

Response to the Welsh Assembly Consultation
**A Living Wales – a new framework for our
environment, our countryside and our
seas**

5th December 2010

Introduction

The Landscape Institute (LI) is an educational charity and chartered body responsible for protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Institute's accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. Landscape Institute Wales (LIW) is the Welsh branch of the LI. LIW represents members of the Institute in Wales, and promotes the profession to a range of audiences.

Consultation Response

The LI has responded to this consultation as a stakeholder able to assist with delivering 'A Living Wales – a new framework for our environment, our countryside and our seas' and welcomes the principles of this framework. This document focuses on several key issues and policy areas which need to reflect the new approach and deliver this framework effectively and efficiently and then goes on to explain how landscape professionals are able to assist the Assembly with this work.

Green Infrastructure

The LI considers that the key issue to successfully implementing the objectives of the framework is the clear recognition of the significance of green infrastructure (GI) in driving this initiative forwards. The framework must highlight how GI provision is critical in meeting the challenge of taking a truly integrated approach to the management of our environment. The multifunctional approach of GI involves planning, design, implementation and management and presents an opportunity to achieve many social, environmental and economic objectives.

Natural assets are often seen as separate entities— afterthoughts in the discipline of land use planning which gives priority to 'grey infrastructure' at the expense of the natural environment. This approach fails to recognise the symbiosis between the quality and connectivity of natural assets with local environmental and economic performance. The result can be a disconnected series of inadequately-managed natural elements which deliver far fewer public benefits than could be provided.

Overcoming this failure — of policy, investment and service delivery —relies on the recognition that the natural environment has a critical role to play in sustaining life, and the quality of that life, through the provision of a range of different functions. It relies on an understanding that these functions are multiplied and enhanced significantly when the natural environment is planned and managed as an integrated whole; a managed network of green spaces, habitats and places providing benefits which exceed the sum of the individual parts. It is this concept of connectivity and multifunctionality which makes the GI approach such an important part of landscape planning and management. The concern for the natural environment goes beyond environment for environment's sake.

Planning to safeguard and extend green infrastructure assets is central to ensuring the continued flow of ecosystem services to our society, recognising the importance of eco-connectivity in maintaining functioning ecosystems and their biodiversity, and building in resilience to meet future challenges and needs.

Planning in Wales

The Welsh environment is itself a major component of the Welsh economy - the ultimate source of many income streams and much of our employment, and a potential key to future economic strength built on 'green & blue technologies' and the attractiveness of Wales as a place to live and work. As mentioned in the consultation document, the WAG Economic Renewal Strategy issued in July recognises that role and the opportunities arising from it.

The LI fully supports the work carried out in the document 'Towards a Green Infrastructure Strategy' produced by WYG Planning and Design for the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). This document explains clearly how GI fully supports the themes of the Wales Spatial Plan.

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dpsp/report/walesspatialplan/100910sewnermainrepen.pdf>

This report also clearly shows how developing our 'Green Infrastructure' can not only improve our natural environment but also deliver social and economic benefits, as part of sustainable development that improves the lives and well-being of our communities. The report shows how this 'green infrastructure for sustainable development' approach could work in South East Wales, and offers a toolkit for delivery across Wales. The LI would like this approach to be adopted by WAG as a strategy for implementation of this framework.

Useful exemplar case studies, which demonstrate the potential of the green infrastructure approach, are also contained within this report. The case studies illustrate different green infrastructure focal points or policy objectives: addressing the needs of deprived communities, supporting economic regeneration, enhancing ecological connectivity and flood risk management. Also of importance, they illustrate that collaborative working across local authority boundaries on key green infrastructure matters will produce greater benefits.

The LI recommends that in order for this framework to be successfully implemented, regional and local planning authority GI strategies should be prepared, most usefully in conjunction with relevant neighbouring authorities, based upon surveys of needs, opportunities and potential. Regional GI strategies would reflect the geographical rather than political boundaries required for effective delivery.

The LI also recommends that one way of achieving many of the commitments of the European Landscape Convention is to allow for incorporation of and consideration of GI strategies into current planning frameworks as well as greater emphasis on overall landscape planning. This will allow the Assembly to deliver a much greener and more sustainable future than is possible under the planning system as it currently exists.

Landscape planning recognises the action and interaction of natural and human factors taking place in a particular area is a positive planning activity which is normally focused at district, or regional level. It works with the existing landscape and its various areas of character, and seeks to direct development into the best places, where the development can be located not merely in a functional manner, but also where the development will fit well into the landscape, and sit well with the adjacent existing and desired land uses. It also takes account of natural habitats, and seeks to reconcile the needs of farming and forestry for change and growth, with the need to keep the integrity and unspoilt appearance of the landscape intact.

The LI Wales proposes the inclusion of landscape plans and landscape policies as an integral part of planning system in Wales, in order to ensure that future change takes into consideration the importance of the landscape as the context for sustainable development and that GI strategies are adopted.

The LI appreciates that it will be difficult for planning authorities to allocate resources in-house to carry out the necessary work involved in surveys, strategy preparation and delivery. There should however be considerable opportunity for economies of scale through a coordinated approach working with other departments, other authorities and organisations, thus spreading the load, sharing skills and achieving more effective results. The LI agrees that this would be benefited by the restructuring of the activities of some of the key delivery agencies in Wales to enable a more integrated and sustainable view of environmental management based on the ecosystems approach set out in the framework.

How can the LI assist the Welsh Assembly in the delivery of this framework?

Landscape practitioners are engaged in every stage of the GI approach and are heading a revolution in the way in which GI is developed. This includes the planning of environmental resources, the design of new public realm, implementation of strategy and the management of delivered projects. Landscape practitioners have a pivotal role to play with other professionals in all stages of a GI process, which operates at all spatial scales.

Landscape practitioners are trained in a broad range of disciplines with an ability to think holistically and see the bigger picture. This means that the profession understands the many processes at work which shape the land and appreciates the need to consider potential changes to which a particular location could be subjected over time. The result is a profession that is ideally placed to provide the vision and tenacity needed for the sustainable development of our GI assets.

The LI recommends that the Welsh Assembly and other keystone holders involved in the development of 'A Living Wales' framework consult the organisation's position statement on the subject of GI:

http://www.landscapeinstitute.org/PDF/Contribute/GreenInfrastructurepositionstatement13May09_001.pdf

This document also contains a series of useful case studies which illustrate the successes of GI at a range of different levels.

Furthermore we would like to see the LI specifically mentioned as a key organisation within this area of work as our members play a critical role in the science, planning, design, implementation and management of landscapes. Additionally the Landscape Institute has an interest in the marine environment, particularly from the seascape perspective of off-shore developments being an area in which some of our members are involved.

Additional examples of successful small scale case studies in Wales adopting the approach of this framework can be found on the following websites:

http://www.salixrw.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=92&Itemid=303&lang=en

http://www.salixrw.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=89&Itemid=238&lang=en

Conclusion

The LI welcomes this framework initiative to reconsider how to deliver sustainable development and an integrated approach to the management of the environment. The approach is supported in principle and the LI recommends that the documents mentioned in this response are used by the Welsh Assembly to turn this approach into action. The content of this consultation document, however, does not reflect the emphasis of its objectives; it appears to have far more content on biodiversity-related issues and very little on GI. The framework needs to produce a strategy in addressing the particular challenges involved in dealing with the successful delivery of landscape, biodiversity and technical aspects of GI implementation.

The L.I. Wales believes that the inclusion of GI strategies and landscape planning as an integral part of the planning system would raise the standard of development and landscape dramatically, and would bring about a range of long-lasting benefits for the welsh landscape, for sustainable development, and above all for the people of Wales.

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