

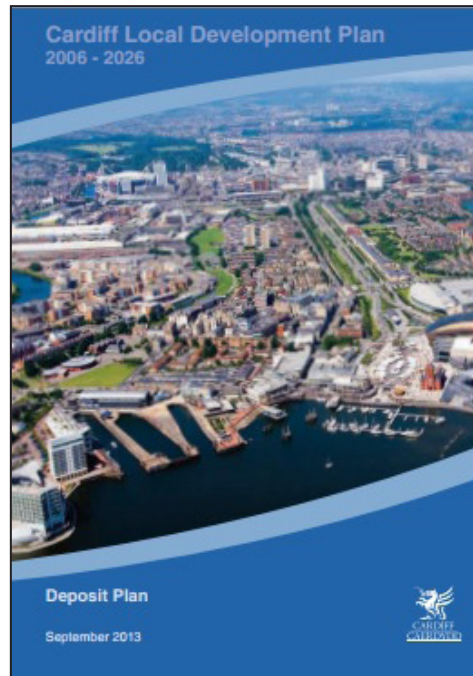
# aboutwales

Civic society network / Case study

## Engaging with planning policy: Cardiff Civic Society

Like many other societies Cardiff Civic Society maintains a watching brief over the planning application list and, where relevant, makes comments and responses to major applications and other selected applications of note. For many years a representative of the society also sat on the local authority's conservation area advisory committee, but this has proved difficult to sustain. However, in addition, and potentially with a more far reaching impact, the civic society engages with the local authority's planning policy process.

The UK's planning system is plan led. Decisions made by a local authority (or planning inspector) on a planning application are made using planning policy. In Wales there is national planning policy and guidance (Planning Policy Wales, Technical Advice Notes, Mineral Advice Notes) which guides the planning policy and guidance that every local planning authority in Wales must produce. Local Development Plans (previously Unitary Development Plans) and Supplementary Planning Guidance are the local level planning policy and guidance. The Local Development Plan, or LDP, sets out a local authority's proposals and policies for future development and use of the



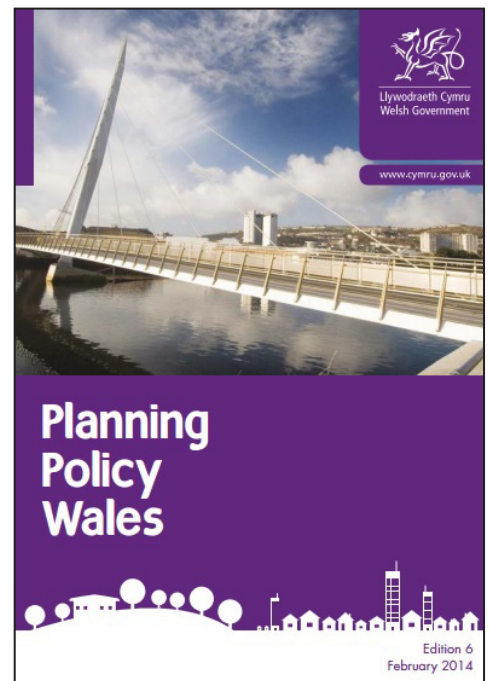
land in its area. It is this that is used by the local planning authority to make decisions on, for example, the planning application for 25 houses, on commercial or industrial development or development on greenfield sites.

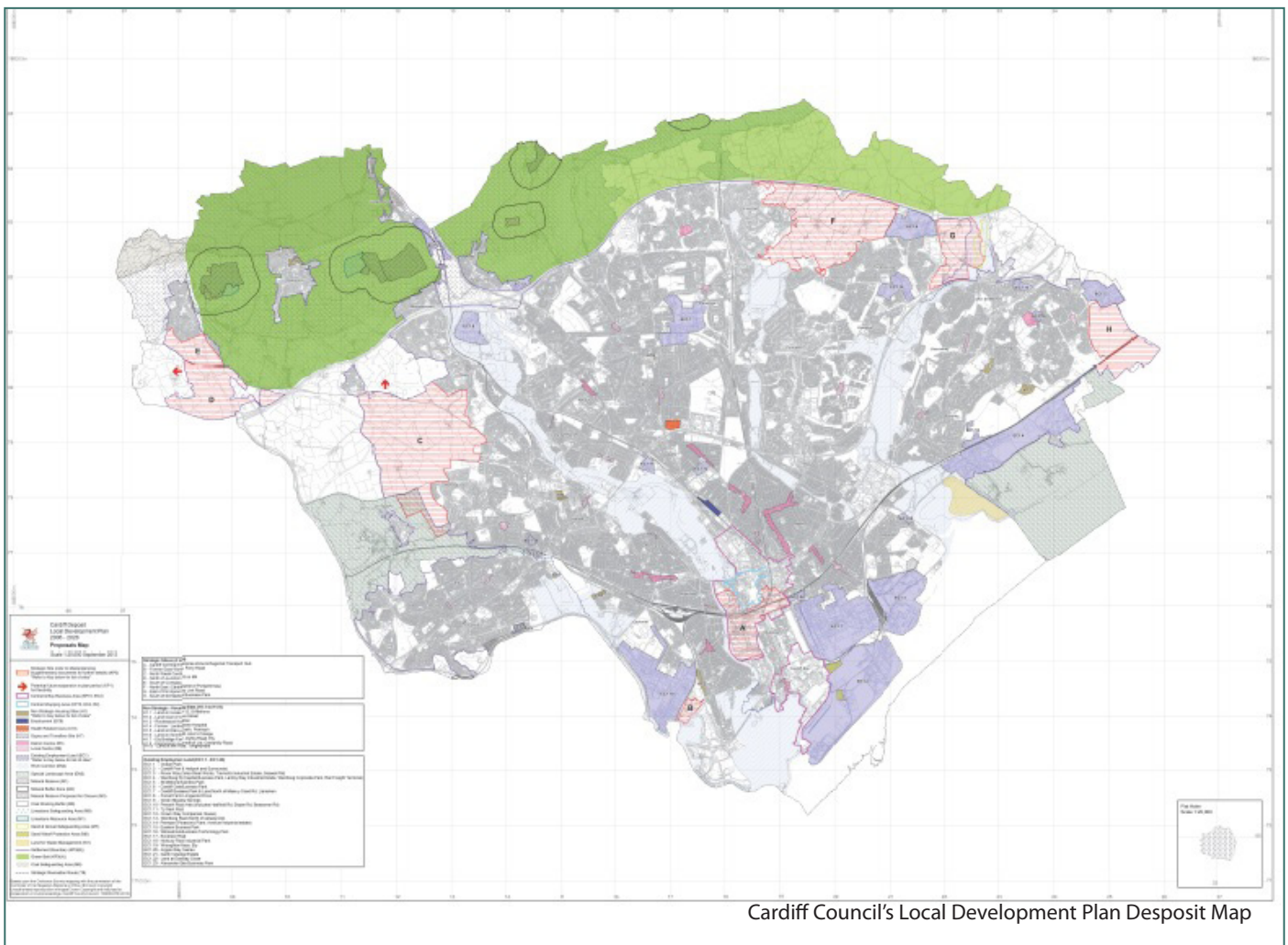
“These plans let people know how places will work and look in the future. They are key drivers for investment, helping to realise the potential of Wales and compete on a UK, European and global level. They also help to create attractive places and homes for our communities and protect sensitive environments. Authorities that have up to date development plans can also

start on preparing a Community Infrastructure Levy ...”. (Welsh Government Development Plans <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/development-plans/?lang=en>).

Realising the importance of getting planning policy right, particularly as, once adopted, a local development plan is in place for fifteen years; Cardiff Civic Society became engaged with the local development plan process in Cardiff Council, and also with the national planning policy process of the Welsh Government. When the group started the majority had no previous involvement with the planning system and had

first to understand the process, before working out how to engage. This included some formal training, provided by the Planning Inspectorate. Six years later the Society are now invited to meetings by the Chief Executive and council cabinet members and have produced numerous consultation responses, a number of evidence based research papers and organised a number of public events. The outputs are available to download.





Cardiff Council's Local Development Plan Desposit Map

**How have Cardiff Civic Society done this?**

**1 A separate LDP sub-committee**

The Society has formed a separate LDP group within the Society. Without this the Society's work or focus would be entirely consumed by the LDP. The LDP group consists of 6 people all of whom have assigned roles.

**2 The right skills**

- The current LDP group consists of people with the following backgrounds:
- strategic planning/analyst;
  - organisation;
  - third sector/graphic design/IT;
  - public relations;
  - heritage;
  - civil service;
  - planner.

Where skills were missing they have pulled people into the group. Ideally they would

also like to have someone in the group with a legal background.

**3 A determined and able leader(s)**

Inspired by a council presentation to civic societies and community groups to ask us to get more involved, David and Jeanne-Helene Eggleton persuaded the Cardiff Civic Society to start up an LDP group. They formed the team and have put many hours into engaging with the process researching and producing evidence based papers, responding to consultations and organising informative events. The processes used are complex, bureaucratic and rather inflexible, and difficult to engage with, and need determination to follow through for our voice to be heard.

**4 Understanding the process (e.g. LDP) process**

The development plan process, or national policy

process, is laid out in the Welsh Government. Their website provides details . It includes several stages of preparation, consultation and engagement with the public and other interested parties. Each local planning authority specifies their individual LDP process in the Delivery Agreement agreed with the Welsh Government. The process is very sequential, rigid, and the council doesn't go back a step. It is therefore essential to understand it. For more details about Cardiff's development plan process please see the appendix.

**5 Roles of the group members**

Faced with a formal consultation with a 6 week deadline, or an analysis document, the team decide on roles and responsibilities, and a timetable to draft a response. One member will take on the significant role of producing the final output by combining the contributions of each member. This involves reviewing the

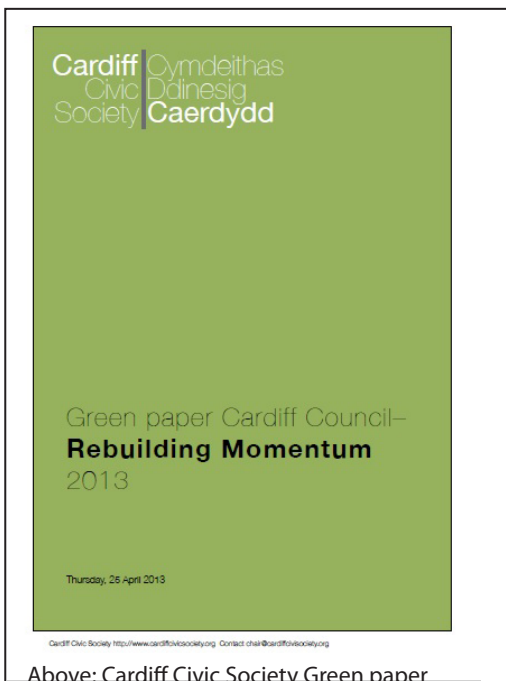
local planning authority's documents and identifying what is relevant and what might be missing; knowing the LDP is critical. Members of the group then focus on different themes such as transport, housing, development, sustainable development and economy, analyse these topics and recommending what Cardiff should be considering within the field. The team use e-mail to share drafts, final drafting is a round table affair the output is a consistent and professional paper that is put in the public domain immediately. This allows the build-up of a library of documents that can be referred to in the future, and makes communication easier.

**6 Increasing the society's sphere of influence**

The society's members have been determined, and persistent in their dealings with the local authority. The LDP group of the civic society had previously had no contact



Above: Cardiff Civic Society discussion paper



Above: Cardiff Civic Society Green paper



Above: Rhodri Morgan talking at a joint Cardiff Civic Society/IWA event on the LDP

with the local authority. When they began engaging in the development plan process the LDP process had already begun and therefore when the Society asked for a meeting with the local authority they were unwilling to meet them for fear of being accused of bias. However the group persisted and over time met with more senior people within the authority moving from the Head of Policy, to the Operational Manager – Planning Policy, followed by the Director of Planning, and then the Chief Executive. The local authority now considers them “their critical friends”.

As the society groups experience grew they realised that it was essential to talk to people outside the local authority, for information gathering as well as further establishing their credibility with the local authority. Being able to say, “we have exchanged letters with the Minister on this topic...”, or “we have discussed this recently with our Assembly Member, and MP” not only sounds good but opened doors.

The Society meets regularly with local Assembly Members and local community groups, and is in regular written contact with the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport; Such liaison is time consuming but essential to garner support.

Another way the society has publicised itself is through the constant trickle of publications under the Civic Society's name (see below), and also by attending the range of events run in Cardiff by organisations such as the School of Planning or the Institute of Welsh Affairs. At these events they have become recognised as major contributors and regular questioners of the presenters, and will take notes of the lectures or workshops and pass them back to the organisers who often publish or circulate them with Cardiff Civic Society's name on them. The lectures

and events also provide them with another way of getting information on a range of topics as well as getting their faces known.

## 7 Publications

The group have found that producing publications has been important for a number of reasons. The circulation of publications increases influence, and provides an evidence base for views. Additionally it allowed the society to clarify its own views.

At the beginning of the Society's engagement with the LDP, they realised that they had to have a strong and well developed set of ideas for the city to form a basis for comment. This resulted in a number of Green Papers which identified their focus and vision for Cardiff. These identified five key challenges that the council should respond to: climate change, quality of life, economy, growth of the built environment, and transportation. These themes have continued through all the following publications of the society and all the work they do is evidence based. There has been a consistency of thought throughout their work which is underlined by the use of the same headings in every report, for example climate change, transportation etc... This approach allows people to join the group, or read the work, and catch up on information quickly. When it comes to the report production, most of the report editing is done around the table. Usually the group goes through three versions of a report before a final output is produced. This is always after a lively and interesting debate.

As time has passed the groups attitude has changed from just critiquing the work of the LPA to a proactive stance of suggesting what the LPA should be doing. Gradually the Society has seen their ideas and work appear in other peoples writings and/or comments, often uncredited of course!

One example of their proactive approach is the paper they wrote on 'options for growth' which proposed phasing development land availability. This would encourage brown field land development first and requiring transport systems to be put in place for future green field development. A more recent paper has suggested a New Town approach integrated with a transport plan, with an emphasis on sustainable development and community based growth. This helps the financing and is aimed at helping the city-region policy to come forward, a subject that the society has actively supported since the beginning.

All significant publications are sent to the local councillors, MPs and AMs, and a press release issued.

## **8 Organising events and attending others**

The Society has organised a number of public events over the years. These have involved a range of expert speakers talking on the themes raised in the report (ie climate change, economy etc.). More information, including the transcript of the latest event held in the College of Music and Drama, can be seen in the pdf of documents produced by Cardiff Civic Society. The events have also been filmed and placed on the internet for wider accessibility.

Such events provide a database of views and opinions of which the team take careful note of and include in subsequent papers. By this means they can involve hundreds of people, and get a feel for topics of importance, and the priorities

## **9 Working with others/ networking**

Cardiff Civic Society has networked with other organisations such as the North West Cardiff community councils, which included

another civic society: the Radyr and Morganstown Community Association. The Society has also recently opened a dialogue with two civic societies in neighbouring authorities - Penarth and Newport Civic Societies.

### **10 Being organised**

There are a lot of documents and paper produced as part of the planning process so it is essential to be well organised. A good filing system is vital! Additionally, the society has found that keeping the same format for document production means that it's easier to move past the blank page problem when producing a document.

### **11 Keep an A-political stance**

The Civic Society does not, because of its charitable status, take political views, but it does seek to develop views on behalf of all the citizens of the city about issues that affect it now and in the future. The Society tries very hard to make sure it comments on the merits of a plan or proposal although it is sometimes very difficult to do this. The team have realised that they have to engage with politicians, as well as officers, to make progress. It is essential to keep neutral throughout.

### **12 Publicity**

Every time the group have written a document they write a press release. The Society also has a website and a twitter account, and they have made a connection with the local press. This has been less successful than anticipated as the press tend to look for controversy, not ideas.

### **Problems with the LDP process**

1 Community engagement is restricted

The process allows changes of individual comments but not a review of the strategic approach.

The formal consultation meetings are designed to tell the attendees what the LDP contains, the Civic Society feels that the listening element is much less in evidence.

### **2 The understanding of the 'deposit' stage**

The Society has recently become concerned about the 'deposit' stage of the LDP process. It is widely considered that the deposit stage provides the opportunity for consultation with the community. Indeed Cardiff Council consulted on the deposit plan in November 2013 and received 1652 responses. However it appears that the Welsh Government are directing local authorities that the purpose of the deposit plan consultation is not to elicit improvements to the plan but merely to confirm that it is 'sound'. The Welsh Government have informed another local authority that once a Plan is put on deposit it is by definition considered by the authority to be 'sound' and therefore in need of no further changes. Taking their cue from Welsh Government guidance, the Cardiff Council have concluded that not a single one of those representations should result in any changes to the plan, which must of course have been 'sound' when it was put on deposit. Similarly, the alternative sites consultation which followed the deposit stage also resulted in no changes to the plan.

### **3 Fixed six week consultation periods**

The consultation periods are relatively limited. This means that every time a consultation is published by Cardiff Council the LDP group have an intensive period of activity reading the document, researching and writing their response, with the end result being pulled together by one person. The group have found it essential to have people involved who are willing to do this for all of the 6-8 consultations throughout

the LDP process. It is a challenge but it is very important for consistency and the quality of output.

### **4 Member relations**

The group have found these more difficult to nurture especially with the regular member changes or committee changes. They also recognise that it is not a subject that has widespread interest.

### **5 Hard copies of documents**

Analysing reports is easier when using hard copies of documents. At the beginning of the society's involvement the LDP group would print documents at their own cost. This was after they had struggled to locate the relevant documents on the LPAs website. Following improved relationships between the LPA and the civic society they are now provided with a box of documents, including maps.

### **More about Cardiff Civic Society**

The Society is also engaging in the Planning Bill, Heritage Bill and Future Generations Bill (sustainable development). A number of social outings are organised every year, and a newsletter is published regularly. They have an active Twitter account (@ CardiffCivicSoc) and a website.

To find out more about the work of Cardiff Civic Society contact the Secretary, David Eggleton. This can be done through the Civic Trust for Wales.