

Recommendation	Response	Update April 2015
<p>Recommendation 1 - We recommend that as part of its revision of national planning policy on economic issues, the Welsh Government should ensure that Planning Policy Wales fully protects town centres from the potential impacts of out-of-town retail developments, and that the Government should also take steps to improve the implementation of national and local planning policy on the ground. (Page 14)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The proposed revised policy (Chapter 7 of Planning Policy Wales consultation ended on 5th March 2012) will require local planning authorities to adopt a more holistic approach to economic development and recognise that most land uses have some economic impact. Local authorities will be expected to consider the likely impacts of all development and adopt a “whole-economy” approach rather than look at proposals in isolation. In addition, the revised policy identifies that local authorities should seek to concentrate development that attracts large numbers of people, including retail and offices, in city, town and village centres.</p>	<p>The revised planning policy on economic development was published in Planning Policy Wales in October 2012. This was followed by the publication of Technical Advice Note (TAN) 23 in February 2014.</p> <p>TAN23 recognises retailing as an economic land use and gives policy advice to local planning authorities regarding weighing the economic benefits of new developments which includes steering development to the most sustainable locations.</p> <p>This advice complements the strong “town centres first” policy already contained in Planning Policy Wales.</p> <p>We will also be introducing secondary legislation this summer which will require planning permission for the installation of a mezzanine floor in retail buildings where the additional floorspace will be greater than 200 sq m. This will mean these developments will be assessed against existing national retail planning policy.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 2 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should guide local authorities towards making better use of their contractual agreements with out-of-town retailers to further protect the vitality of town centres. (Page 15)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>Regulations already make provision for contractual obligations to out-of-town developments and it is for local authorities to discuss and negotiate with developers and out-of-town retailers on such matters and protect the vitality of their town centres, as appropriate.</p> <p>As part of our review of regeneration, the Welsh Government will consider how we develop guidance for our partners to protect the vitality of town centres.</p>	<p>Local Planning Authorities can already place conditions on out of town planning permissions to control the types of goods sold so as to minimise the impact on town centres.</p> <p>We are considering strengthening our advice to local planning authorities on the use of conditions on planning applications in the current review of national retail planning policy.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 3 - We believe that examples of good practice in promoting town centres should be disseminated more widely, and recommend that the Centre for Regeneration Excellence in Wales (CREW) should develop its role in this area, including educating and encouraging professionals in the sector. (Page 15)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>This is an area where the Welsh Government will be looking to develop as part of our review of regeneration. We understand that CREW will shortly be launching a 'Small Towns: Policy and Practice Network' which is aimed at raising awareness of best practice in town centre regeneration and educating professionals in the sector. We will be working closely with CREW to support their activities.</p>	<p>CREW is the key organisation for the sharing of best practice on Wales; they launched a refreshed Welsh Towns Network in October 2014 and have established a new executive. CREW has supported Local Authorities and their delivery partners in the mobilisation of programmes under the regeneration framework, Vibrant and Viable Places, with its focus on town centres and seaside towns.</p> <p>As well as toolkits and research, they also build the capacity of the profession and community groups by conducting best practice visits (and publishing related case studies), conducting seminars and themed events eg. Meanwhile Uses. More information on the ongoing programme can be found here:</p> <p>http://regenwales.org/events.php</p>

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<p>Recommendation 4 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should commission more research on the effects that supermarkets can have on the quality of town centres in order to better inform and improve the impact analysis of proposed developments within the planning control system, and that local retail impact assessments should be obligatory for all supermarket proposals. (Page 17)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>We will commission research which will study the impact that new retail development has had on town centres in Wales. This will build upon the existing guidance about when retail impact assessments should be prepared, as we would expect that any change to current guidance should be based upon robust evidence which will be provided through the research.</p>	<p>In June 2013 Planning Division commissioned research consultants Genecon in to the dynamics of retail development in Wales to help inform a future review of retail planning policy and advice. The final report was published in April 2014.</p> <p>The report discusses recent trends in retailing and their potential implications and made 15 recommendations on potential changes to national planning policy.</p> <p>Following the completion of the research the Minister for Natural Resources agreed for officials to begin work on the review of retail planning policy advice, and this work is now underway.</p> <p>A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) has been established in order to inform this work.</p> <p>This will result in a refreshed Chapter 10 of Planning Policy Wales and a replacement draft Technical Advice Note (TAN) 4: Retailing and Town Centres, being published for consultation by Summer 2015.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 5 - We recommend that local planning authorities should be encouraged, within their Local Development Plan, to see office and work-place development as a means of increasing footfall within town centres, and that they should assess the possible outcomes of, and alternatives to, out-of-town office development proposals more carefully. (Page 18)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The proposed changes to Chapter 7 (Supporting the Economy) of Planning Policy Wales identify that local authorities should seek to concentrate development that attracts large numbers of people, including retail and offices, in city, town and village centres. This position is reinforced in Chapter 10 (Retail) of Planning Policy Wales, which identifies established town, district, local, and village centres as being the most appropriate locations for retailing, leisure and other complementary functions. It is for the local planning authority to demonstrate that they have a robust evidence base to support local and site specific strategies and policies contained within their Local Development Plans, which has been developed in conformity with national planning policy.</p>	<p>The revised planning policy on economic development was published in Planning Policy Wales in October 2012. This was followed by the publication of Technical Advice Note (TAN) 23 in February 2014.</p> <p>In addition, the Genecon report highlighted the need for additional guidance on the sequential approach to site selection and development management decision making. This issue is now being considered as part of the review of national retail planning policy.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 6 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should establish dedicated Ministerial leadership for town centres, including setting up a town centre policy forum chaired by the lead Minister, that would bring together officials from different Departments and key representatives from the private, public and voluntary sectors to share good practice and to identify a plan of action and monitoring framework for regenerating Wales's town centres. (Page 21)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>As Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage I have lead ministerial responsibility for town centre regeneration on behalf of the Welsh Government. This work is also supported by a number of external organisations and partnerships, including the National Regeneration Panel and CREW.</p>	<p>Town centre leadership is now with me as Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty.</p> <p>We have formed a Vibrant and Viable Places Ministerial Advisory Group, comprising a range of expertise across the public, private and voluntary sectors and across a range of disciplines pertinent to regeneration. The group is scrutinising our town centre policies and actions and we will publish its final advice in 2016.</p> <p>Officials from different Welsh Government departments meet regularly to consider town centre policy through the Vibrant and Viable Places Policy Board.</p> <p>We have issued a framework for monitoring town centre performance to the Local Authorities receiving Vibrant and Viable Places funding, and the first data collections will take place in April – May this year.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 7 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that the development of integrated and sustainable transport in Welsh town and city centres is a priority in the delivery of the National Transport Plan. Further, the Welsh Government should provide clear guidance to local authorities to ensure that transport integration is a core element of all town centre regeneration and redevelopment plans. (Page 24)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>Sustainable travel is one of the Welsh Government's priorities for transport. The Minister for Local Government and Communities recently prioritised the National Transport Plan in the context of delivering this Government's commitments to tackle poverty, increase well-being and assist economic growth. The continued development of integrated and sustainable transport in Welsh towns is a priority within the NTP, evidenced by the commitment to investment in the Sustainable Travel Centres initiative for at least another 3 years together with continued investment in, and promotion of, smarter choices interventions such as the Personalised Travel Planning initiative launched in Cardiff in September 2011.</p>	<p>The new draft National Transport Plan was closed to consultation on the 11 March 2015. The Plan focuses on five key priorities and sustainable travel and safety is one of these. Responses received from the consultation are currently being considered and the final Plan will be published in the spring.</p> <p>A similar priority was also stipulated in the Local transport Plan Guidance published by Welsh Government to local authorities.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 8 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should establish a rigorous performance monitoring framework and commission a detailed, independent evaluation of the Sustainable Travel Centre scheme. This should include assessment of the impact of each scheme on the vitality of the town centres involved, including access for people with disabilities. (Page 28)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The Welsh Government has a framework commission in place to deliver Personalised Travel Planning across Wales including School Travel Planning and Workplace Travel Planning. The contract was awarded in December 2010 for a four year period. Included within the framework is the requirement to carry out performance monitoring and evaluation. The proposed methodology for performance monitoring and evaluation is being considered by the Steering Group for Sustainable Travel Centres. Once agreed this will be resourced through this existing framework commission.</p> <p>We are also monitoring the impact of the infrastructure investment.</p>	<p>The 4 year Personalised Travel Planning programme completed in December 2014. An evaluation report on the projects undertaken in Cardiff, Pontypridd, Caerphilly and Mon a Menai has been submitted to the Welsh Government. The report is currently under consideration.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 9 - We believe that town centre businesses may need to operate more flexible working hours in order to meet changing customer needs. We therefore recommend that the Welsh Government should update its Technical Advice Note on Planning and Retailing to include guidance for local authorities about imposing conditions on retail development regarding more flexible working hours. (Page 29)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>We accept that our town centres are changing, as are shopping and leisure activities and consumer habits, with vacant premises offering potential for residential accommodation, including above shops and other ground floor services.</p> <p>Conditions cannot be introduced retrospectively to apply to the opening hours' conditions on existing developments. However, as part of the wider Planning Application Improvement Programme, work is ongoing to review Welsh guidance on the use of conditions with planning permissions; this will be subject to public consultation in due course. In considering whether a particular condition is necessary, planning authorities should ask themselves whether permission would have been refused if that condition were not imposed. Other factors which local planning authorities must include a consideration of whether a proposed condition is relevant to planning, is enforceable, and reasonable in all other respects.</p> <p>The need to update Technical Advice Note 4 will be considered in light of the research referred to in response to Recommendations 1 and 4.</p>	<p>Local Planning Authorities can already place conditions on out of town planning permissions to control the types of goods sold so as to minimise the impact on town centres.</p> <p>We are considering strengthening our advice to local planning authorities on the use of conditions on planning applications in the current review of national retail planning policy.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 10 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should work with local authorities to develop planned and innovative approaches that incentivise property owners to let their vacant town centre properties for living and working uses that would contribute to the vitality of town centres but would not undermine the properties' long-term value. (Page 30)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>We are already supporting projects and programmes, such as the Housing Renewal Area, that can act as catalysts to bring empty properties back into use and make a valuable contribution to the vitality of a town centre. We are working with partners to address issues around empty properties and will further explore opportunities in this area.</p>	<p>Many Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) projects and Town Centre Loan projects support incentives to town centre landlords to make best use of their properties and contribute better to town centre vibrancy. For example, in Flintshire and in Newport VVP funding will be used to turn rooms above shops into good quality town centre housing and to improve town centre shop frontages.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 11 - We recommend that Cadw should continue with its characterisation studies of towns and villages and that they form an integral part of any regeneration scheme. We also recommend that the Welsh Government should make greater use of the Design Review Service and encourage its development partners to do the same. (Page 33)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>We see Characterisation Studies as an important tool in developing an appreciation of the history and character of a place and Characterisation will be an integral part of future regeneration schemes. Cadw will continue to deliver Characterisation Studies for selected towns, and will offer advice and guidance to ensure that future development is informed by an understanding of historic character.</p> <p>We will encourage the greater use of the Design Commission for Wales' Design Review Service for our town centre regeneration activities and will encourage our partners in regeneration to utilise this service.</p>	<p>Cadw published two further 'Understanding Urban Character' reports in March 2015, covering Merthyr Tydfil and Pembroke. Studies completed, not yet published but available as drafts include Hafod and the Lower Swansea valley, and Holyhead. Cadw is also working on a practice guide 'Managing Local Historic Character', to explain why it is important to recognise historic character in conservation, regeneration and planning, and how to respond to it.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 12 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should review national planning policy and guidance for retailing and town centres to ensure that local planning authorities set out a positive vision for all their town centres and high streets in their Local Development Plan, and to provide a strong planning application decision-making framework for ensuring appropriate development can be guided to suitable locations that are highly accessible by sustainable transport. (Page 35)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The Welsh Government considers that the proposed changes to Chapter 7 of Planning Policy Wales will address this recommendation. It requires local authorities to establish an evidence base of the economic characteristics of their areas, and to develop appropriate development plan policies based upon informed assumptions about possible changes, having regard to national economic policies. The guidance in Chapter 8 (Transport) and Chapter 10 (Retailing and Town Centres) of Planning Policy Wales provides a hierarchy to inform decisions on the location of new development and clearly identifies the importance of securing sustainable transport.</p>	<p>The Genecon report highlights the importance of town centres having a clear vision, strategy or Masterplan in place to guide and formulate policy development in Local Development Plans.</p> <p>We are considering strengthening our advice to local planning authorities on the use of masterplans and town centre strategies in the current review of national retail planning policy.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 13 - We recommend that within the framework of the Local Development Plan, each town should have a comprehensive plan in place, developed by a local partnership of key stakeholders and engaging the community, which contains actions for addressing the issues affecting the viability of the town centre. (Page 37)</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>We accept the thrust of the Committee's recommendation. This is a matter for local authorities to take forward through the evidence base and community involvement scheme required to ensure the progress of sound Local Development Plans.</p> <p>Conformity with national planning policy forms part of the test of soundness of the Local Development Plan, and is assessed by an independent Inspector. In respect of community engagement, the Local Planning Authority is required to produce a Community Involvement Scheme setting out how the authority will involve the community in all stages of LDP preparation and the people or groups who should be involved.</p> <p>We will be looking to strengthen this aspect further as part of our review of regeneration.</p>	<p>The Genecon report highlights the importance of town centres having a clear vision, strategy or Masterplan in place to guide and formulate policy development in Local Development Plans.</p> <p>We are considering strengthening our advice to local planning authorities on the use of masterplans and town centre strategies in the current review of national retail planning policy.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 14 - We believe that the key to success in town centre regeneration at a local level is strong, effective leadership. We therefore recommend that the Welsh Government should consider how better to support people who have the necessary skills and the respect of the local community to act as champions for bringing together the different aspects and players in town centre regeneration. (Page 38)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The success of town centre regeneration schemes are often attributed to the dedication and enthusiasm of local individuals with strong leadership qualities. We will explore how best to support local leadership as part of our consideration of options for future investment.</p>	<p>We have provided a new £845K regeneration fund to support twenty Town Centre Partnerships across Wales which are encouraging activities which contribute to improved town centre performance. The funding will increase the capacity to provide the leadership for such partnerships.</p> <p>CREW, through our grant funding, facilitates the Welsh Towns Network to develop skills and leadership in this area.</p>
<p>Recommendation 15 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should help local authorities and communities to be proactive in seeking and accessing sources of investment for town centre regeneration projects where public funding is unavailable. (Page 40)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>We accept this recommendation, although we do need to manage expectations in terms of the levels of investment available, and any relevant requirements, for example, the return required.</p>	<p>Every Local Authority in Wales has the benefit of a named Welsh Government Regeneration Manager. Each is receiving some direct investment for town centre regeneration in grants or loan from us, but the Regeneration Managers have a brief to support Local Authorities in using innovative approaches to support town centres in all areas.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 16 - We recommend that the Welsh Government's independent panel on business rates should consider changes in legislation and in the application of discretionary powers, with the aim of improving the mix and quality of the retail offer in town centres. (Page 43)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The independent panel on business rates is aware of the Committee's recommendation and the wider issues relating to the regeneration of town centres. This will be considered as part of its final report which is expected before the end of March. The Welsh Government will consider the Panel's recommendations and will respond to its final report in the summer.</p>	<p>Since the recommendation was made in January 2012, the Business Rates Task and Finish Group and the Business Rates Panel have made a number of recommendations, many of which support the retail sector and town centres through the business rates regime.</p> <p>These measures have included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting local authorities to use their discretionary business rates powers to offer reliefs (including the Wales Retail Relief Scheme and Open for Business Scheme); • the extension of Small Business Rate Relief; • the capping of Business Rates Bill increases at 2%. <p>More broadly business rates have recently been devolved to Wales and this will provide Wales with the financial and policy flexibility to develop the right regime for Wales.</p>

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<p><u>Recommendation 17 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should consider developing a pilot scheme, within EU competition rules and in partnership with local authorities and property owners, which helps new businesses set up in town centres. (Page 44)</u></p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The Welsh Government will consider this as part of its proposals for future investment.</p>	<p>See response to Rec. 16 above.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 18 - We recommend that during negotiations over draft legislative proposals for EU Structural Funds 2014-2010, the Welsh Government should seek to ensure that the new Regulations are sufficiently flexible to enable the Funds to be used to support town centre regeneration activities in the next round. (Page 45)</u></p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Within the current EU Convergence programme a total of 24 town centre regeneration projects have been approved by WEFO totalling around £270 million of investment. The Welsh Government is currently making the case, in discussions with the UK Government and EU institutions, for continuing investment of EU Structural Funds. Town centre regeneration will be considered as part of this process.</p>	<p>The Welsh Government was closely involved in the negotiation of the 2014-2020 Structural Funds regulations, championing flexibility, integration and simplification. The final regulations allow for the investment in a range of infrastructure, which could potentially include town centre regeneration actions.</p> <p>The type of action supported in Wales will all depend on the contribution to the specific objectives and results of the programmes. The types of investment are a means to an end, not the end in themselves. This might mean different infrastructure investments could deliver greater impacts.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 19 - We recommend that the Welsh Government should commission a full and transparent assessment of the effectiveness of the Swansea Business Improvement District (BID) and consult with a broad range of stakeholders to inform further BID development in Wales. (Page 47)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>The Welsh Government is currently working with partners to consider the effectiveness of BIDs and the potential for them to be utilised elsewhere in Wales. With Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Area funding we are supporting the development of a BID in Merthyr Tydfil which will hold a ballot between its town's businesses this summer. We will be looking to learn the lessons from the Merthyr experience and we will commission a review of BIDs within and beyond Wales, including Swansea. We will also explore the potential for utilising current and future EU Structural Funds to support business competitiveness through the Welsh BID model. Stakeholders should register any related project ideas via the WEFO website.</p>	<p>We commissioned a report to assess the effectiveness of existing BIDs in Wales and to explore the further progress of BIDs development. The report was completed in June 2013 and is available on our website.</p> <p>The Welsh Government announced funding of £203k in January 2014 to support the development of proposals in Wales.</p> <p>We are currently supporting ten areas: Abergavenny; Aberystwyth; Bridgend; Llanelli; Neath; Pant & Merthyr Industrial Estates; Pontypridd; Caernarfon; Bangor and Colwyn Bay.</p> <p>A successful ballot must be held in each area before a BID can be established and ballots will take place during 2015.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 20 - We recommend that the Welsh Government through Visit Wales should encourage town partnerships to market their unique selling points such as architectural heritage and environmental quality, local produce and local culture, perhaps involving groups of towns within a region so that their different offers can complement each other. This could be part of the town centre plan we recommended above. (Page 49)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>Visit Wales already takes this approach and the Welsh Government will continue to work with local authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that this activity delivers even greater value in future. Visit Wales is actively involved in encouraging local businesses and all those involved in an area's tourism offer to work together and collectively promote an area as a tourism destination. There is a dedicated website, www.dmwales.com, to encourage this tourism destination development and help create a complete experience for visitors by drawing together all the tourism assets within an area. Visit Wales also works closely within Regeneration Areas to ensure that tourism plays an important role in town centre regeneration activities.</p>	<p>Welsh Government continues to work with the key destination management partnerships around Wales, with each having agreed actions and recommendations within their destination management plans for improving their town centre offer. The tourism sector continues to provide both capital and revenue funding that can be used to improve the town centre offer across Wales.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 21 - We believe that the Welsh Government should develop a robust framework for the design, development and delivery of town centre regeneration projects in which objectives and targets can be clearly set; data collected; where outcomes and impacts can be measured; and performance and success evaluated and compared. (Page 50)</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>As stated in the introduction to this response, I have announced that we will undertake a review into our current regeneration activities and the seven Regeneration Areas, in particular. The intention is to establish what works well and learn from these recent activities. In terms of our future programmes of investment we will ensure that a framework is developed to effectively measure our performance in regeneration.</p>	<p>We are developing a robust framework to effectively measure our performance in regeneration, in particular the Vibrant and Viable Places programme.</p> <p>We have recently issued to Local Authorities a manual to measure town centre performance in Vibrant and Viable Places areas, building on an established methodology.</p> <p>We are commissioning a process evaluation of Vibrant and Viable Places to understand what has worked well and what there is to learn about the design and implementation of this programme. We expect to publish the evaluation report in the summer.</p>