

Volunteer Bulletin

Planning Aid Wales: Working towards a fairer planning system

July / August 2007 Bulletin No. 3

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Greetings

Welcome to the July / August edition of the PAW volunteer bulletin. We have ambitions for the bulletin which go beyond the need to keep you, our most valuable resource, up-to-date with current PAW work. For instance the bulletin can give PAW volunteers, a group of like-minded and committed people, opportunities to network, learn from each other and let off steam. It also allows us, the staff team, to tempt you to get more involved in the increasing spread of PAW activities. From taking on new cases, to helping out with training, attending promotional events,

helping develop policy responses, and preparing publications and guidance leaflets, volunteers have a key role. And it's not all one-way traffic – we are finding that volunteers who take up the opportunities to broaden their experience often benefit, both personally and professionally. The benefits come in the form of the new perspectives, experiences and contacts which greater involvement in planning aid can bring.

We hope you enjoy the combination of work updates, news, volunteer cases, events and opinion which follow, and that you feel inspired to



Elwyn Thomas

contribute to future editions. It's your bulletin, so please do feel free to submit articles or updates for subsequent editions. Any suggestions for improving content are always welcome.

And finally, we send the volunteer bulletin to a range of organisations and people who have an interest in the planning aid movement in Wales. If you have any suggestions for contacts to add to the distribution list, please contact James Davies in the Cardiff office.

Elwyn Thomas
Chief Executive

Latest News

Welsh Language Scheme 2007- 2010

Following volunteer consultation in last month's bulletin and open consultation on our website, the PAW Welsh Language Scheme was given the go ahead by the PAW Board at its July meeting. The Scheme has since received formal approval from the Welsh Language Board.

Volunteer Audit 2007

The Volunteer Audit was rolled out at the end of July, and 60% of our volunteers have responded so far. The information provided has proved very useful, and it would be appreciated if remaining volunteers would complete and return the questionnaire ASAP. Please contact James Davies for more information.

Gypsy and Traveller consultation

PAW volunteers Huw Thomas and Neil Harris helped design PAW's consultation on the draft circular *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Sites* earlier this year. A final report with recommendations has been submitted to WAG - if you would like a copy, just drop Marika a line on marikafusser@btconnect.com.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.planningaidwales.org.uk



Swansea University: Location of the Planning Summer School and the PAW Annual General Meeting 2007.

(source: Planning Summer School website)

Caseload Update

At present, only a small proportion of PAW cases are being referred on to volunteers. We would like to use our volunteers more, so if you are able to take on casework over the coming month or two, please contact James Davies on 02920 4640205 or email: james.paw@btconnect.com

Swansea housing allocations

Following an enquiry to PAW from a community group in Swansea, I was asked to assist with a policy matter relating to housing allocations. In short, the community group felt that the local

planning authority had not adequately considered objections to proposed housing allocations. Faced with a shortage of housing land the authority had moved to adopt housing allocations in their draft UDP before a Public Inquiry had been held into the Plan.

Although relatively uncommon, this move by the LPA is regarded as being acceptable. However, it had led to public concern that objections raised to housing sites were not given proper consideration. On further investigation, it became apparent that full consultation with the public, and

particularly those objecting to housing sites had been undertaken, and there had been opportunities to raise concerns at a Public Inquiry before an Independent Inspector.

I was able to relay my findings to the community group and reassure them that the LPA had dealt with the matter in an inclusive manner and that the issues raised by objectors had been considered at an independent inquiry.

**Ste James,
PAW volunteer**

Recent Activities

PAW presence at the National Eisteddfod

PAW shared a stand with One Voice Wales at this year's National Eisteddfod in Mold. Our presence was greatly enhanced by new exhibition posters which helped to generate real interest in our services. Special thanks to volunteer Owain Wyn for helping to man the stand.

Training for Community and Town Councillors

Many thanks to volunteers Allan Archer, Dave Lucas, Jon Talbot, Kay Powell, Lucie Taylor and Owain Wyn who have helped deliver seven 'taster' training sessions to

One Voice Wales members over recent months. The sessions have been extremely well received and will be followed later this year by more in-depth seminars led jointly by a professional trainer and a PAW volunteer. Please let Marika know if you are interested in helping out.

PAW Annual General Meeting 2007

This year's Annual General Meeting was held on 11th September as a 'fringe' event of the Planning Summer School at Swansea University. Members were elected to our Board of Management and the 2006/07 Annual Report was launched. There was also a

very interesting talk given by Susan Alexander of the Traveller's Aid Trust, which worked with PAW as a partner on a recent consultation project carried out for WAG. Susan explained the important role that planning can play in helping marginalised traveller communities overcome discrimination. If you would like to receive further information on this project, please contact Marika.

We will be sending a copy of the Annual Report to all our volunteers.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.planningaidwales.org.uk

Brecon access workshop: April 2007

When asked by PAW to help the Brecknock Access Group set up and run an access workshop, my first move was to refresh my knowledge of the relevant national planning policy, including the then current WAG consultation. My second was to draft a rough programme based on what BAG wanted, and my third to contact planners at the Brecon Beacons National Park.

It helped to know them – in fact a former colleague Chris Morgan had recently joined as Chief Planner, so it was just a question of ‘phoning a friend’. He was very helpful and spared two of his staff for an

hour and a half to talk about development plan and development control issues relevant to access. Their presence turned this into a workshop facilitated (rather than given) by PAW – a good model.

Many thanks to Richard Jenkins (Forward Planning), and Matthew Sherwood (DC), for fitting this in to their very busy schedules. Their being there to explain procedures and answer questions was much appreciated by the twenty BAG members who attended. It was also tremendously helpful that Park Board member Jackie

Charlton, champion for equal opportunity, also attended. She was able to give the member perspective, and proposed that BBNP should set up a steering group with BAG members to draft the Access SPG which otherwise would not be progressed due to lack of resources. The workshop gave the Group a good opportunity to refine their response to the WAG consultation document.

With very thoughtful timing, Hannah Budnitz had organised a seminar on access issues for Young Planners Wales a few nights before the workshop.

The invitation was extended to ‘oldies’ and I jumped at the chance to attend. This ensured that I was up-to-date on current and future policy requirements as we had authoritative speakers from WAG and Disability Wales.

The programme and text I used for the PAW-facilitated workshop is available from Planning Aid Wales – you can use, or draw from, this or contact me for more information.

Kay Powell,
PAW Volunteer
Tel: 02920 563001

Upcoming Events

Planning Aid Wales Quiz Night

25th October 2007

Back by popular demand, the next Planning Aid Wales Quiz Night will be held at 7pm on Thursday 25th October in O’Neils bar in Cardiff. The quiz night is being held in conjunction with the RTPI Young Planner’s Network and will be an ideal opportunity to network and socialise with other volunteers and planners in Wales.

The quiz itself will be a general knowledge quiz (with maybe a few planning questions thrown in!), and a

number of prizes will be available. If you would like to attend, or form a team, please contact James Davies for more information.

CFSN Conference

11th / 12th October 2007

The Communities First Support Network is a consortium of eight national voluntary sector organisations that work across Wales to provide support to community organisations, partnerships and others involved in the Communities First programme. Planning Aid Wales has been invited to

attend the event to deliver a workshop entitled ‘*How to make the planning system work for you*’. We will also be having a stand with leaflets etc. at the event over the two days.

The workshop aims to give participants valuable insights into how they can use the land use planning system to help achieve their community’s objectives.

If any volunteers wish to attend to help deliver the workshop or to help out on our stand, please contact James Davies.

Non-PAW Events Diary

If you would like any more information on these events, please contact Sandra Watson on 02920 464225.

19th / 20th September 2007 (Rhyl)

BURA conference: *The Social Challenges of the Seaside*

27th September 2007 (Newport)

Regeneration Skills Collective Wales Annual Conference: *Delivering Regeneration 4*



We are always keen to hear your opinions, whether they be on issues specific to the work of Planning Aid Wales, or wider planning or voluntary sector issues.

Opinion

The value of volunteering

Despite recent reforms aiming to increase community participation in planning issues, the planning system is just as complex for the public as ever before. The introduction of the Local Development Plan is an example of just how complicated things can get – there is a real need for greater simplicity and consistency in the mechanisms which determine how planning decisions are made.

The idea of ‘change for the sake of change’ and the

adoption of marketing theory within central government (i.e. repackaging the product) needs to be avoided at all costs. Regular reorganisations and reviews shake public confidence in the system and its ability to deal with the day-to-day decisions that impact on the general public. So until decision makers begin to focus on improving what we already have, the role of Planning Aid volunteers will remain just as important as ever before.

Communities need a fall-back position where independent advice and support is available to help navigate an

otherwise complex nightmare of planning principles, regulations and legal issues. Although Planning Aid can't always resolve these issues, volunteers can continue to provide sound planning advice and promote mutual understanding by acting as an independent link between the public and local planning authorities. The work is satisfying and is appreciated by the community, and the value of the experience for the volunteer cannot be underestimated.

**Ste James,
PAW volunteer**

Planning News Roundup

Planning White Paper

Consultation on the Planning White Paper is now over, but there is the possibility of further consultation later this year in Wales. The PWP proposes a new system for deciding major infrastructure projects, including new approaches to community engagement, assembling a panel of independent expert decision makers and new inquiry procedures. It also proposes a simplified regime for householder applications such as extensions and conservatories. For more information visit:

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/606>

Welsh Assembly Government

First Minister Rhodri Morgan has unveiled his new Cabinet for the Welsh Assembly Government. The Cabinet includes: Jane Davidson, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing; Ieuan Wyn Jones, Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport; Dr Brian Gibbons, Minister for Social Justice and Local Government; Elin Jones, Minister for Rural Affairs; and Rhodri Glyn Thomas, Minister for Heritage. For more information visit:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/?lang=en>

Affordable housing in Wales

Leighton Andrews, Deputy Minister with responsibility for housing, has set out the Assembly Government's plans for improving the supply of affordable housing in Wales.

For more information visit: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/?lang=en>

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The RTPI has recently set up a new Rural Planning Network. The Network aims to bring together individuals who work in rural areas or have an interest / involvement in rural planning to discuss solutions to the challenges facing rural communities. To find out more or how to join visit:

http://www.rtpi.org.uk/rural_planning_network/

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Media

Website revamp update

We are developing a brief for tenders from web design firms, and would like to ask volunteers with experience of working with reputable design firms to get in touch. We are looking for reliable, confident designers with good experience in public sector projects, and ideally the ability to develop sites in both English and Welsh.

Moving online

The recent volunteer audit has suggested a number of ways in which PAW might move to improve the delivery of our services.

As we build our online presence via the new website, we are considering the possible benefits of moving more of our case management and volunteer

liaison activities online. But before moving ahead with this, we would like to know what our volunteers think? Any comments or suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

For more information, please contact James Davies

RTPI Networks

RTPI Networks provide a voice for everyone with an interest in the planning profession. The networks have a strong track record of generating and spreading knowledge and good practice.

Network members come from all sectors including government, consultancies, academia and not-for-profit organisations, and cover all

levels of experience. Generally, networks are virtual communities but members also meet face-to-face at events and conferences as well as receiving regular email bulletins with all the latest news and information.

Rhian Brimble,
PAW Volunteer

For more information, please visit:

RTPI Development Management Network:

http://www.rtpi.org.uk/development_management_network/

RTPI Development Planning Network

http://www.rtpi.org.uk/development_planning_network/

In the Next Issue...

Thanks to Kay Powell, Ste James and Rhian Brimble for contributions to this issue. If any volunteers are interested in submitting articles for the next issue of the volunteer bulletin, please don't hesitate to contact James Davies.

We are committed to involving Planning Aid Wales volunteers more in the core work of the organisation, and a regular volunteer update bulletin will be a key part of this. We would particularly welcome articles from

volunteers writing articles on any subject they choose for the next issue.

The next issue will be mailed out in November.