



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Public Attitudes Towards the Planning System in Wales

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Appendix: Descriptions of key planning themes used in the workshops

1. Executive summary

Awareness and understanding of planning system

- 1.1 Overall, the general public admitted a lack of knowledge regarding the planning system in Wales, which correlated with low levels of direct experience of the planning system.
- 1.1 The perceived absence of any prominent sources of information to help the general public better understand planning meant that they did not encounter, or know where to find, information on the subject (only a very small number of participants in the workshops were aware of www.planningportal.gov.uk).
- 1.2 Confusion also existed regarding the scope, responsibilities and purpose of the planning system in Wales. Perceptions of the role of the planning system tended to centre on a way of 'controlling' developments (mainly by granting permission on building activities). The Local Authority was usually deemed to be responsible for the planning system.
- 1.3 There was a further lack of clarity concerning the role of the Welsh Government in relation to planning. Some believed that the Welsh Government set the policy for the Local Authorities to implement, but some thought the latter set their own planning policies. Others admitted that they had no idea how the Welsh Government related to the planning system in Wales or, more generally, what fell under its remit versus central UK Government's.

Overall perceptions of the planning system

- 1.4 The majority of Welsh citizens were satisfied on the whole with the way the planning system in Wales works. However, this result was qualified by many 'tending to agree' (as opposed to 'strongly' agreeing) that they were satisfied on the whole; and one third who were unable to say, reflecting the limited awareness and understanding of the planning system.
- 1.5 Although some workshop participants were able to refer to examples of good planning, top of mind associations focused (negatively) on perceived process issues such as complexity, bureaucracy, unfairness and cost. However some acknowledged that their impressions were not always based on specific experience.
- 1.6 Local citizens' influence on planning was thought to be limited at best. A majority felt 'local citizens do not have enough say in the way the planning system in Wales works' and only a minority agreed that 'decisions on planning applications are being made by the right people and organisations'.
- 1.7 A perception of a lack of fairness and public interest being taken into account. was sometimes expressed strongly (and spontaneously) across the workshops. There was a common belief that, in order to gain planning permission, it was often a case of 'who you know' and 'money talks' being the primary influences, although participants tended not to be very forthcoming with specific examples to support this view.

Satisfaction with planning and future priorities

- 1.8 Satisfaction with the way various issues were being addressed by the planning system in Wales was mixed. Satisfaction was highest with conservation and preservation of the built / natural environment, ensuring energy supplies and how transport issues were being addressed, while satisfaction was lowest with economic development and town centre decline.
- 1.9 In terms of priorities for the planning system to address as far as the general public is concerned, most importance was attached to economic development and dealing with town centre decline.

Experiences of those directly / indirectly involved with planning services

- 1.10 Overall, applicants tended to be satisfied with application process - almost three quarters were ('very' or 'fairly') satisfied overall. However, only a minority described themselves as being 'very' satisfied and a quarter were dissatisfied.
- 1.11 Applicants were most positive about the availability of information and the simplicity of the application process, although the majority had used professional services for their application, which helped minimise the challenges faced with the process.
- 1.12 In terms of criticisms, these were more likely to be aimed at the perceived complexity of the process and timescales involved (including speed of decision making).

2. Situation, objectives and research method

2.1 Situation

2.1.1 As part of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government a new Planning Bill will be introduced this Assembly term. The Bill will contribute to creating more sustainable communities through streamlining and improving planning regulations in Wales.

2.1.2 During 2012 the Welsh Government is gathering evidence to help inform a White Paper which will set out what may be included in the Bill. The Welsh Government will then consult on this Paper during 2013.

2.1.3 In October 2011 the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development established an Independent Advisory Group to review and consider options on how to deliver the planning system in the future. The review has looked at and made recommendations about:

- Options for future delivery of the planning system including a preferred approach
- The legislation and policy guidance necessary to introduce the options and preferred approach
- An assessment of the resources necessary to deliver the options and preferred approach which will include staff numbers and costs
- Improvements which can be implemented quickly and easily

2.1.4 The Group has sought evidence and ideas about what structures will be needed to deliver planning services across Wales in the future, and how this could be taken forward into the Planning Bill.

2.1.5 The Welsh Government also wants to ensure the views of a non-technical audience were included in the process. With this in mind, Beaufort research was commissioned to gather and report on the views of citizens across Wales on the planning system.

2.2 Research objectives

2.2.1 The client set four main objectives for the study:

- Measure general awareness, understanding and perceptions of the current planning system in Wales
- Measure the attitudes and perceptions of those directly, or indirectly, involved in the planning system in the last 12 months
- Measure the level of public satisfaction with planning services provided in Wales
- Identify the issues that the public in Wales think the planning system should address in the future

2.3 Research method

2.3.1 Given the breadth of the research objectives, the method designed consisted of three components: a face to face survey with a representative sample of 1,006 Welsh citizens (aged 16 or over) using Beaufort's quarterly Wales Omnibus Survey; 201 telephone interviews with recent domestic planning applicants in Wales; and three deliberative workshops with a cross-section of the general public.

2.3.1 Survey of the Welsh public

2.3.1.1 The Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey provided robust quantitative data on awareness, perceptions and understanding of the planning system amongst Welsh citizens.

2.3.1.2 The Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey is based upon a representative quota sample, consisting of a minimum of **1,000 adults** aged 16+ who are resident in Wales. Interviewing was spread across 68 separate locations throughout Wales and all interviews were conducted face-to-face in respondents' homes using a CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) approach.

2.3.1.3 In addition to being a sufficiently large sample to be able to confidently measure the attitudes and perceptions at an overall level, the large sample size allowed for sub-group analysis by demographic variables such as region, rurality, gender, age, and socio-economic group.

2.3.1.4 Questions were asked on the March wave of the Wales Omnibus survey which ran from 2 to 11 March 2012.

2.3.2 Survey with recent planning application applicants

2.3.2.1 In addition to exploring views and experiences of a representative sample of the general public, a short CATI (computer aided telephone interviewing) survey was conducted specifically with members of the general public directly involved in planning applications in Wales. This survey investigated users' experiences of the planning system and gauged satisfaction levels.

2.3.2.2 A database of recent registered planning applications from a mix of Local Authorities and National Park areas was provided by the client. This was derived from randomly selecting public weekly lists of planning applications hosted on local authority websites. A specialist telephone number appending service was then used to add telephone contact details to the database. From this sample as many applicants as possible were interviewed, resulting in a total of 201 successful interviews.

2.3.2.3 Interviewing was undertaken by a specialised CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) unit at the Beaufort Research head office. In line with the objectives of the research the survey was only to be undertaken with the applicants themselves and not any agents or architects working on their behalf. All respondents were offered the opportunity to participate in either Welsh or English.

2.3.2.4 Fieldwork for this component of the research was conducted 16 April - 15 May 2012.

2.3.3 Deliberative workshops with the general public

2.3.3.1 The three workshops were conducted in Cardiff, Haverfordwest and Caernarfon. 64 participants attended in total across the three locations. 24 participants were recruited to each workshop with the expectation that 18 to 20 would attend on the evening.

2.3.3.2 Interlocking demographic criteria were applied to the sample composition of 24 participants in each location, as the table below highlights.

Demographic criteria target for each location

									Total
Age	18-34		35-44		45-54		55-70		
	6		6		6		6		24
Gender	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
SEG*	ABC1	C2DE	ABC1	C2DE	ABC1	C2DE	ABC1	C2DE	
	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24

*Socio-economic grouping. More information on these groupings can be found here: <http://bit.ly/NKeJdV> on the Market Research Society website.

2.3.3.3 The high levels of attendance meant that each workshop possessed a good mix across all of the criteria above.

2.3.3.4 A number of further criteria were also included in the sample composition:

- 20 participants across the workshops had experience of the planning process, either as an applicant or as someone with indirect involvement with the system, over the last five years
- Six participants across the workshops had a disability
- Five members of the public in the Cardiff workshop were Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) participants
- Ten of the Haverfordwest participants lived within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park boundary
- The Caernarfon workshop was conducted in the medium of Welsh
- Urban, semi-urban and more rurally based participants were recruited across the workshops

2.3.3.5 The workshops lasted approximately three hours and took place 23 - 25 April 2012.

3. Awareness and understanding of the current planning system in Wales

3.1 Overall awareness and understanding of the planning system

- 3.1.1 Overall, the general public did not feel that they had a good understanding of the planning system in Wales. When asked for their agreement with the statement 'I don't know much about the planning system in Wales', approaching three quarters (72%) of the Welsh population agreed (and only 19% disagreed).
- 3.1.2 This lack of knowledge correlates with the figure that fewer than one in five (19%) members of the general public had direct experience of the planning system in the last five years.
- 3.1.3 A lack of understanding was evident even among those with direct experience of making a planning application as more than half (54%) of recent planning applicants also agreed with the statement.
- 3.1.4 Knowledge tended to be lowest among younger citizens (79% agreeing), females (76%) and those from lower socio-economic grades (76% of C2DE respondents agreeing). However those in rural areas¹ (who were slightly more likely to have had direct experience of the system) were somewhat more knowledgeable: only 62 per cent agreed, compared with an overall average of 72 per cent.
- 3.1.5 Despite this admission, some participants in the workshops displayed a greater understanding of planning than they had originally acknowledged: they were presented with several scenarios provided by the Welsh Government and they had to decide whether or not each scenario was to do with planning.
- 3.1.6 Virtually all of the 64 workshop participants were correct in thinking that the following scenarios related to planning: building a domestic extension; converting a disused chapel into a community centre; and ensuring a proposal for a new public building was accessible to disabled people.

I thought that if you want to build say a small porch, if you're changing something at the front of your house you have to have planning for it? (Female, Caernarfon)

- 3.1.7 The two scenarios participants were more likely to answer *incorrectly* related to Highways Department responsibilities: 'diverting a public footpath on my land' (virtually all agreed this issue was to do with planning), and 'wanting a bypass around our village' (a slight majority disagreeing it was to do with planning). This last scenario was shown to participants after the footpath scenario which may have influenced

¹ As defined by the ONS rural-urban classification: <http://tinyurl.com/6dmq85n>

responses to it (i.e. hearing that the former was to do with the Highways Department).

- 3.1.8 There were also mixed responses when it came to deciding whether planning related to: licensing for playing music in a community centre; installing a wind turbine on a domestic roof; and a building next door becoming unstable.
- 3.1.9 Some participants held reasonably narrow associations of planning, for example mainly involving housing and / or domestic extensions, and therefore did not feel it was especially relevant to them unless it actively affected them. There was occasional acknowledgement that planning did affect people's lives on a day to day basis, but that it was not something to which they gave much thought.

Planning doesn't involve me, it's not something I've come across. (Male, Cardiff)

Nobody thinks about planning until it's on their doorstep, 'oh gosh, someone's thinking of building there, and it's going to interfere with me'. Otherwise, we don't think about it. (Female, Caernarfon)

I don't know much about it to be honest, it doesn't appear to affect me. . . It's strange, you are affected in all walks of life by planning decisions, maybe you just don't notice it. You take it for granted. (Male, Cardiff)

- 3.1.10 Among the appropriate associations with planning mentioned (e.g. new housing, domestic extensions, satellite dishes, wall heights), participants in the workshops regularly referred to transport related themes when providing their top-of mind understanding and views. Examples of these themes included the number of traffic lights in a given area, one-way systems, bus lanes, potholes, the amount of street-lighting, and introducing roundabouts.

Culverhouse Cross, the amount of lights, whoever decided to plan that didn't have a clue. I live near there and it takes me ages to get from one side to the other. . . . All parts of the roundabout get clogged up on a regular basis. (Female, Cardiff)

- 3.1.11 The perceived absence of any prominent sources of information to help the general public better understand planning meant that they did not encounter, or know where to find, information on the subject. Only a very small number of participants in the workshops were aware of www.planningportal.gov.uk (the online planning and building regulations resource for England and Wales). They felt that it had been a particularly useful and comprehensive resource. This lack of clear signposting of where to find more information left some participants

expressing an appetite for knowing more about such information sources.

If I wanted to know anything I wouldn't have a clue where to start and it would be just a job to see what unfolds. (Female, Cardiff)

[The Planning Portal] deals with everything, even dimensions you need to stick to and legislation. (Female, Cardiff)

3.1.12 In terms of finding out about planning applications that might affect them, participants tended to be aware that announcements would be made in local newspapers (which they did not necessarily read) and somewhere at the site of proposed planning. Some also assumed or recollected that a letter concerning the planning application would be sent to neighbouring addresses although a number of participants reported instances of developments in the immediate vicinity of which they knew nothing until construction began.

3.2 The perceived role of planning and responsibility for the system

3.2.1 The workshops provided the opportunity to ask participants what they saw as the purpose of the planning system. Its specific role was by no means clear to all. Perceptions tended to centre on a way of 'controlling' developments (mainly building activities) by granting permission on what could and could not be built; and also ensuring certain building standards are met, for example around design.

3.2.2 From time to time, there was also reference to protecting the natural and built environment and attempting to achieve a balance among all parties affected by a development, including the views and needs of communities and the potential impact on the immediate vicinity.

[Planning's role is] to stop stupid things being built. Making sure it's reasonable. Get a balance and control. (Male, Caernarfon)

I'm sure we would have lost a lot of green belt if it wasn't for somebody turning around and saying 'no, that is a protected building, no you can't have that piece of land' and I'm sure there are lots of positives there. (Female, Cardiff)

[Planning is about] taking into consideration the whole of an area so that the decision on planning has got to do with people who live in a place, interests of the town as a whole, individual interests etc. There isn't enough information available to us . . . (Female, Haverfordwest)

3.2.3 Having given the subject deeper thought, some participants recognised the significant challenge faced by those responsible for planning when trying to achieve this balance; whereas members of the public were only concerned with what directly affected them.

They have a very difficult forward planning job in terms of the overview. It's all very well, we're looking at the guy next door in a way here, but to actually sit down and say this is Pembrokeshire, this is where we want industrial. . . . It's a fantastic problem, we all have to recognise that [others agree]. (Male, Haverfordwest)

I'm sure it's difficult for the Council officers also. There are so many rules for them, and trying to look from our perspective and theirs. If they let something go, I'm sure someone would be on their backs, too. (Male, Caernarfon)

- 3.2.4 The Local Authority was deemed to be responsible for the planning system overall. In the main, however, participants did not display a great deal of knowledge of how the process worked unless they had recent experience of it.

There's a team of local councillors responsible for it. They've been appointed to the job to be part of planning. They then meet in Caernarfon or Dolgellau to decide your fate. (Female, Caernarfon)

- 3.2.5 In some cases, when recounting examples of planning, participants were unsure which types of organisation were behind the developments, for example a series of regeneration projects in a Pembrokeshire village and a retail development in Cardiff. (The perceived influence of money in planning decisions described in section 4.3 affected some participants' views of which organisations were responsible for / influenced the planning system.)

I'm assuming whoever throws money at these projects, either it's the big development companies who just think about 'put these shops here now, never mind those that are going to close'. But they must have the permission from someone. . . . Money [is involved]. (Female, Cardiff)

- 3.2.6 This lack of clarity became more acute when participants were asked about the role of the Welsh Government in relation to planning. A number of them believed that the Welsh Government set the policy for the Local Authorities to implement but some thought the latter set their own planning policies. Other participants admitted that they had no idea how the Welsh Government related to the planning system in Wales or, more generally, what fell under its remit versus central UK Government's.

The Welsh Government set the agenda and decides how much money goes to each Council like planning projects and things. (Female, Cardiff)

It's County Councils [who are responsible for planning] isn't it? I don't know. (Male, Haverfordwest)

No, I've got to be honest I haven't got a clue [about the Welsh Government's role]. (Male, Cardiff)

- 3.2.7 In Haverfordwest, participants generally saw Pembrokeshire Coast National Park as entirely separate from the local authority and believed that the organisation had more authority than the Council on planning.

The Council bows down to them. (Female, Haverfordwest)

4. Attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the planning system in Wales

4.1 Overall positive perceptions of the planning system in Wales

4.1.1 At a broad level, the quantitative survey among the general public in Wales found that an overall majority were 'satisfied on the whole with the way the planning system in Wales works'. However, this result was qualified with 37 per cent who tended to agree with the statement, and one third who were unable to say. This lack of strength of positive consensus reflected the limited awareness and understanding of the planning system discussed in section 3 of this report.

4.1.2 When analysing the responses of the general public by region, those in rural areas² and Mid Wales³ were less likely to be 'satisfied on the whole with the way the planning system in Wales works'. Indeed, those in Mid Wales were more likely to strongly disagree than others with the statement.

4.1.3 Planning applicants responding to the same statement were more likely to have greater conviction in their answers with 20 per cent strongly agreeing (versus 5% of the general public) but also 17 per cent strongly disagreeing (versus 7% of the general public).

4.1.4 Participants in the workshops were able to spontaneously provide a number of cases of what they perceived to be good examples of planning in Wales. Cases volunteered often had a community or social perspective, for example changing the use of buildings to the benefit of the local community thus taking public interest into account. They also tended to be small scale. In addition, some participants were concerned with the design and look of new buildings. Examples given of good planning are provided below:

- Converting 'wasteland' in an urban setting into allotments (Cardiff)

There [is] a patch of land that they made into allotments for people to use so it benefits everyone. (Female, Cardiff)

- Refurbishing 'Llandaff Court' (Insole Court) as a community venue in Cardiff

The building was closed for 18 months and it was great to see that it was brought back to life and can be used by local residents and visitors to the area. I understand that work which is underway is providing small business units to help keep the building and its grounds sustainable in the future. (Female, Cardiff)

² As defined by the ONS rural-urban classification: <http://tinyurl.com/6dmq85n>

³ Ceredigion, Powys and old district of Meirionnydd

- Developing the Old School, Sully, into community resource (South Wales)

Planning was granted for the old school to be used by private clubs, organisations and local village people. It has benefitted the community a lot and is a real success. (Male, Cardiff)

- Changing the use of an existing building from business premises to a community space (Cardiff)

The local church purchased a business premises and converted it into a space for the community to meet. In fact, a new church. . . I thought it was fantastic, they've recuperated something that was going to waste. (Female, Cardiff)

- Developing the Sbectrwm Community Enterprise Centre in Fairwater, Cardiff which provides vocational help for adults with learning needs

I've got a local community centre by me and they've got a garden in there for disabled people to go – they go and work there and then it's also open to the public so it's getting everybody involved in it. (Female, Cardiff)

- Spending money regenerating the village of Crymych (Pembrokeshire)

It's had a lot of building generated over the last five years, and it has had a very positive effect on the village. I felt it didn't have much heart, it was empty a bit; . . . they've taken the cheap market out of the centre and now it's got a big new space, so there's more people using that and cafés have opened because more people come there. . . . It's become productive, busy and it's pretty. . . . They've created a village atmosphere, there's a lot happening there now. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- Opening Fishguard leisure centre

It fitted in very well with all the buildings. I think it's had a big impact on the community, it's a nice facility to have. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- Building of Galeri in Caernarfon

I like the place, there's lots been against it but it's a fantastic place. We're ready enough to complain but there are good things that happen, too. (Male, Caernarfon)

- Requiring supermarket to build a new school on the site of the existing school it had acquired as part of the planning permission (Porthmadog)

A new [supermarket] came to Porthmadog, and we got a brand new school. Part of the planning was that Ysgol Eifionydd would get a new school. I think that's a good example. With a school falling to pieces, and [the supermarket] wanting land, we get a new school. (Male, Caernarfon)

- Developing Cardiff Royal Infirmary and preserving the façade of St David's Hospital, both of benefit to communities in Cardiff.

4.2 Overall negative perceptions of the planning system in Wales

4.2.1 Although workshops participants referred to a range of different examples of good planning, their top-of-mind perceptions with the planning system in Wales were mainly negative, with a focus on perceived process issues. Four themes emerged from among these associations: complexity, bureaucracy, unfairness and, to a lesser extent as it was more likely to be based on applicant experience, cost. (Negative examples of planning provided by participants have been distributed across the appropriate topics in section 5).

4.2.2 Some participants acknowledged that their impression of planning as something complex was not always based on specific experience or knowledge but rather on expectations. The point was also made that hearing the different experiences and perceptions in the workshops sometimes compounded this perceived complexity.

I suppose it's always been that way for years, we've never looked at it as an easy thing to do so maybe it's something that's floating around, you always think that - planning permission you've always got this negative impression. (Male, Cardiff)

I know you can call into the offices to view and inspect proposed building plans but how much of them I would understand – I don't know. (Female, Cardiff)

Listening to everyone else's views here, everyone has different ideas about the process, how to get planning, how much it costs. . . . There's more to it than you think. (Male, Caernarfon)

4.2.3 In keeping with the quantitative findings, however, some applicants had found the planning system straightforward although they were often employing a professional to help with the application.

4.2.4 Linking in with the complexity perception, participants in the workshops anticipated that the planning system would be protracted and involve extensive 'red tape' with form-filling and having to deal with different planning staff in different levels within the Council. The likely expense involved was also mentioned. This view existed among those with and without planning application experience, as the comments below demonstrate.

Red tape to get around the permission to get it started – there is a lot of work to get it all done and to prepare it.

You hear all the negative things in the media. (Male & Female, Cardiff)

I've found bureaucracy terrible. Finding the right person to speak to, phone numbers, extensions etc. (Male, Caernarfon)

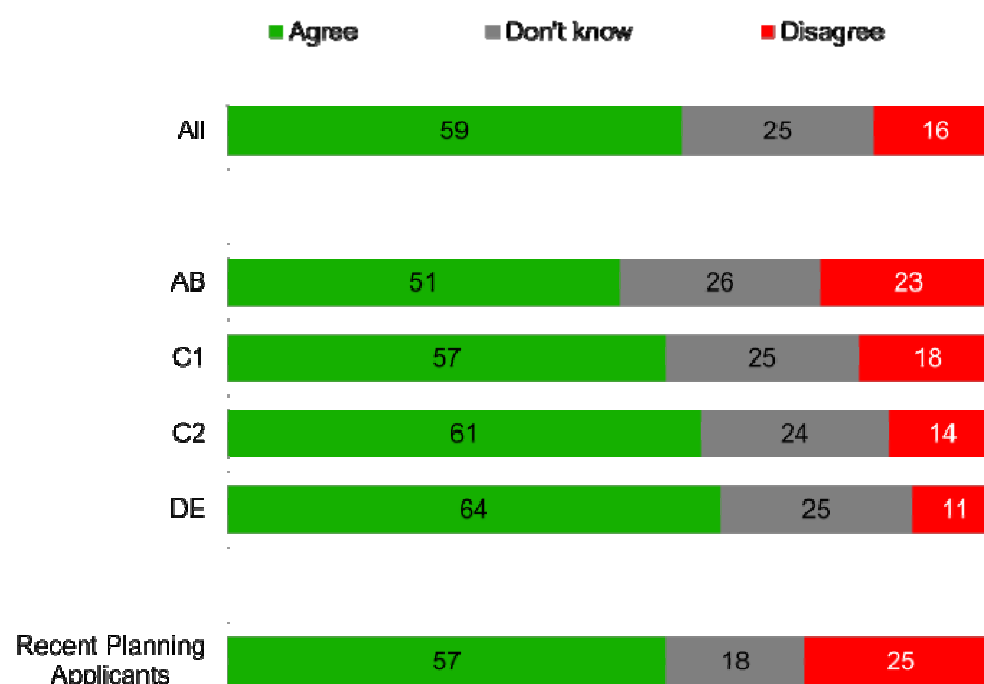
I would expect a planning application to be a long process with a lot of forms and waiting. (Male, Cardiff)

I haven't made an application for planning but I would expect it to be expensive, taking a long time and mountains of paperwork to fill in. (Female, Haverfordwest)

4.3 Planning and perceived influence, fairness

- 4.3.1 The theme of lack of fairness in the workshops tied in with the overall research finding that local citizens' influence on planning was thought to be limited at best. Those with recent experience of the planning system, however, were slightly more likely than the general public to be positive about the system across the various survey measures on this topic.
- 4.3.2 59 per cent of the general public agreed with the statement that 'Local citizens don't have enough of a say in the way the planning system in Wales works', and a further 25 per cent reported that they could not give an answer (see figure A below). This latter figure reflects the overall low levels of awareness and understanding of planning discussed in section 3 of this report.
- 4.3.3 Further analysis on this statement found that the lowest socio-economic groupings were more likely to agree that local citizens did not have enough of a say in the way the planning system in Wales works (64% socio-economic groupings DE versus 51% AB). Recent planning applicants were slightly more likely than the general public to disagree with this statement (25% versus 16% respectively).

Figure A: Proportion agreeing / disagreeing that "Local Citizens don't have enough of a say in the way the planning system in Wales works" (%)



Base: all (general public) = 1006, AB (170), C1 (303), C2 (178), DE (355) planning applicants (201).

- 4.3.4 The research also found that many members of the public believed that 'some citizens have more of an influence than others'. Almost three quarters (74%) agreed with this statement, with 18 per cent unable to answer. As before, recent planning applicants were slightly more likely than the general public to disagree with this statement (12% and 7% respectively).
- 4.3.5 Issues with perceptions of the fairness of the planning system become more acute when the research results showed that only three in ten (31%) of the general public agreed that 'decisions on planning applications for new developments are being made by the right people and organisations'. The lack of knowledge on the subject was illustrated by the 36 per cent of the general public who answered 'don't know' to this question.
- 4.3.6 Those in Mid Wales were most likely to disagree with this statement (45% versus the 33% average) although the small base size of 78 respondents for this sub-group should be noted. Agreement was higher among recent planning applicants (42% agreed, versus 31% overall, that 'decisions on planning applications for new developments are being made by the right people and organisations').
- 4.3.7 The lack of fairness issue was sometimes expressed strongly (and spontaneously) across the three research locations and the term 'corrupt' was used on several occasions in the workshops. There was a common belief that, in order to gain planning permission, it was often a case of 'who you know' and 'money talks' being the primary influences. Participants normally had commercial developments in mind when making this point, with developers thought to be exerting undue influence over councils although participants tended not to be very forthcoming with specific examples to support this view. Public interest was therefore not always felt to be taken into account.

Corruption – if you know people in planning departments you can get away with [it]. (Female, Haverfordwest)

Planning should be granted from someone or persons who do not have connections to the area and are not corrupt . . . (Haverfordwest)

Well [bribery] exists in this field for years. Everybody knows that. It's been happening in the building industry for years. People acknowledge it goes on - how much I don't know. (Male, Caernarfon)

When one party is powerful then the influence they have can be disproportionate [e.g. Llanishen Reservoir]. (Female, Cardiff)

It's not in the public interest, it's in the Council's interest and whoever is going to make a lot of money from these developments. (Female, Haverfordwest)

There's one local company, I won't name them, but they get to buy massive bits of land for a pound. If you and I wanted to buy some land to build on for a pound, we wouldn't be allowed. And the type of buildings being built - I don't think they suit our area but there you go. (Female, Caernarfon)

5. Satisfaction with planning in relation to specific planning themes tested

5.1 Overall satisfaction with the themes

5.1.2 The survey and workshops with the general public covered perceptions of, and satisfaction with, the way in which the planning system in Wales addressed the following themes:

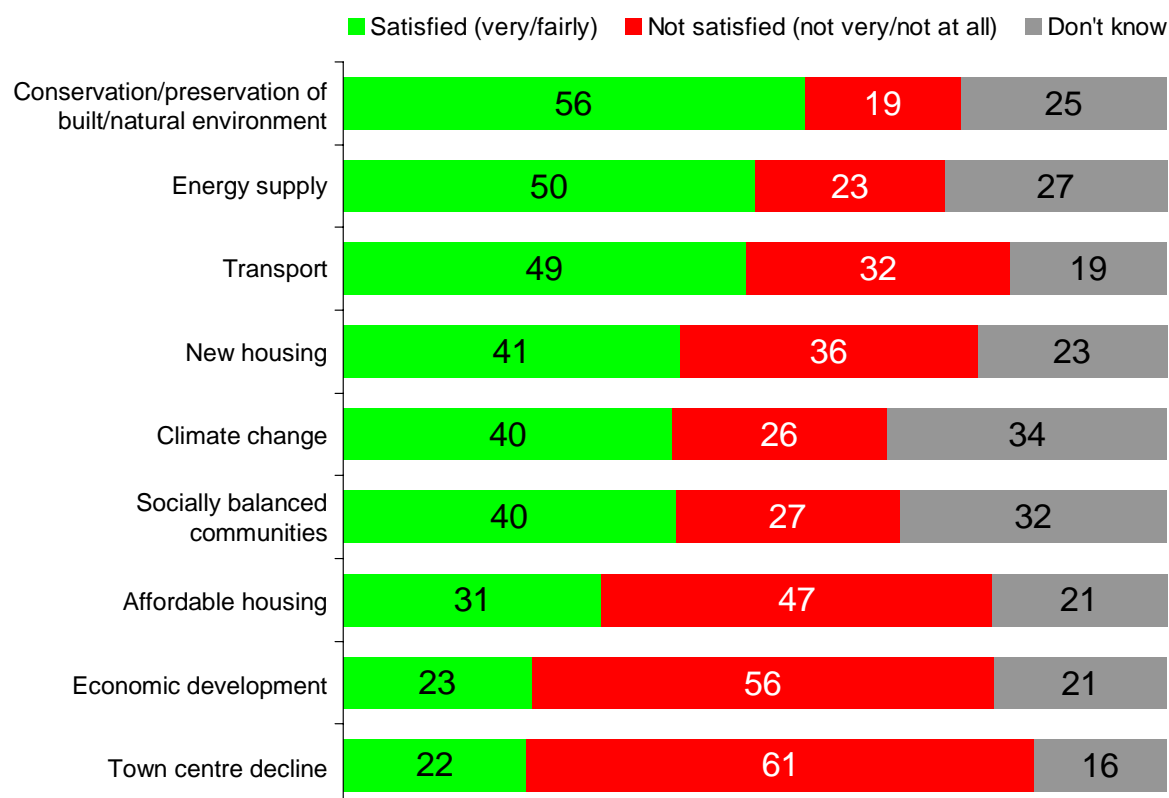
- Planning and energy supply
- Planning contributing to economic development and job creation
- Planning creating socially balanced communities
- Planning delivering new housing
- Planning providing affordable housing
- Planning securing better transportation
- Planning securing the conservation and preservation of the natural and built environment
- Planning taking account of climate change
- Planning tackling town centre decline

5.1.3 The findings across the research elements were broadly consistent in terms of where the general public felt the issues lay, and which were a priority to address.

5.1.4 Figure B overleaf summarises general public satisfaction levels with the way various issues are being addressed by the planning system in Wales.

5.1.5 Reflecting an overall lack of knowledge/understanding of the system, many respondents were unable to state whether or not they were satisfied with a number of the dimensions. Satisfaction was highest overall with: conservation and preservation of the built/natural environment; ensuring energy supplies; and how transport issues were being addressed. Satisfaction was lowest for economic development and town centre decline.

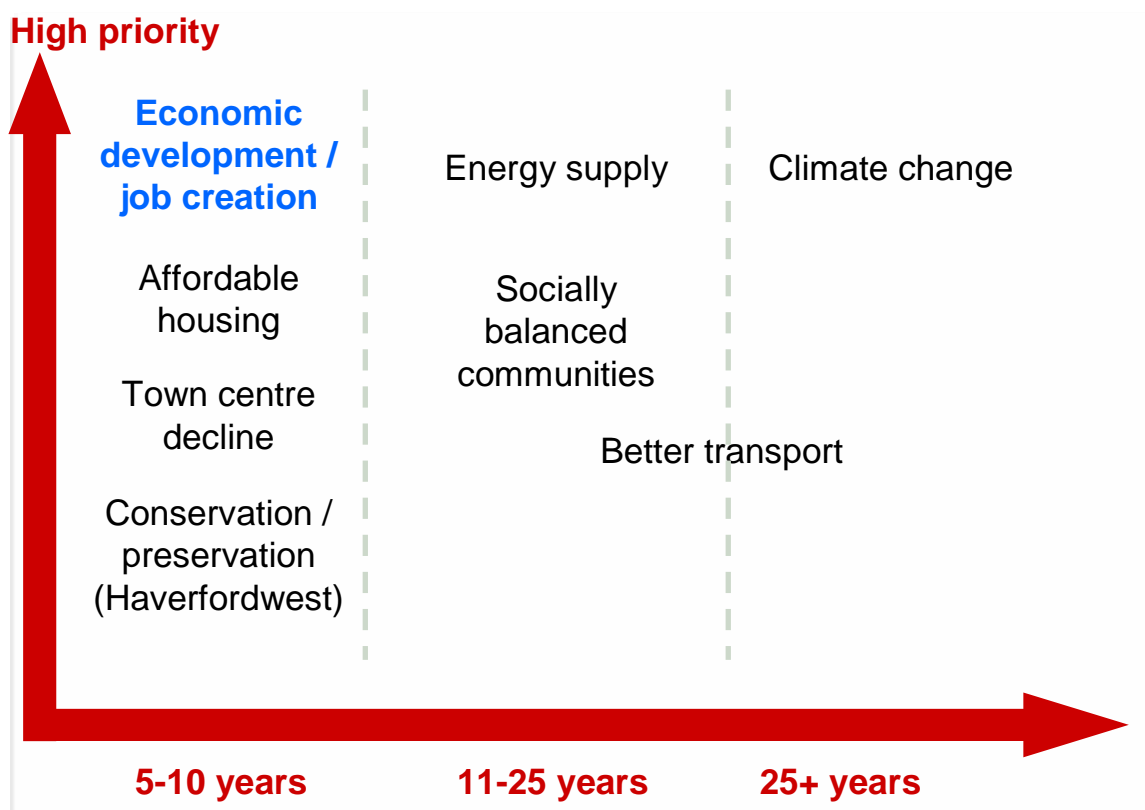
Figure B: Satisfaction with how different issues are being addressed by the planning system in Wales (%)



Base: all (general public) = 1006

- 5.1.6 Participants in the workshops were given descriptions of what the Welsh Government meant by each of the subjects listed above (see appendix for the descriptions used).
- 5.1.7 During the workshops, they were asked to try and reach a consensus on where the priorities should lie for the planning system in Wales in relation to the themes above. Most subjects were considered important and therefore the groups of participants were asked to try and place at least two themes within each of three broad time frames: the next five to ten years, 11-25 years and 25 years or more. Planning contributing to economic development and job creation dominated the immediate priorities identified by participants. Affordable housing and town centre decline also featured regularly as immediate priorities. A key difference emerged in the Haverfordwest workshop where participants generally agreed that conservation and preservation of the natural and built environment were an immediate priority as well.
- 5.1.8 Overall, these priorities reflected the present issues participants and the general public were facing and which they were more likely to affect them and their communities.

5.1.9 The outcome of this qualitative exercise is broadly summarised below.



5.1.10 The report now explores views on each of these themes. In the workshops participants were presented with each theme, followed by the description to help with understanding.

5.2 Planning tackling town centre decline

61 per cent of the general public in Wales were dissatisfied with how town centre decline was being addressed; across the themes tested, they were least likely to answer 'don't know' to this subject.

5.2.1 Closely linked in workshop participants' minds with the theme of economic development and job creation, town centre decline was an issue to which they could readily relate, overall. Those in Haverfordwest and Caernarfon believed that their own town centres were in decline, and some of those in Cardiff referred to Newport (Gwent) as a high profile city centre facing regeneration challenges.

*Pembrokeshire Council are really failing us. It's a major town, Haverfordwest. Yet they've put more money into Milford.
(Female, Haverfordwest)*

- 5.2.2 Aberystwyth, Llanelli, the Valleys and Swansea were also mentioned as having town centre problems in addition to Newport.

Town centres are all the same across the country. They are all suffering. I can't see them changing it in the next five years. (Male, Caernarfon)

It is going to be huge [issue for Wales] then, and you've got to think of the Valleys and those areas. (Male, Cardiff)

- 5.2.3 Cardiff itself was felt overall not to be suffering to the same extent as some other towns in Wales, with St David's 2 used as a positive example, although some participants believed that the new retail development was having an adverse impact on retail survival in other parts of the city.

- 5.2.4 The description provided by the Welsh Government to accompany this topic included reference to the 'sequential test that identifies that any new shops should be developed within existing town centres first and only if suitable sites are not available should an edge of centre location be considered, and only if no edge of centre site is available should out of town retail development then be proposed.' A number of participants who absorbed this information did not think that they had seen it applied in reality, contrasting empty town centre retail space with thriving edge of town / out of town retail parks.

One of the biggest problems probably everywhere is this business of out of town shopping. You've got your [large retailer] and all the other things that we've now got around Haverfordwest. The trouble is the centre of town: what are you going to do with that? If you walk up the High Street in Haverfordwest there's nothing happening there. The question is what can happen there because it's on a busy road, people are now shopping out of town, how is it all going to work? (Male, Haverfordwest)

- 5.2.5 Some referred to how, in community areas, the large supermarkets were opening smaller format stores to the detriment of independent traders, which did not give the impression of taking the interest of small businesses into account.

It doesn't say anything in there about taking into consideration the family businesses that are already in the communities and they're just thinking of where they can plonk themselves and it's not for the family, small businesses. (Female, Cardiff)

- 5.2.6 Reflecting recent media coverage on the subject, some participants suggested that more could be done with existing buildings in town centres by creating more residential property (for example like the Hayes in Cardiff) thus stimulating an organic need for businesses to support these growing communities.

Planning to be concerned with decline in town centres they've got to change the use of the buildings. You've got a large building and you can get six flats in it. Six flats is better than four flats and an empty shop underneath. (Male, Haverfordwest)

What they've got right in the city centre is the Hayes. They've gone in for mixed conversion on residential and they made the most out of the land using shops, apartments above them but they killed two birds with one stone and they have made the most of what they can. (Female, Cardiff)

5.3 Planning contributing to economic development and job creation

56 per cent of the general public in Wales were dissatisfied with how economic development and job creation were being addressed. 79 per cent felt providing more jobs should be a top priority as far as planning was concerned.

5.3.1 Workshop participants were virtually unanimous in considering this theme an immediate priority for Wales. They felt that economic development and job creation were essential foundations for improvements in other areas such as town centre regeneration and housing. Interpretations of what this planning topic might entail centred for some on granting planning permission for new industry and regeneration. For some participants, however, it was not very clear exactly what role planning could play in contributing to economic development and job creation.

Because without economic development planning, there's no future for the local community. It will die on its feet. (Male, Caernarfon)

M: Is there anything more important than jobs? F: Jobs has got to be it.

M: Planning tackling town centre decline would make jobs. (Haverfordwest)

I don't know if it's down to planning, it's whole country economics and it is not happening here in Wales and I don't know if it's up to planning to make it happen. (Male, Haverfordwest)

5.3.2 In terms of how well Wales and its planning system was faring in this respect, opinions were mixed as to whether the issue lay with a failure in the planning system or with the wider economic downturn. Examples were given of large employers closing sites (LG and Canon deemed 'wasted money' in funding) and a lack of jobs in the local area, for example Caernarfon. Some also referred to the demise of several town centres (e.g. Haverfordwest, Llanelli, Caernarfon).

There isn't anything locally really, other than the Premier Inn that has been built that brings in jobs to Caernarfon, but there's nothing else locally that's been built here. (Female, Caernarfon)

I used to work in Wylfa and Llanberis with Rio Tinto, and that drove the economy in those communities upwards. Everyone was building houses, young people having good training and work, and also the money was running through the community. The whole area was booming. Now there's nothing like that. Male, Caernarfon

- 5.3.3 A number of small business owners in Haverfordwest felt that there was a perceived shortage of affordable business units for small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) in their area (Pembrokeshire). The point was also made among Haverfordwest participants that Pembrokeshire appeared to focus mainly on farming and tourism and that other sectors including those involving SMEs, would be overlooked.

People do have to make a living to live in Wales and it is a big issue for Wales as a whole. . . . The diversity that's going on should be applauded where farmers are using land for tourism purposes but we still don't want to be Disneyland where Tenby is all tourism and work is only in the summer. We've got to be careful there's sustainable life for people that live in Wales all year and not just in the summertime. (Female, Haverfordwest)

In Newport [Pembrokeshire] we have an industrial park which is just grass because the National Park doesn't put up anything. You can have a plot and build your own but the idea of them putting up something and trying to rent it out – you can't. (Male, Haverfordwest)

If you're looking for somewhere to work [i.e. to be based as a small business] it's not there. If people are looking to build industrial units they should look to offer one or two of them, with help from planners, to people who are start-up. . . . There are no start-up units in Narbeth anywhere. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 5.3.4 Examples of positive planning relating to economic development and job creation were also given and included St David's 2 shopping centre in Cardiff, Pembroke Dock, and Bluestone for jobs and tourism (for some) in Pembrokeshire.

The previous area [of Cardiff] was run down, dilapidated and in poor condition. Since the introduction of St David's 2, it has completely changed that area and the city centre in general with the opening of new trades which has brought more tourism to the city and ultimately more money. (Female, Cardiff)

5.4 Planning providing affordable / new housing

47 per cent of the general public in Wales were dissatisfied with how affordable housing was being addressed, with 41 per cent satisfied. 49 per cent felt providing more housing should be a top priority as far as planning was concerned.

- 5.4.1 Planning and housing in general preoccupied participants across all workshops given that it was an area that affected many directly, for example younger people looking for first homes; and those experiencing or facing the impact of a nearby housing development. Participants were presented with affordable housing and new housing as separate topics but tended to feel that they belonged together, or that the provision of affordable housing was more of an issue.
- 5.4.2 Several themes emerged in relation to housing overall among workshop participants, each of which is now discussed. Affordability, design, impact on the immediate local community, a perceived lack of consultation on applications, and the amount of influence local residents have in a planning decision on housing were identified.
- 5.4.3 **Affordability / availability of housing:** some younger participants in all three workshops spoke strongly about the lack of affordable housing and their inability to raise the finance for a deposit or mortgage, instead becoming 'stuck in a hole' with renting accommodation.

You can't start life really, well you can, but if you rent you're going to get stuck renting. It would be better for young people to be able to buy their own houses. If you do rent there's a risk you might get stuck in a hole. The money you could be saving to buy a house is paying other people's mortgage. Personally for me, it's not like there's no jobs, but there are no houses, not some you can buy at an affordable price anyway. (Female, Caernarfon)

That is a definite [priority] with so many people and young couples and middle aged people. They've got to have a 20 per cent deposit and they save and save them paying rent. (Female, Cardiff)

That is a society need. Trying to get a mortgage is hard work. I can't get a mortgage. (Male, Cardiff)

- 5.4.4 Some participants surmised that Wales was probably not performing very well regarding affordable housing because of perceived lengthy waiting lists for social housing. They could not reconcile this apparent situation with the empty homes they saw or heard about. According to some in Haverfordwest, the perceived problem of the lack of affordable housing was exacerbated by affluent older people retiring to the area thus inflating house prices in the locality.

There are four council houses in Whitchurch [Cardiff], four. I'm sure there are more than four families in Whitchurch who want a council house. [I wanted] to get on the list. A 25 year wait. . . . There are empty houses in Whitchurch. (Female, Cardiff)

If there's an empty house and there's someone on the housing list then they're not performing. . . . Why can't you just put the money into some of the housing that's empty? (Female, Cardiff)

Because people are retiring to Newport [Pembrokeshire] with money, the house prices are the highest in North Pembrokeshire; there's no low cost housing for the youngsters to buy and no jobs for them to earn the money to buy them. (Male, Haverfordwest)

- 5.4.5 There was also a suspicion that developers built the minimum required in relation to section 106 agreements in order to make significant amounts of money on more expensive properties with little real concern for providing affordable housing.

- 5.4.6 **Design of new housing:** the aesthetics of housing developments featured quite regularly in the discussions, especially in the more rural locations of Haverfordwest and Caernarfon. There were references to perceived low quality housing being built with designs out of keeping with the area in which they were situated.

We live in Narberth which is a classic Pembrokeshire town but they're whacking up square box houses all over the place and then somebody can't even [alter their home due to planning restrictions], which is ridiculous. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 5.4.7 Some participants did identify examples of housing developments which were more sensitive to their surroundings, for example in Llandaff, Cardiff and Letterston, Pembrokeshire.

New houses near Llandaff [are] in keeping with a traditional neighbourhood, low density and retro style. (Male, Cardiff)

There is a positive new housing estate in Letterston and it's modern, it's not modern looking but is nice and it does verge on being pastiche with the design of it but as you go past it isn't jarring on the eye, it looks good, it's a positive thing in the locality. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 5.4.8 **Local impact of new housing:** several examples were raised where new housing developments were felt to be adversely affecting the immediate local area, or where it was felt that planned developments were likely to have a negative impact. Issues included increased congestion and its associated risks (e.g. more accidents), a lack of parking, and overcrowded schools.

They don't think about the schools. There's a class now in the school with 48 children, because they've built too many houses in Llanrug, and the school can't cope with it, so they have to have two teachers for one class. (Female, Caernarfon)
I live in Narberth and it's a lovely estate and all of a sudden we've been told xx houses will be built close together and all the development work is going to be driven down our road and . . . there's a bit of a blind bend and the traffic is really bad. (Male, Haverfordwest)

They don't look after the infrastructure. You've got two or three cars to each house now. Where are they going to park their cars? It's a joke. (Male, Caernarfon)

- 5.4.9 In another case, a participant in Caernarfon explained how a community in North Wales was opposing a new housing development because they feared that it would attract homeowners from outside Wales and threaten their local Welsh identity.

In Bodelwydden, the community is against the houses that are coming to Bodelwydden. They are going to lose their Welsh culture and everything. (Male, Caernarfon)

5.4.10 **Advanced consultation and influence on housing planning**

applications: some participants believed that little effort was made to consult with those most likely to be affected by a housing development although this belief appeared to be a perception rather than an experience, on occasion. (This subject was also raised as a broader issue with commercial developments; see section 6.1) There was also a sense that, by the time local residents attempted to have their say, the planning application in reality would be going ahead whatever views were aired, as described in section 4.3 of this report.

People only get involved when they say they're going to build these houses. There needs to be more forward planning before . . . 'The city needs these houses, how can we go about that without causing major problems?' I don't think there is a consultation. (Male, Cardiff)

You hear about these housing estates going up and people are protesting about it and they still go ahead – they're not taking the public interest into account a lot of the time anyway. (Female, Cardiff)

- 5.4.11 In one example, a couple of participants described their concerns about the building of 400 homes in Dinas Powys in the context of its impact on local infrastructure and the availability of employment in the area. The housing development was reportedly presented as a 'done deal' at a consultation event.

There was a meeting in Dinas about what they're planning to do but it was after it had gone and been agreed. . . . It was

presented as this is what's going to happen. It was a done deal was the impression we got; the builders were supposed to put a contribution towards the infrastructure. Where or what that contribution was, . . . they pulled the school down that was within walking distance of the development and the only difference to roads is it's only been resurfaced. They haven't supplied any more access, it's all gridlocked every morning and evening. Wall-to-wall traffic. (Female, Cardiff)

5.4.12 These findings suggest a slight disparity in how workshop participants discussed housing, in that it was deemed a key priority but also drew criticism when the conversation turned to examples of poor planning. This disparity therefore suggested a degree of 'NIMBYism' (see <http://bit.ly/KRaMEC> for a definition) on the topic of housing developments.

5.5 Planning creating socially balanced communities

40 per cent of the general public in Wales were satisfied with how socially balanced communities were being addressed; but 32 per cent responded 'don't know' and 27 per cent were dissatisfied.

5.5.1 The 32 per cent of respondents in the survey with the general public who were unable to give a satisfaction level for this statement on socially balanced communities was the second highest 'don't know' response. Similarly, participants in the workshops found this theme a challenge to define, and to envisage from a planning point of view even with a description. Interpretations tended to centre on the provision of affordable housing.

5.5.2 Some wondered how easy it was to achieve socially balanced communities and one or two participants gave the impression that they would prefer not to live in one. On occasion, participants in Cardiff argued strongly that this subject should be an immediate priority because of how socially deprived areas were more likely to be neglected. An example was also given of unexpectedly encountering socially deprived areas in Haverfordwest, through work.

You've got to have balanced communities or you end up with anarchy don't you? You've got to have balanced communities for everybody's sake – you can't give it a low priority, it has to be something that's addressed. (Female, Cardiff)

You need a balanced community because you're creating discrimination if it's not so you can have a socially deprived area where no one cares and they just do what they want. (Male, Cardiff)

I was quite shocked by the places I went to in Haverfordwest [through work] that I didn't know were there because I had no reason go there and they were quite desolate and ugly. It didn't suggest socially balanced communities to you. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 5.5.3 Even so, the spontaneous discussions on good and poor examples of planning revealed a number of positive enhancements to local communities which participants had noted (see 4.1).
- 5.5.4 In the main, therefore, participants found it difficult to decide how well Wales and planning were performing in terms of creating socially balanced communities. It was generally positioned as a slightly longer term priority, in their minds.

5.6 Planning taking account of climate change

40 per cent of the general public in Wales were satisfied with how planning took account of climate change; 26 per cent were dissatisfied, and 34 per cent were unable to answer. This latter figure was the highest percentage of 'don't know' responses across the issues measured.

5.6.1 Prior to hearing an explanation of planning considering climate change, participants tended to think it related to the construction of more energy efficient buildings (e.g. 'carbon neutral homes'), rather than considering how new and future developments would need to adapt over time owing to climate change factors. Also, on occasion, participants guessed that the subject might relate to controlling emissions from new industrial sites.

Houses are now built to a standard that keeps heat in. (Male, Caernarfon)

Maybe when it comes to planning industries or factories, something that's going to produce possible pollution, they have to step back and say do we really need this or can we put a wind turbine there instead or is there an alternative? (Male, Cardiff)

5.6.2 The explanation prompted mixed views from participants. Some felt it was more to do with 'common sense' for example not permitting developments on areas prone to flooding. Some also felt that Wales was probably less vulnerable than other places like England in relation to climate change.

F: That's not expensive is it? That's a planning thing, not something you've got to plough money into. . . . M: It's common sense really and you don't want to build where there are going to be floods. (Cardiff)

We don't live on flood plains like in England. (Female, Haverfordwest)

5.6.3 The perceived absence of any effect of climate change on everyday life meant that participants in the workshops viewed it as a priority for planning to address in the future.

It's important but it sounds a bit extreme [in the explanation]; it sounds like we're expecting some dramatic change in the weather. (Male, Haverfordwest)

5.6.4 A couple of examples were put forward which participants believed took climate change into account: a development in Caernarfon which was thought to have been rejected because of possible rising sea levels; and a bypass in Pembrokeshire which took into account the potential of a nearby river to flood. A further example was given of a local factory in Pembrokeshire which flooded every year but the business had received permission to extend the site.

5.7 Planning securing better transportation

49 per cent of the general public in Wales were satisfied with how transport issues were being addressed by the planning system in Wales, 32 per cent were dissatisfied, and 19 per cent were unable to answer, one of the lowest 'don't know' responses.

5.7.1 Understanding of what planning securing better transport implied was largely misunderstood in the workshops. Initial interpretations centred generally on providing public transport generally, congestion and the condition of roads.

5.7.2 However, during the workshops as a whole, participants provided a number of examples where they argued planning had not taken into account the impact of the development (normally housing or retail) on the local transport infrastructure, including the impact on parking availability.

Examples included:

- A new clothes and food retailer in Haverfordwest where customers were reported to be using a hospital car park in order to visit the store which meant people visiting the hospital sometimes could not find a parking space

Also they've taken development out of town where [retailer] are which is very popular now but the traffic up there is dreadful and they all park in the hospital car park and go to [retailer] and when you go to the hospital, you can't park. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- New hotels and a GP surgery in Caernarfon which did not provide any parking for its customers

*They've built two hotels in the dock. Where's the car park?
Surgery, where's the car park? (Male, Caernarfon)*

- As highlighted earlier in this report, a new housing development proposal in Dinas Powys that did not appear to take into account the likely 'strain' on the local infrastructure with the significant increase in the number of homes in the area.

A proposal has been put forward to demolish St Cyres School site and use the area for housing – maybe 400 properties. Residents feel that as the area is slowly choking with the amount of traffic travelling through Dinas Powys, that no thought for infrastructure has been given which local residents find very disturbing. . . .Existing properties will find it extremely difficult to access the roads leading to the main Barry to Cardiff road. It might also put a very great strain on the existing train and bus services. (Male, Cardiff)

- 5.7.3 On balance, participants believed that planning securing better transportation was not as immediate a priority as those which related to the economy and town centre decline.

5.8 Planning and energy supply

50 per cent of the general public in Wales were satisfied with how energy supply was being addressed; 23 per cent were dissatisfied with how it was being addressed, and 27 per cent were unable to answer.

- 5.8.1 Like climate change, energy supply was a more abstract concept for workshop participants to deal with. In contrast to housing and jobs, participants were less likely to encounter it as an issue from a planning perspective.

- 5.8.2 Some recognised Wales as a country which was actively exploring alternative energy sources with its apparent focus on wind and wave energy. There was also positive reference to Anglesey's positioning as 'Energy Island' with its activities in this respect.

We need to use the natural resources we have, such as water and wind. (Male, Caernarfon)

- 5.8.3 The point was occasionally made that the development of alternative sources of energy would stand Wales in good stead in that it would not be so reliant on other countries for energy in the future. The proliferation of domestic solar panels was also noted as providing a different energy source. However, it was not deemed an immediate priority for Wales as the energy resource situation was not considered critical and it appeared other options were already being explored.

We've got solar panels and that and went to planning and they said yes straightaway. Everybody in area is allowed to have them as we've got them [now]. (Female, Haverfordwest)

If it can be localised I think it's great and I think that wave power is the best. (Female, Haverfordwest)

Given the economic situation, maybe in the next 25 years [it will become a priority]. (Female, Cardiff)

5.9 Planning securing the conservation and preservation of the natural and built environment

50 per cent of the general public in Wales were satisfied with how the planning system was addressing this issue; only 19 per cent were dissatisfied – the lowest level of dissatisfaction across the issues measured; and 25 per cent were unable to answer.

- 5.9.1 In general, participants recognised the conservation and preservation of the natural and built environment as an important asset to the economy in Wales. The small number of specific examples of planning's role in this respect included: Cadw which was 'doing a good job'; a local leisure resort which had involved schoolchildren in planting woodland (although it was also cited for allegedly destroying ancient woodland as part of the development); and Shire Hall in Haverfordwest, where a 'rejected planning application' from a local developer was welcomed.

Shire Hall in Haverfordwest which is a lovely building and they had numerous applications to strip everything out of it and it's a historic building and they've finally thrown out the second appeal by [developer]; I was quite heartened by that. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 5.9.2 Participants in Haverfordwest found this theme to be more of an immediate concern and priority than participants in other workshops. Its importance to Pembrokeshire was also highlighted, in terms of visitor attraction and ensuring the county remained a place in which people wanted to live. The natural environment would be virtually impossible to replace, if lost, according to these participants.

Planning and securing the conservation is quite high [as a priority] because people come to Pembrokeshire to see the environment. (Female, Haverfordwest)

F: If you lose the wildlife, you won't get it back. Once they've gone they've gone. . . . It needs to be sorted now . . . F: If we don't look after what we have got people won't want to come here and live here. (Haverfordwest)

- 5.9.3 Examples of perceived poor planning concerning this theme included Llanishen Reservoir and the progress being made by developers despite local opposition; a new housing development near Caernarfon Castle which was felt to look inappropriate from a design point of view in the context of the castle; and housing developments in Narberth which were out of keeping with the character of the town.

Llanishen reservoir was a wonderful amenity and part of the 'green living' of Cardiff. . . . However, because they are able to, the people who own the site have battled on, . . . the area is in such a sad state. The planning department needs to . . . do what's right for the people in Cardiff. They seem to act at the mercy of [utility company]. (Female, Cardiff)

If you go to Coed Helen, all you see is the flats, it detracts from the castle doesn't it. It doesn't go with the natural environment. It looks like a monster next to the castle. It detracts from the castle. It's a castle town, so everything should look natural...they

say to us we need to have so-and-so slate, and yet there they can do what they want. (Female, Caernarfon)

- 5.9.4 There was also a sense that older buildings in town centres were sometimes in disrepair because of the stringent restrictions in place for listed buildings, and also that demolition seemed the preferred route rather than restoration.

I think there's so many listed building in the town you can't touch them. There are so many costs involved to maintain them, it's impossible to have enough money to keep up with them. And when people leave them, they fall into disrepair. Nobody wants them, but yet you can't demolish them either. (Male, Caernarfon)

Parks and green spaces seem to be protected but buildings seem to be very easy to get rid of. The developers seem to want to demolish them. (Male, Cardiff)

5.9.5 Perceptions of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

- 5.9.5.1 A proportion of participants in the Haverfordwest workshop lived within the National Park boundary, as set out in the sample criteria for this element of research.

- 5.9.5.2 They acknowledged that the principle of 'retaining the character' of the region was important and, occasionally, that this involved the finer detail of a planning application.

I think it is important to retain the character of Pembrokeshire and I think that comes down to detail quite often. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 5.9.5.3 However, the general view of the National Park Authority across the workshop was negative. Some recounted their own negative experiences with the body and others sometimes knew of people who had faced similar issues. Perceptions voiced on the organisation included a lack of common sense, the impression of creating work to keep themselves busy, incompetence and inconsistency, being 'over the top' and 'nit-picking'. The National Park was seen as being more powerful than the Local Authority.

- 5.9.5.4 It is not possible to relate the level of detail participants provided on certain planning related instances in order to preserve anonymity, but examples of the types of concern participants voiced are described below:

- Being given a limited choice of colours with which to paint the front door
- Being given three different answers on the same issue in terms of materials to use on a particular part of the house

- Not being able to make a specific alteration to a building to improve living conditions despite the building being out of sight of public thoroughfares
- A lack of helpful guidance on what might be permitted in relation to the design of a building (rather than focusing on what was not permitted)

Jobs for the boys at National Parks. They have to make work to keep themselves occupied. (Male, Haverfordwest)

M: How many of those who say yes or no actually know anything about planning? F: Exactly. They're not trained. (Haverfordwest)

What you have is a planning department that thinks it's a design department and they are more interested in the colour on the front door. They will come along with a colour chart and you can choose one of these for the front door – they'll check that you've painted it that colour. (Haverfordwest)

5.9.5.5 In addition, there was widespread awareness of a domestic planning issue which had been reported in the local media relating to a property in the region. In participants' eyes, the National Park had failed to read the plans correctly and / or had been allegedly swayed by the influence of the owner responsible for the development. The building itself was criticised for being entirely out of keeping with the area.

It is a monumental [error] in a very sensitive area and for somebody with a lot of money getting away with that – it's not fair on the little person. (Female, Haverfordwest)

5.9.5.6 Some of the fine detail planning issues that participants recounted when interacting with the National Park were contrasted with the way in which a large development like Bluestone was given planning permission, and with housing developments which were deemed unsympathetic to the character of the local built environment.

6. Direct experiences and satisfaction with planning services

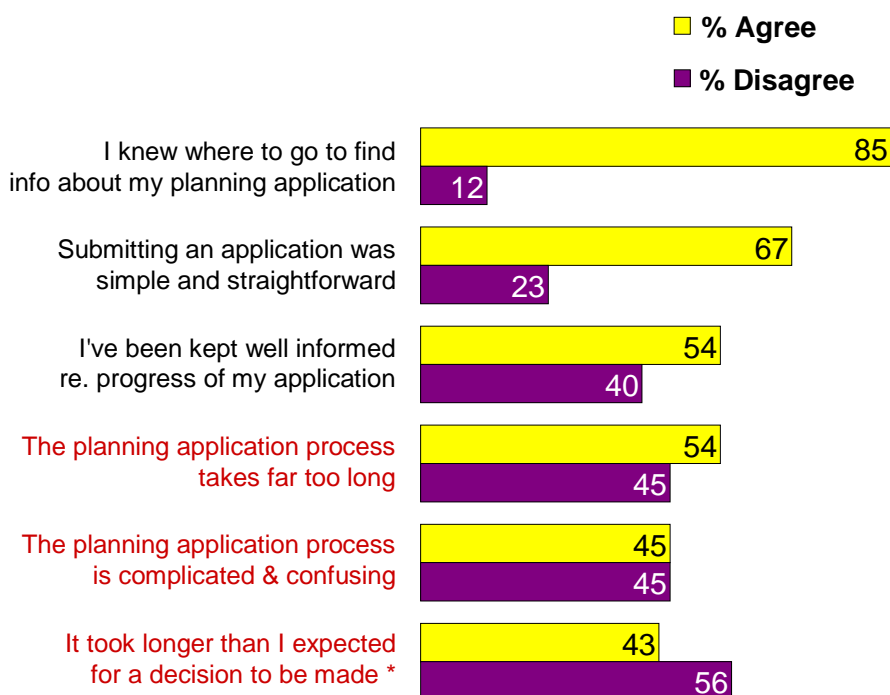
6.1 Levels of satisfaction with the planning application process

6.1.1 This section of the report focuses on the quantitative survey results among 201 planning applicants combined with examples from the workshops of experiences of interactions with the planning system in Wales.

6.1.2 Overall, satisfaction with planning application process in Wales was relatively high, with approaching three quarters (73%) of recent applicants stating that they were satisfied. However, it is worth noting that only one third (36%) were very satisfied and more than a quarter (26%) were dissatisfied. Not surprisingly, those whose application was refused were the least satisfied.

6.1.3 The quantitative survey also measured satisfaction with six elements of the planning process: awareness of where to go to find information about their planning application, simplicity of submitting an application, how well they were kept informed about their application progress, the length of time the application process took, the complexity of the application process and length of time taken to make a decision compared with expectations. Figure C below summarises planning applicant satisfaction with each of these elements.

Figure C: % agreeing / disagreeing with statements relating to elements of the planning application process (negative statements shown in red)



Base: all recent applicants (201 – except * = 182)

- 6.1.4 Across these elements, applicants were most positive about knowing 'where to go to find information about my planning application' and the simplicity of submitting an application. In the workshops, applicants tended to have used professional services for their application which helped to minimise the challenges faced with the process. A small number of workshop (successful) applicants also used the word 'fair' to sum up their impression of the process, for example accepting the requirement to make minor alterations to plans.

When I had mine done it was very straight forward – we didn't have any experience and we asked a few people and got an architect and he came in and drew up the plans and he did everything so we didn't have to do much, just sign the form. (Female, Caernarfon)

I made an application to the Council and I found the Council's website very helpful and the forms easy to complete. I also felt that the planning staff were helpful. . . . Some minor details had to be altered but nothing significant. It was fair. (Female, Cardiff)

I had to demolish a house or part of a house and I was lucky to have a chartered surveyor friend and he was a project manager so the whole thing about the next step, if you have someone who knows what they are doing it goes smoothly – it's having the knowledge. (Male, Cardiff)

- 6.1.5 The nature of the workshops also allowed participants to feed back (sometimes via written exercises) with several positive examples of interacting with the planning process as people affected by the applications of others. They included a case where the participant appreciated the opportunity to air her views on a neighbouring proposed extension. Following a site meeting involving interested parties, the application was rejected.

We and many other neighbours objected to a planning application put in by another neighbour because he wanted to alter his house and the result would have been very large and out of character. It would also have meant losing protected land. We attended a site meeting with the Council Planning Department and interested parties. The application was rejected. The owner of the house then sold up and moved. (Female, Cardiff)

- 6.1.6 In another example, the participant described how a local political party member helped to mobilise the community to encourage feedback on proposed planning developments in the area.

I live in [Cardiff suburb] and whatever has been built, . . . this lady who is [named political party] she has leaflets saying what's

going on and this is changing and then if you don't like it and you want to dispute it you can meet at the community centre, and it involves other people, to discuss their opinions and they give their views across and to say what they think about it and I think that way is a good way as it gives an opportunity to share your thoughts. (Male, Cardiff)

- 6.1.7 Similarly, the cases below relate to local residents being provided with the chance to give their opinion on a local housing planning application and Local Development Programme. The opportunities were welcomed especially where residents had concerns over the impact on local infrastructure.

An example is when a surveyor and contractors were looking to build new homes on a farm. However this would have huge implications for traffic and future travelling difficulties. A meeting was held in the community centre to discuss the concerns and planning arrangements. I thought this was good as this gave members in the residential area a voice that contributed to the area. (Male, Cardiff)

I attended a consultation meeting about the Cardiff LDP in Rhiwbina. It was a really well attended meeting with lots of information and discussion. It was well done and very worthwhile. The Councillors then emailed the plans and information to those that requested it. We felt very involved. (Female, Cardiff)

- 6.1.8 Dissatisfaction with the system was more likely to occur in relation to the speed of decision-making associated with the application and the perceived complexity of the process. 54 per cent of recent applicants agreed that the process 'takes far too long' and 43 per cent felt that it had taken longer than they had expected for a decision to be made. A similar number, 45 per cent, found that the planning process 'was complicated and confusing'.

It's a slow process, isn't it? By the time you put the plans in, get an architect and these things, you put your planning case to the Council and wait then for months for it to go to committee for a yes or no. (Male, Caernarfon)

Page after page of bullet points [on the Local Authority website] that actually make no sense . . . It's all waffle, if you read it out it would not make grammatical sense. . . . 'Do I have to make a planning application?' Well actually you can't tell if you do or you don't so then you have to ring up and they keep you on hold and when you speak to someone they don't know either and they refer you on . . . and it's just really awful. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 6.1.9 More specific examples of issues from the workshops relating to the perceived protracted process included having to ensure a specific type of window was used in a conservation area which took time, constantly having to contact the local planning department to try and find out the status of an application; having to resubmit plans; and a time period of several weeks to find out whether or not solar panels on a particular part of a building required planning permission.

We had to have special windows, we couldn't have normal Velux because it's conservation. . . . It took a long time; there was a lot to sort out. (Male, Haverfordwest)

[I was] on the phone regularly asking what was happening, and I found that when I hassled them enough I got answers but it's case of wasting a lot of time phoning again and again. (Female, Haverfordwest)

After four weeks, no reply [about the positioning of solar panels]. I contacted Planning and was told that the matter was still being dealt with. [Several] weeks later, another phone call. I was told the person dealing with it had gone off sick and the letter [to me] was found in the desk drawer, not posted. Ten days later I received it. In total it took [x] weeks for them to give us an answer: we didn't need planning. (Male, Haverfordwest)

- 6.1.10 Some participants in the workshops reiterated that they were dissatisfied with the perceived lack of influence the local community appeared to have despite strongly voicing opposition to a development. In the case below (provided in writing by the participant), they did not feel that the opposition were given sufficient time at a meeting to put the case against a housing development and that the process was biased towards those in favour of the planning application

Planning rejection process [is an issue]. The local community of [location in Pembrokeshire] participated in opposing a nearby housing development. The experience indicated that the whole process was stacked against the lay person. It favours the planning authority professionals and corporate developers. For example, the community is only allowed one person to represent their views and only three minutes is allowed to present an oral argument. This is inadequate. On such an important issue at least five to six minutes would be more reasonable. Additionally if the community loses the objection there is no appeal. If the County Council [sic] loses the decision, they have the right of appeal. (Female, Haverfordwest)*

(*In reality, it would be the developer who had the right of appeal rather than the Council.)

- 6.1.11 On a similar theme, one participant felt that the views of the local population were ignored when they objected to the locating of a women's refuge and subsistence misusers' centre in the participant's street.

A women's refuge was placed at the end of our street and a drug drop-in centre. The Council decided to place it in our location as it was close to the train station and a massive unused building. The building was [originally] donated to the people of [the area] for community activities. . . . Instead we [now] have a refuge which would be better located in a more run down poverty area. The planning was very underhand and residents were all against it but ignored, and it has gone ahead. (Female, Cardiff)

- 6.1.12 A related example from Caernarfon concerned the change of use of a building in the participant's neighbourhood from housing for older people to accommodation for those recovering from alcohol misuse.

The prime example is the elderly people's home and the owner wanted to change it, change the category, went to planning, planning granted. Now they're allowed to take reformed alcoholics, reformed drunks. We've appealed to Cardiff and nothing changed. (Male, Caernarfon)

- 6.1.13 The dissatisfaction with the local population's perceived inability to influence planning also included examples where participants did not feel informed of planning applications but were affected by them. Living opposite a small, half-full industrial estate, a participant found out that a new industrial estate was to be built on the same road, and with no sign of consultation or notice of the development. She first became aware of it when the heavy plant arrived on site. She was now concerned about the increased traffic, as she had two young daughters who regularly visited friends nearby.

I live on a quiet road, and there's a few houses and there was a small industrial park and only half the units are filled and they've now gone and built more industrial units down the road. They should surely concentrate on promoting what's already there before building but now I've got two small girls, they could walk across the road and go down the street to play with their friends. Now I've got to watch them cross the road because of the amount of traffic that's there. It's ridiculous. [I didn't know it was happening] until they started digging up the fields. The planning had already been passed and they'd started building. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 6.1.14 In a final example of dissatisfaction among those who had been affected by planning, a participant described how a new housing estate built opposite his home resulted in direct sight lines from the new

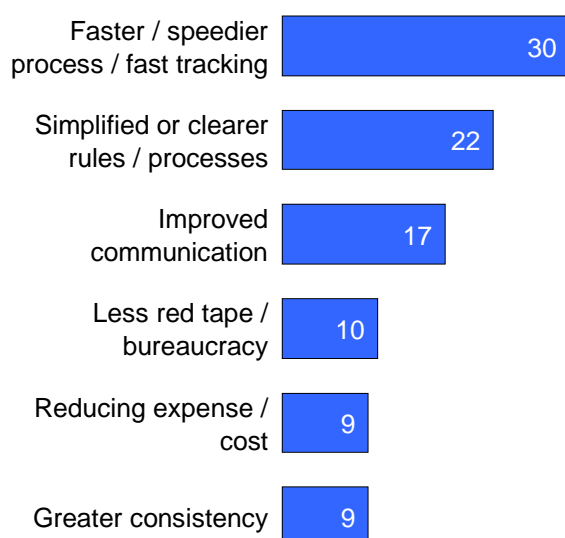
development into his daughters' bedrooms. He eventually had to move his daughters to other rooms in the house after he found an individual opposite looking into his daughters' bedroom. He had not been aware that the new housing development would be designed in this way. He did not think that the public's interest had been taken into account.

*I swapped bedrooms with my daughters because youngsters don't close the curtains and they just stand there looking into my daughters' bedrooms. . . . Once the house is built there's nothing you can do about it. . . . They just want to get the houses up and money in their pockets – they don't care about the other people.
(Male, Cardiff)*

6.2 Improving the planning application process

6.2.1 Despite the broadly positive satisfaction results from the quantitative survey among applicants, seven in ten still believed that the planning application process in Wales could be improved. Speed and simplification of the process were the key areas they felt needed to be addressed (see figure D below).

Figure D: Suggested improvements to the planning application process (main spontaneous suggestions, %)



Base: applicants who think process can be improved (139)

6.2.2 Suggestions for improvements from applicants and the general public in the workshops covered two main themes. The first was providing clear and accessible information on the process, particularly for those exploring the subject for the first time. There were calls for signposting to clear information on how to go about making a planning application, what the specific steps involved would be, and what to consider along the way that might affect the success or otherwise of the application –

which could in turn save the applicant time and money. The lack of knowledge among participants of what related to planning meant that some were looking for information that was not directly related to the subject (e.g. what kind of 'licences' builders are required to hold).

- 6.2.3 This form of help might be made available online and face to face, according to some participants.

It would be good to have access to information on how to make a planning application because when you go on websites it isn't clear and it doesn't give you a list of the issues you've got to consider when making a planning application. (Male, Haverfordwest)

If you could go to someone and they told you from the start this is what you need to do now if you're thinking of going to your architect, and these are the types of things we accept, it would take a lot less time, less time for them, less for the architect, and it would be much quicker. . . . You've got a better chance of it being passed, rather than letting people spend hundreds of pounds when they knew from the start it would be refused. (Female, Caernarfon)

If there was something saying 'What to do next, find a builder, make sure they have got a licence to carry rubbish etc.', all these things that we are responsible for as individuals now. If you're not involved in it, how do you know what to do? (Female, Cardiff)

- 6.2.4 There was also a suggestion for an accompanying information leaflet with paper based correspondence from the Local Authority Planning Department

'You have been granted planning permission. Read through this leaflet and this is the website which has got more information.' That would have been useful to me. (Female, Cardiff)

- 6.2.5 The second area for improvement to emerge from the workshops related to providing better public access to the decision-making process, and genuinely taking public interest and feedback into account, especially at the start of the planning application process. Improvements of this nature, they thought, would show that their voice really was being considered.

M: They should have a local meeting . . . explaining the situation, not saying 'we're going to build 400 houses'. M: It seems to be afterwards doesn't it [that there are public meetings]? (Cardiff)

It's a consultation before is what you need, like in our village when you get a consultation after, with everyone up in arms, it's after [the planning application goes ahead] we have the meeting. (Female, Caernarfon)

Maybe put it into the hands of the community more, but maybe it wouldn't work that way, I don't know. That's what I'd like to see, let the community have the 'yes' or 'no', as it's them it impacts most. (Male, Caernarfon)

- 6.2.6 In terms of finding out about a planning application there was a perception that planning notices placed on telegraph poles were not always easy to spot or read. There was a suggestion, therefore, that at least the printed notices could include a website address or phone number for the application detail and that the communications should be written in plain language.

They could put a website address so you could go straight to the website and see the plan . . . or a number to call the office to get them to send you a plan. (Female, Haverfordwest)

- 6.2.7 Some participants in Haverfordwest focused their suggested improvements to the planning system on improving the service provided by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. There were calls for the body to apply more 'common sense' to dealing with planning applications and restrictions (e.g. on exterior door colours) – and to be more reasonable; to reduce its bureaucracy; and to be more progressive from a design point of view.

*M: Control of the National Park [would be an improvement]. . . .
M: They are over the top and bureaucratic. (Haverfordwest)*

M: They've got to be more practical in their outlook of applications. . . . F: It's common sense isn't it? M: Of course it is, lack of sense. They seem to be stuck in the 1930s. I don't know why they want to keep everything looking like that. (Haverfordwest)

7. Key learnings from the research

- 7.1 In broad terms, the planning consultation and application process tended to be a positive experience for members of the public although they often received professional help with the application. This finding implies that their involvement in the detail of the process may have been limited.
- 7.2 Qualitatively, those *indirectly* involved in the planning system and process appeared slightly less positive than recent applicants (with some exceptions in Pembrokeshire): they were less likely to feel that their input had made any difference to the outcome of a particular application – normally one that involved a commercial developer.
- 7.3 In the quantitative survey, personal involvement with the planning system as an applicant resulted in slightly more positive views than among the public generally.
- 7.4 However, general levels of awareness and understanding of the planning system in Wales suggests that there is scope for better education for the public on this subject, from the practical perspective of the process and what is covered by planning, and also on the macro challenges the planning system faces, and what it is aiming to achieve.
- 7.5 The mixed attitudes towards the planning system, evident in both the survey and workshops, indicate an opportunity for reconnecting with the general public via the Planning Bill for Wales.
- 7.6 The criticism voiced towards planning concerning transparency, influence and fairness (also evident in the survey results) appeared to be quite deep-rooted for some participants in the workshops, but it was not always based on concrete or recent knowledge. Historic associations from the past could still hold sway because these participants had not encountered information to dispute these views. The perceived lack of information and transparency could lead the public to draw their own, less positive, conclusions on the rationale behind decisions made on (mostly commercial) planning applications.
- 7.7 This opportunity for reconnection may also prove valuable on high-interest topics which touch many people's lives, such as housing, economic development and job creation, and town centre decline.
- 7.8 A final challenge based on the research findings relates to communicating more effectively with the general public on how the planning process works, and where they can find clear sources of guidance in plain language. The apparent very low awareness of the planningportal.gov.uk website provides an immediate opportunity for helping to address this issue, for example by promoting it as widely as possible across Local Authority websites and through interactions with the public on the subject of planning. Promotion of the site may also help to overcome the limited awareness of planning's areas of responsibility, and begin to address the issue of perceptions of planning being affected by views on other areas not directly relevant (such as the transport examples described earlier in this report).

APPENDIX

Descriptions of key planning themes used in the workshops

Planning providing Affordable Housing – this refers to using the planning system to secure a percentage of new housing being built as affordable housing in order to provide an opportunity for people who cannot afford to buy houses in towns or rural areas to still live and work within the area that they wish to be.

Planning taking account of Climate Change – this refers to the need for Planning to consider how new and future developments will need to adapt over time due to climate change factors (e.g. increased rain and flooding or increased summer temperatures and drought) to ensure that these developments will remain safe for occupiers and also not have a detrimental impact on surrounding neighbours and other land over the lifetime of the development.

Planning contributing to economic development and job creation – this refers to the benefits that the planning system can bring to a town, city or region of Wales as a result of giving planning permission for land to be developed into new businesses, homes or factories, and the value that this brings to the economy in terms of goods and services, jobs, and the knock on effect for additional services (such as shops, leisure, and transportation) to support these new developments.

Planning and Energy supply – this refers to the role that the planning system has in allocating and granting consent for a range of energy facilities (i.e. nuclear power stations, wind turbines, solar farms, hydro-electricity stations) in the right places in Wales at the right time to ensure that society has a reliable and secure energy supply that is able to meet demands in order to keep the lights on in Wales.

Planning securing the conservation and preservation of the natural and built environment – this refers to the planning policies set out by local council's and the Welsh Government that identify certain buildings and structures as being historically important and worthy of protection. In relation to the natural environment planning needs to promote the conservation of landscapes and biodiversity and safeguard protected species from inappropriate development.

Planning delivering new housing – this relates to the role that planning plays in identifying suitable sites for new housing in development plans which can come forward to be built over a 15 to 20 year period (and beyond) to meet the needs of citizens in Wales. Planning also has a role in ensuring that new housing developments are well designed safe communities which can offer a range and choice of accommodation (i.e. from flats through to 5+ bed houses), are energy efficient, and are well located in relation to shops, schools and other facilities.

Planning creating socially balanced communities – this relates to the role that planning plays in considering the needs of all sectors of society in meetings its primary purpose of regulating the development and use of land in the wider public interest. For example it could include the need to ensure that new developments provide a mix of uses that will create more job opportunities suitable for both the skilled and unskilled workforce, or affordable places for people to live that look the same as private housing and are dispersed within the same development.

Planning tackling town centre decline – Whilst the planning system cannot prevent the closure of shops and services from occurring around Wales as a result of free market economics it does have a role in promoting the regeneration of town centres. This is achieved through a sequential test that identifies that any new shops should be developed within existing town centres first and only if suitable sites are not available should an edge of centre location be considered, and only if no edge of centre site is available should out of town retail development then be proposed.

Planning securing better transportation – This relates to how the planning system is used to ensure that new developments do not create additional burdens on transport systems, and where appropriate are developed in a way that can deliver positive benefits not only to the occupiers of the development but also the wider community (for example this could include a requirement to provide bus stops and subsidise a new bus service from the site to the town centre, or it may be a requirement to provide a park and ride scheme or improvements to existing roads and junctions).