approach to rural development
6. Two planners' workshops where the implications of the public findings for planners were discussed.

Results

Overarching issues	Comments
Clear recognition of a multifunctional countryside	<i>though how to work with this multifunctionality is less clear</i>
Public disquiet with their experiences of planning for their countryside.	<i>there is a clear disquiet with the experience of planning though public preferences do in part reflect current planning policy .</i>
Strong affinity with the countryside	<i>the countryside is widely appreciated and valued</i>
Strong concern with overdevelopment	<i>which contrasts with identification of types of necessary development</i>
Strong concern with the littering of the countryside.	<i>consistent theme in both rural and urban countrysides.</i>
Little change desired	<i>strong support for rural conservation but how to reconcile with necessary development not clear</i>
Protection of the open countryside and designations	<i>strongly supported</i>
Appropriate scale and design of development	<i>a key overriding issue</i>
Planning for established needs	<i>supported as the correct approach to a wide range of development</i>
Policy integration	<i>widely suggested as missing but necessary</i>
Locally distinctive policy	<i>need to respond to the many countrysides that make up Wales and marry top down with bottom up</i>
Contested issues (hunting/farming/transport/housing)	<i>Common issues identified but the articulation of these suggests a greater complexity than simple urban vs rural reductionism. .</i>

Topic issues	Comments
Housing	<i>leading issue of concern focused on planning for housing needs rather than demand, and affordability need for greater coordination with employment policy</i>
Transport	<i>vexed issues as poor transport access is seen as holding rural areas back, but rural to urban commuting is also identified as a problem</i>
Employment	<i>desire for diversification to help 'weak' rural economies and improve quality of jobs, jobs for locals and youngsters but also concern over scale and 'industrialisation' of the countryside</i>
Future of farming	<i>strong concern with broad agreement on the need for appropriate diversification</i>
Tourism	<i>but of the 'right' scale, distinctively Welsh, and locally 'attached' / integrated</i>
Recreation	<i>recreation is the dominant relationship with the countryside greater opportunities for local people supported, especially for informal recreation</i>
Local countryside	<i>identified as the most important sort of countryside, but too little recognised as such</i>
National Parks / AONBs	<i>identified as the next most important sorts of countryside</i>
Settlement strategy	<i>no clear agreement as to the right places for most development</i>
Sustainable development	<i>need for greater integration and focus on locality</i>
Local communities	<i>concern over weakening of communities and lack of public sector connection with them</i>
Welsh language	<i>identified as an important issue but disagreement in terms of how to respond</i>

Discussion

Four key discussion themes were identified from the results. First, that there is a consensus over the kind of countryside that is wanted but within no simple unified vision. Specifically, a locally derived and sustainable countryside was required. Development in the countryside would be supported but only where there was clear evidence of need. There was widespread rejection of developments which increased commuting, fragmented community structures and reduced available and accessible green space/countryside. Second, that a more integrated and holistic approach to the countryside was needed which allows the plethora of agencies with countryside remits to work together with, and for, local communities to produce more joined up thinking and strategies. This informs the third theme of policy subsidiarity and local distinctiveness, where planning should be more devolved to local communities who become actively engaged in policy formation, primarily through the community strategy process. Operationalising this new agenda will involve significant capacity building for local communities and agencies to move away from the current top-down emphasis and short term nature of public engagement towards

a more long term process supported by a widened debate and improved communication. Finally, there is a key theme about the mechanics of the town and country planning system in Wales. The results show strong levels of public support for much of the theory of current planning approaches protecting the open countryside and designated countryside, but universal criticism of their experience of planning in their countryside where the type, pace and scale of development apparently does not square with either policy or their ideals. Here the local politicisation of planning and the decision making processes require further scrutiny.

Recommendations

National

1. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government produce an updated rural strategy which sets out a new framework for the countryside within which agencies and the planning system will work. Such a document has to address all the constituent parts of countryside policy and how the planning system fits in. It also should address the need for policy subsidiarity at the heart of the sustainable agenda developing themes inherent within the Wales Spatial Plan. In particular how top down agencies can re-engage with their local communities through proper local differentiation and attachment of policy. Integrated development strategies and community strategies are seen as important tools to achieve this.
2. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government provide guidance on how sustainable development can be operationalised in both the planning system and the countryside. This particularly applies to Integrated Development Strategies. The development of rural proofing within all policy making is one mechanism to improve “joined up thinking” about countryside matters throughout Wales. Furthermore, the use of Strategic Environmental Assessment and State of the Countryside reports are recommended to improve the consistency and monitoring of policy/plans more generally.
3. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government, through PPW, require policies for the countryside (housing employment and transport) to be based on sound local empirical evidence and needs analyses to address the current presumption in policy formulation. In addition a set of countryside indicators should be developed to track change in the Welsh countryside.
4. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government evaluate the role that LANDMAP can play in providing empirical data to improve the sustainable development of the Welsh countryside.
5. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government should provide fuller guidance in the revision of TAN6 on the sustainable development of the Welsh multi-purpose countryside and the use of integrated rural development strategies as a mean for achieving this. A particular focus should be on economic

- development (of all sorts) and its relationship with the provision of housing and transport. Planning Delivering for Wales should also address these issues.
6. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government should provide fuller guidance in the revision of TAN6 on identification of rural development needs through appropriate evidence (including the views of local communities), including for housing and employment, and the circumstances in which this can lead to policies which depart from the general guidance of PPW. In turn PPW should also make clearer the circumstances in which policies for rural development might depart from its general guidance.
 7. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government, as part of Planning – Delivering for Wales, should give greater guidance on the relationship between Community Strategies/Local Development Plans and development control. In particular how to marry strategic imperatives and community aspirations in support of sustainable rural development.
 8. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government should encourage better coordination of work on rural transport through Local Transport Plans, Community strategies, setting integrated solutions to transport problems, including addressing the impacts of rural car use.
 9. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government should consider pooling planning gain funds to support non land use aspects of rural communities.
 10. It is recommended that PPW should give greater emphasis to the provision of affordable housing and housing to meet local needs in rural Wales. It should also make clear the circumstances in which housing not meeting recognised local needs should be resisted. The revision of TAN 2 Planning and Affordable Housing should address both affordable housing and housing to meet local needs in rural areas. Uptake of the approaches outlined in *Local Housing Market Analysis: An Advice Note To Welsh Local Authorities From The Welsh Assembly Government (2002)* should be encouraged in rural Wales.
 11. It is recommended that PPW should also make clear that assumptions of settlement hierarchy and functional relationships may vary with local circumstances and that local policy should reflect such variation, based on sound appropriate evidence.
 12. It is recommended that PPW should give more guidance on planning's role in improving opportunities for informal countryside recreation, especially for local communities, and the necessary connections with other activities, particularly community strategies.
 13. It is recommended that TAN 12 Design should be better cross referenced with PPW and give greater emphasis to the design of new rural buildings *per se* and their contribution to distinctive Welsh rural landscapes, not just the location of new development. Clearer linkage should also be made to LANDMAP as the key tool for understanding/interpreting Welsh rural landscapes.

14. It is recommended that when TAN 20 The Welsh Language and Unitary Development Plans and Planning Control is revised, it should give particular consideration to the issues raised by planning in rural Wales, drawing on other current research. The TAN should support the development of different policy approaches to suit differing local circumstances.
15. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government review the roles and responsibilities of community councils in order to respond to the policy subsidiarity agenda.
16. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government support the development of community strategies as a means to generate local distinctiveness and use this as a vehicle to ensure effective engagement of the bottom up view with top down agency programmes.
17. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government give sufficient resources and support for capacity building for organisations and communities to improve and re-invigorate community strategies and integrated rural strategies and work attached to it such as formulating local planning policies and promoting informed discussions about key issues in the countryside. The resource (time and cost) implications should not be overlooked. The agenda drawn out from the public surveys in this research: overdevelopment; litter; future of farming; transport and field sports offer a useful and justified starting point.

Local

18. It is recommended that local authorities and agencies should recognise the place and role of planning work in other public sector work and programmes. In particular the current failure to utilise integrated rural development strategies and community strategies should be addressed.
19. It is recommended that local authorities and agencies address work programmes to clean up the countryside and to generate a greater culture of respect for those that visit or pass through countryside locations. Responding to the widespread perception of countryside full of litter/rubbish is an important priority emerging from this research.
20. It is recommended that local authorities, in conjunction with other agencies, should seek more integrated approaches to rural development, including the use of visions and integrated rural development strategies. In some cases there is a role for regional strategic policy development such as that developed in South East Wales. This should not be necessarily dependent on the fuller Welsh Assembly Government guidance, though this will be of obvious importance.
21. It is recommended that Local Authorities and associated agencies should seek to develop/foster local entrepreneurship in rural development activities. Current training initiatives and business support should be audited to identify any gaps and highlight examples of good practice such as Farming Connect.

22. It is recommended that Local Authorities should consider making better use of the strategic capabilities of planning to pursue a more pro-active and integrated approach to rural development, particularly as expressed through community and integrated rural strategies.
23. It is recommended that Local Planning Authorities should seek to develop more locally distinctive planning policies based on local evidence (including the views of local communities). It is envisaged that LANDMAP data can help inform such policies which should be supplemented by pro-active public surveys. Such material can then inform the proposed local development plans as part of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill.
24. It is recommended that local authorities utilise the community strategy process as a tool for proactive consultation which identifies local needs across the spectrum of social, economic, cultural and environmental interests. This then provides the foundation for agencies to set their agendas in a more integrated and sustainable manner thereby reducing consultation fatigue.
25. It is recommended that support be given to community based projects highlighting local distinctiveness. Parish maps, plans and village design statements should all be encouraged. The public perception component of LANDMAP is seen as a useful vehicle within which to locate such activities.
26. It is recommended that local authorities, as part of an agency consortium, promote informed local discussion and debate over key countryside issues, making information publicly available.
27. It is recommended that participation in the community strategy is managed and co-ordinated to meet the needs of other public sector strategies in order to reduce the burden of current consultations.
28. It is recommended that more consideration is given to the involvement of youth in local matters (eg community council representation). Their voice is often marginalised within community consultations. Their voices are often unheard with presumptions made about the kind of facilities/activities they want.

Further research

29. Research is needed to support better guidance on the identification of rural development needs through gathering of appropriate evidence (including the views of local communities). Housing, transport and employment are key issues but there is a widespread lack of systematic use of evidence to support local rural planning policies. It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government should provide a lead in improving this situation. This is particularly important as a component of closer working with local communities. Policy development needs a better platform.
30. The research has highlighted a pivotal role for community strategies and integrated rural development strategies to secure a sustainable countryside. It is the authors' views that these processes are not yet delivering their full potential

and it will be important to identify the “why” “how”, “where” and “what” answers through examination of practice and scoping of new methodologies of working practice.

31. The research has led to some tentative findings (based on a small sample size) that ethnic minority and retired peoples' use of the countryside is less than that of other categories. Productive research might investigate whether there are significant differences in expectations and use of the countryside for these groups and how these might be best addressed.
32. The research has sampled across a range of social and economic circumstances and it would appear that there are some subtle differences emerging in the way different groups are attracted to certain types of countryside. Research might like to investigate how different social classes construct and use the countryside.

