National Development Framework 2020-2040

Explanatory Paper – The Spatial Strategy

December 2019

Why have we published these explanatory papers?

During the consultation on the Draft National Development Framework (NDF) some stakeholders suggested further details should be made available setting out how the NDF has been prepared. To assist stakeholders we have produced a collection of explanatory papers to set out the evidence that supports the draft NDF. These papers include:

- The Spatial Strategy
- The Assessments of the NDF
- Future progression of the NDF
- The Regions
- Rural Areas
- Housing need
- Welsh National Marine Plan and Ports
- Evidence compendium

What is this document?

This explanatory paper explains how the spatial strategy of the Draft NDF was developed, highlighting how the policies support the strategy.

Summary

The NDF Spatial Strategy is outlined in Chapter 4 of the draft NDF. An explanation of what it seeks to achieve and key characteristics of the strategy are set out in the draft NDF. This short paper addresses the process of establishing the spatial strategy and highlights how key policies in the draft NDF are designed to support the strategy.

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. / This document is also available in Welsh.

Establishing the NDF Spatial Strategy

1. The draft NDF contains a spatial strategy in accordance with the requirement set out in Planning Policy Wales (paragraph 3.38) that all development plans, including the NDF.

   "Include a spatial strategy covering the lifetime of the plan which establishes a pattern of development improving social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being".

2. The spatial strategy in the draft NDF has three components:

   > Growth and new development must be in the right place, undertaken in the right way and make efficient use of our resources to achieve the NDF Outcomes. The spatial strategy has three components and sets out:
   >
   > - where in Wales growth should be focused
   > - how growth should be planned and managed
   > - how we should power and heat places using renewable energy and district heat networks.

3. This paper is concerned with the first component – *"Where in Wales growth should be focused"*. Specifically, the focus is on developments of a large, national scale and where new development, encapsulating new homes, jobs, transport infrastructure, community and leisure facilities, should be located.

Spatial Options

4. The consultation, in summer 2018, on the NDF Issues, Options and Preferred Option (gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2018-05/180430-consultation-document-issues-options-and-preferred-option.pdf) set out different ways of developing a spatial strategy. Four initial options were tested, with a conclusion that a hybrid option represented the most sustainable approach. This hybrid approach became the Preferred Option. It was not presented spatially but it provided a clear basis for developing a spatial strategy, with draft policy areas identified and a number of key themes prioritised.

5. Key commitments in the Preferred Option included:

   - The NDF will ensure that the planning system in Wales plays a key role in facilitating clean growth and decarbonisation and helps build resilience to the impacts of climate change;
   - A policy framework requiring that physical and mental health and well-being outcomes are central to spatial decision making;
   - All members of society have access to services and facilities, including health, education and digital infrastructure;
   - That the planning system facilitates the delivery of land for high quality housing that meets all society's needs, in locations that are sustainable, accessible and connected;
   - The planning system must build places that create jobs, enhance skills and employability and provide an environment for businesses to grow and thrive.

Drafting the Spatial Strategy

6. The key purpose of the spatial strategy is to support efforts to achieve the NDF Outcomes (see Chapter 3 of draft NDF). These are the main targets or ambitions for the NDF and it is logical that the spatial strategy and all policies are aligned behind the Outcomes to maximise the chances of them being delivered. The NDF Outcomes cover a range of issues and land-uses and all eleven are equally important.

7. The refinement of the NDF Outcomes and the priorities identified in the Preferred Option into a spatial strategy was an iterative and largely qualitative process. Data and mapping from lle.gov.wales and National Statistics (gov.wales/summary-statistics-economic-regions-2019) were used and the policies emanating from the spatial strategy were drafted and refined using the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal.

8. Examples of the data and evidence used to develop the spatial strategy are shown in Annex 1.

Spatial strategy: key features

9. The spatial strategy is described on page 22 of the draft NDF:

   Our strategy is to build on existing strengths and to consolidate advantages. It encourages sustainable and efficient patterns of development, based on co-locating homes with jobs and vital services and the efficient use of resources.

   Co-locating homes, jobs and services means focusing on cities and large towns as the main development areas.

   In all parts of Wales, the strategy supports sustainable growth.

10. In choosing where to focus development we recognised that Wales has established centres of population and work. We looked at data on where people live and work, the density of population and employment and the transport infrastructure used to move people and goods. The location of environmental and landscape designated areas was also built into the process.

11. Where information and plans for future development of national significance was available it contributed to the development of the spatial strategy. The Metro schemes in south east Wales, north east Wales and Swansea Bay for example were important considerations and were key factors in the identification of the National Growth Areas.

Features on the Strategic Diagram

12. The spatial strategy is presented visually on a strategic diagram, shown on page 25 of the draft NDF. The spatial features shown on the map are:

   - National Growth Areas
   - Regional Growth Areas
   - Regional Connectivity
   - Intra-urban connectivity
   - International connections
   - Strategic ports and airport
   - National Parks
   - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

13. The strategic diagram is purposely not a geographically accurate map. Features such as the national and regional growth areas are broadly indicated, allowing space for Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans to develop specific proposals based on regional and local factors. Similarly the connectivity symbols are generalised, showing very broadly the movement of people, goods and services within regions and across the country. They do not represent specific roads, railways or other infrastructure; they are symbols of the main nationally significant patterns of movement.

National Growth Areas

- Wrexham and Deeside
- Swansea Bay and Llanelli
- Cardiff, Newport and the South Wales Valleys

14. These are the main urban areas in the country, with plans for Metro systems and established mixed modes of public transport infrastructure. Each area is economically significant in terms of the number of jobs and the contribution they make to prosperity at a national scale. There are clusters of cities and towns in each area, providing opportunity and a critical mass to improve public and decarbonised transport systems. As each area has more than one 'centre' there is scope to distribute homes, jobs and prosperity according to the needs of the region, and potentially reduce the reliance on individual centres to provide jobs and opportunities. It will be for Strategic and Local Development Plans to take decisions on the scale and location of development within the National Growth Areas and to allocate land accordingly.

Regional Growth Areas/Centres of Regional Growth

- Pembrokeshire Haven towns
- Carmarthen
- Aberystwyth
- Llandrindod Wells
- Newtown
- North Wales coastal towns
- Bangor and Caernarfon

15. Regional Growth Areas are identified on the Strategic Diagram where they are located outside of the national growth areas – i.e. in the North Wales and the Mid and South West Wales regions. In national terms some may have quite small populations (relative to towns in south east Wales, for example) but within their regions they are significant centres, partly due to their distance from the nearest large cities. These towns are important economic and social centres, benefitting from relatively good transport links and are accessible to a wider population, including rural areas.

16. In most cases they are cultural and commercial centres, with important institutions such as universities, theatres, concert venues, shops and visitor attractions and accommodation. Carmarthen, Aberystwyth, Caernarfon and Bangor in particular are hubs for Welsh language culture, with extensive social and economic activity taking place through the Welsh language. All these towns are places currently identified in the relevant Local Development Plans as fulfilling important functions and having potential to grow and develop.

17. These towns are smaller than the main towns in the national growth areas and do not have the same degree of population density. As with the national growth areas it will be for Strategic Development Plans or Local Development Plans to take decisions on the scale and location of development and to allocate land accordingly.

18. In south east Wales, the majority of the region is in the National Growth Area. The draft NDF identifies Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Pontypridd as Centres of Regional Growth within the Growth Area, supplementing Cardiff and Newport which are Centres of National Growth. These four towns are key transport interchanges whose role will enhance as the South Wales Metro progresses. They are also administrative, commercial and retail centres. The regional centres are an important component in distributing growth across the whole National Growth Area. Other places within the region which may have important roles can be identified through a Strategic Development Plan.

Connectivity and connections

19. The NDF spatial strategy seeks to promote co-locating homes with jobs and services though it recognises that across Wales – in particular within the urban areas – there are busy commuter routes and travel patterns between different places. These types of connections are shown as 'Intra-urban Connectivity' on the strategic diagram. Strengthening the resilience of these routes – through improved rail, road and active travel infrastructure or through better public transport services – should be a priority over the NDF plan period.

20. The Regional Connectivity corridors indicate the general pattern of movements that take place outside the national growth areas. They broadly reflect the main railway routes and key parts of the motorway and trunk road network. These connections are vital for the movement of goods and people between the regions of Wales and across the border with England.

21. The 'International Connections' shown on the strategic diagram are linked to the Strategic Ports and Airport.

Strategic Ports and Airport

22. The ports of Milford Haven and Holyhead and Cardiff Airport are identified as Wales' strategic ports and airport. They are the busiest international entry points for goods and people in Wales and are vital to the economic ambitions of the country. Milford Haven accommodates a range of traffic, including freight, cruise ships, fishing boats and passenger ferries. It is the third biggest freight port in the UK by weight and is seven times busier than the next busiest port in Wales. Holyhead's traffic is predominantly roll-on roll-off ferry services, providing a vital trading link to the island of Ireland. It is the second busiest 'ro-ro' port in the UK. It is important for the country that these ports maintain their status and that aspirations to grow sustainably are supported.

23. **The explanatory paper on the Marine Plan and Ports provides more detail.**

24. Cardiff Airport is Wales' only international airport. Services and passenger numbers at the airport are steadily increasing (gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-05/air-transport-2018.pdf) and it is an important symbol of Wales' international connectivity. As with the strategic ports, it is important that ambitions for sustainable growth at the airport are supported.

Areas and places not specifically named in the spatial strategy

25. The NDF is the national level development plan and will be supplemented by Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans. Each tier of the development plan has different purposes and they will each operate at different scales.

26. The draft NDF identifies national scale issues and priorities. These should be taken forward appropriately in SDPs and LDPs, as they are required to be in general conformity with the NDF. The draft NDF does not specify the scale of growth or the geographical extent of national growth areas or regional growth areas, as these decisions are more appropriately taken at regional and local levels. It will be for the relevant SDP or LDP, using local knowledge and engagement, to decide for example which settlements are within a growth area and to select appropriate sites for development.

27. The NDF should not and cannot reasonably name all places in Wales and identify their role and function in terms of development. It has identified those places that have key roles to play in delivering the NDF Outcomes and the Welsh Government's broader objectives at a national scale. The vision for growth and development in all other places will be identified through other tiers of the development plan.

Delivering the spatial strategy: Key policies

28. Many of the policies in the draft NDF will directly support the spatial strategy and are intended to shape development patterns in support of the spatial strategy.

Policy 1 – Sustainable Urban Growth
Policy 2 – Supporting Urban Centres

29. These policies concern the design and function of urban places. They encourage more sustainable forms of development, including higher density development in appropriate locations. The policies promote vibrant town and city centres, incorporating a mix of uses with co-location of homes, jobs and key services encouraged.

Policy 4 – Supporting Rural Communities

30. The draft NDF recognises the importance of supporting and encouraging sustainable development in rural areas. This policy highlights the need for growth and development in rural areas, at a scale that is appropriate to the area. This is best determined at the regional and local level but the NDF recognises the significance of rural Wales as an economic resource and as a home to a significant number of people in Wales. The supporting text highlights sectors that offer key opportunities to develop high-value employment to help maintain and develop a vibrant and prosperous rural population.

31. **A separate explanatory paper sets out the NDF approach to rural areas.**

Policy 17 – Wrexham and Deeside
Policy 18 – North Wales Coastal Settlements

32. These policies set out ambitions to grow and develop the main urban areas of north Wales. Wrexham and Deeside is a national growth area and is the primary focus for large scale development in the region. This area is closely connected to northwest England, and the draft NDF policy is clear that development in this area must respond to demands arising on both sides of the border to the benefit of towns and communities in Wales.

33.	The coastal towns of north Wales are regional growth areas, and should be a focus for development in Local Development Plans. The identified towns are split in two clusters; Caernarfon and Bangor in the west; Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, Rhyl and Prestatyn in the east. These are important service towns to the rural hinterland of north Wales.

Policy 23 – Swansea Bay and Llanelli
Policy 24 – Regional Centres

34.	The cluster of Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot and Llanelli is the second largest urban cluster in Wales and is a national growth area in the draft NDF. The policy for the area recognises the potential and need for development and investment in this city region to bring wider regional benefits.

35.	The regional centres in the mid and south west Wales region are multi-functional towns with distinct primary functions. They are industrial towns with significant current and future employment opportunities (Milford Haven, Pembroke Dock) and market towns increasingly built around public services, town centres and a visitor economy (Carmarthen, Haverfordwest, Aberystwyth, Newtown and Llandrindod). These places are best placed in the region to deliver against the NDF Outcomes.

Policy 27 – Cardiff
Policy 28 – Newport
Policy 29 – The Heads of the Valleys

36.	South East Wales is the most heavily and densely populated area of the country. Cardiff and Newport are the largest and third largest places in Wales, respectively, and both have vital roles to play in generating prosperity and well-being at a regional and national scale. The capital city is an important symbol of Wales' national status and confidence, therefore the draft NDF seeks to encourage this role to be enhanced through policy 27. Current and future trends in housing and employment markets present a timely opportunity to focus on developing Newport and develop a more poly-centric approach to development in the region.

37.	The South Wales Valleys in recent generations have suffered the decimation of established industries resulting in a marked shift towards relying on places along the M4 corridor for jobs. The draft NDF believes the South Wales Metro and other investments can be catalysts in making the Heads of the Valleys more competitive and desirable places to locate new jobs, thus reinvigorating local housing markets and town centres in this part of the region.

Policy 21 – Transport Links to North West England
Policy 26 – Swansea Bay Metro
Policy 31 – Growth in sustainable transit orientated settlements

38.	This series of policies sets out the importance of integrating public transport with development aspirations in each of the three national growth areas. The Metro projects in each area are at different stages of implementation and they have different scales of ambition. Strategic Development Plans and Local Development Plans in these areas should ensure both the scale and distribution of growth are considered in the context of existing and planned new public transport and active travel infrastructure.

Policy 19 – Green Belts in North Wales
Policy 30 – Green Belts in South East Wales

39.	These policies seek to manage the form of development within rural parts of the National Growth Areas in a way which protects the countryside from inappropriate development and encourages development to take place in established settlements. Green belts are a tool to avoid urban sprawl, to help settlements retain their distinctiveness and to prevent the coalescence of settlements.

40. The two green belts identified in the draft NDF are in the north east and south east. There are established greenbelts in England that press up against the Wales-England border, to manage development in and around Chester and Bristol, respectively. The proposed green belts in the draft NDF would enable authorities to similarly manage development on the Wales side of the border so that green spaces and productive agricultural land are maintained. It would enable local planning authorities to direct development to existing centres served by infrastructure, while additionally using development to drive necessary improvements in infrastructure and promoting urban regeneration on previously developed land.

41. In the north east, the movement of people and goods between Wales and Cheshire and the wider North West England region is highly fluid. A green belt would allow authorities in Wales to manage development pressures which arise partly as a result of land generally being cheaper in Wales than in England. It would help maintain towns in the Deeside area as distinctly separate from Cheshire and the wider north west England area.

42. In the south east the recent abolition of the tolls on the Severn Crossings has had an immediate impact on the housing market in south east Wales, as house prices here are relatively cheaper than in Bristol. It has led to increased demand for homes along the M4/M48 corridors. A green belt could help direct that demand to established towns and cities in a strategic way. In particular, it could help focus demand on Newport – a city identified in the draft NDF as a national growth area. It is a city with strong growth in jobs, including a burgeoning semi-conductor sector, and a strategic location on the Great Western mainline railway.

43. Green belts have been widely used as a method to direct development and protect the countryside and rural land in other parts of the UK since for over 70 years. Approximately 12.4% of the land mass in England is covered by green belt (assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840240/Green_Belt_Statistics_England_2018-19.pdf) (1.62m ha), while in Scotland there are green belts around seven areas, the spatial extent of these can be found here: www.spatialhub.scot/.

Annex 1: Data and evidence used to develop the spatial strategy

The following links are some of the indicators used to inform the spatial strategy

1. **Population Density by Local Authority area**
   gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-08/summary-statistics-for-welsh-economic-regions-wales.pdf

2. **Built Up Areas by Population Size**
   lle.gov.wales/catalogue/item/LatestBuiltUpAreaSubDivisionPopulations2015AsAtMay2017/?lang=en

3. **Location of economic activity**
   gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-08/summary-statistics-for-welsh-economic-regions-wales.pdf

4. **Workplace employment by local authority area**
   statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Employment/Jobs/Whole-Workforce/workplaceemployment-by-welshlocalareas-year

5. **Location of Schools**
   lle.gov.wales/catalogue/item/MLSSchools/?lang=en

6. **Railway station usage**
   gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-02/rail-station-usage-april-2017-to-march-2018.pdf

7. **Agricultural Land Classification Map**
   lle.gov.wales/catalogue/item/PredictiveAgriculturalLandClassificationALCMap/?lang=en

8. **Tranquil areas**
   lle.gov.wales/catalogue/item/TranquilAreasWales/?lang=en