

4 Menai

4.1 INTRODUCTION



A well attended event

The event was held on the 27th November 2003 at the Celtic Royal Hotel in Caernarfon. Thirty-seven people attended, representing national and local organisations, as shown in Appendix.

This was one of the larger events outside the South-East, which also had a high proportion of Welsh speaking participants. The majority of the workshops groups were in Welsh and this added an important cultural dimension – offering some ideas and themes to consider bringing forward in the Plan.

4.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW

The opening presentations from the Wales Spatial Plan team prompted several early questions about the role of the Plan: how it relates to existing community plans; its legal status; the extent to which it reflects or addresses the North-South Wales divide; the internal-external balance of investment strategy; and how far it deals with disability issues.

Groups' discussion about the zone and its attributes revealed several themes: the zone was too broad-brush and did not do justice to the diversity of geographic, economic, environmental and cultural differences within the area; there was insufficient regard to the high proportion of Welsh speakers in the area and the extent to which this underpinned local culture; the offshore environment should be included; both tourism and agriculture are insufficiently recognised. Some groups also highlighted the significance of, and differences between towns, and the importance of improved North-South transport links. There was a general sense that the zone was 'not quite right'.

The sustainability matrix helped focus discussion around these and other issues, particularly: potential tensions between renewable energy (wind farms), landscape and tourism; Welsh culture; pockets of deprivation; full transport accessibility depending on car use, although public services were generally recognised to be good.

Group discussion of the cards gave top priority to cluster of objectives related to skills, the knowledge economy, employment and growth. Only slightly less priority was given to projects dealing with infrastructure, internal links and links with neighbouring zones. Objectives relating to towns and the development of brownfield sites were rated of less importance, but were

nonetheless the subject of imaginative constructive proposals.

In the afternoon groups worked on ideas for implementation drawn from the morning discussion. The themes chosen were: Distinctiveness; Role of Key Centres; Deprivation; Increasing Employment; Transport and Infrastructure and Affordable Housing.

The groups were able, in each instance, to come up with a range of ideas for action, to identify the main agencies and potential partnerships, and potential blockages.

This workshop was particularly distinctive because of the strong Welsh speaking representation, and the tensions which were thrown up between the need to sustain this distinctive identity and environment, while accommodating some of the necessary external pressures, which could bring social polarisation if wrongly handled. The idea of a settlement network along the Menai, as the focus for growth and services was perhaps the most distinctive spatial idea.

4.3 THE EVENT DETAILS

Following an explanation of the purpose of the day and a presentation of the draft Wales Spatial Plan, comments and questions were taken from the audience. These concerned:

- The problem of the strong North-South divide within Wales and the associated problem of 'emotional distance' from Cardiff. Can this be addressed in the Plan?
- How the Wales Spatial Plan fits with the community plans of the areas concerned.
- The Plan should concern itself with what is really needed for Wales rather than developing or duplicating already existing initiatives.
- Wales should take a more internal approach rather than focusing on external influences, especially in seeking new economic investment.
- Will the plan have legal status? This will be important in how it is taken forward.
- Disability issues should be included in the plan.
- Coastal issues should also be covered more strongly.

The audience then split into five groups to explore the content of the Plan. The initial discussions are summarised as follows:

4.4 ZONE ISSUES

The groups reviewed the content of the zone as presented in the Plan:



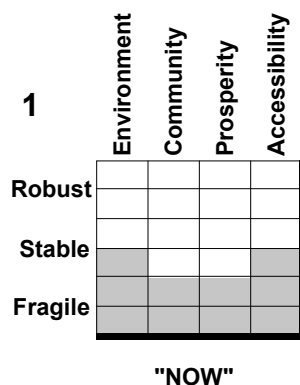
Assessing the Zone and Sustainability Matrix

- Zones should take geographical attributes of the area more into account. This related partly to physical geography (e.g. of Snowdonia) – although Plan is intended to address functional rather than topographical zones.
- There are big differences within the area that are not really mentioned in the Plan. While the area is still characterised through agriculture, there are several urban settlements that provide basic services. A balance must be achieved between the two.
- Zoning is too broad brush and ignores fine local differences, e.g. Anglesey can be seen as having more attributes of the Green Zone than the Yellow.
- The eastern part of the Zone around Llandudno has more in common with the Orange Zone and the other half should remain yellow – so possibly consider splitting the Zone into two?
- Equally, does the Lleyrn not relate more to the Zone functionally than Llandudno?
- Little has been said about the high proportion of Welsh speakers in the local community. This forms a substantial part of the culture in the Menai area and is also a positive opportunity.
- The area is also characterised by untapped natural resources. The area could make more use of sustainable energy, but this might spoil the landscape and have a negative effect on tourism. Renewable energy is nevertheless an important issue for the Menai area.
- How do policies for the Yellow Zone correspond to other policy arenas and documents?
- There was a view that Wales is changing constantly and, even though the edges of the zones are blurred, the zoning principle is based on static data. The concept is possibly too simplistic and does not reflect dynamic reality on the ground. Could the indicators on which the zones are determined not rely on the *priorities* of the area rather than its general characteristics (such as population density, economic performance etc.)?
- The area suffers from flood risk and the extent of the zone should take this into account. The Spatial Plan should also concentrate beyond the land and include off-shore elements. This will be particularly important when considering off-shore wind farms or wave/ tidal energy.
- Holyhead has not been mentioned as a regional centre. For Anglesey's population, Holyhead is seen as the centre, and it was suggested that it be represented as such.
- The attributes of the Menai area appear very negative, rather than pinpointing the potential of the area. Some

additional positive attributes that would redress this imbalance might be:

- flexible workforce (for instance part-time farmers)
- comparatively good public transport services
- dependence on tourism (can be seen as an advantage and disadvantage at the same time)
- It was argued that the main attribute of the zone is the Menai Straits, which is in some ways very fragile.
- Some participants did not agree that the population is declining in the area.
- Tourism is an area attribute but it isn't mentioned much in the Plan, nor is agriculture. Tourism is currently a real economic driver in the area.
- Transport – we need better links North and South as well as East to West, both within and without the zone. In particular, better public transport is needed
- Better air links are also a possibility? Could this be promoted through the Plan
- Bangor is identified as a centre: there were mixed views as to whether this a strength or a weakness?
- The encouragement of more private - rather than public sector - employers was felt to be important by some – in driving the economy forward - this was not necessarily a unanimous view.
- Finally, there was a realism that the area is affected by external circumstances and factors. For instance, it was recognised that Ireland and the North West of England influence the area in some ways. This also provides some uncertainties for the future.

4.5 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (1)



The diagrams show:

1. The "Now" Matrix set after group discussion (average of all groups)

2. The Matrix adjusted to show the affects of the implementation of the Plan (average of all groups)

Environment

- The area is characterised by untapped natural resources and could make more use of sustainable energy. On the other hand this might spoil the landscape and have a negative effect on tourism. Renewable energy is therefore considered to be an important and sensitive issue for the Menai area.
- There are also big differences in environmental quality within the Zone, which are not mentioned in the Plan. While the area is, to a large extent, still characterised by agriculture, there are also urban settlements that provide basic services. On balance, the Environment was considered to be more vulnerable than it might appear was set at **stable**.

Community

- As already noted, there was concern that virtually nothing is said about the high percentage of Welsh speakers in the area. This forms an important part of the culture and

community identity in the Menai area. It also represents a degree of fragility in terms of being at risk from external forces.

There was general consensus with that the rating for Community should be between **fragile** and **stable**.

Prosperity

- It was recognised that the area contains some pockets of deprivation which have a negative impact on aggregate prosperity
- Additionally, there was a lively discussion about what “prosperity” actually meant. It was agreed that Gross Domestic Product is an insufficient indicator for prosperity in the area. Wider quality of life was seen as a factor that would have to be taken into account. However, groups were unclear how to measure this.
- As already noted agriculture plays a more important role than is indicated in the Plan, and this reinforces a degree of uncertainty and fragility.

In general groups rated the Prosperity as **fragile**.

Accessibility

- In terms of accessibility, it was stated that accessibility within the area is fairly good and the public transport system is excellent when compared with other Welsh areas. However, participants agreed that full mobility is only possible for those who have access to a car. Access to services was also seen as problematic for those in more remote areas

On balance, Accessibility was rated between **stable** and **fragile**.

4.6 PRIORITIES AND TIMESCALES

Groups considered the range of Plan cards representing the proposals in the document, as listed in the table (and given in the PDF document accompanying this report).

The placement of the cards in the Timescale / Priority matrix is shown in the table below, with the darker tones indicating increased level of consensus.

Figure 1 - Group Card Placements

Challenge	Timescale			Priority			Weighted Priority
	Short	Medium	Long	High	Medium	Low	
Skills	5			5			15
Employment & Growth	5			5			15
The Knowledge Economy	4	1		5			15
Integration	4	1		3	2		14
Infrastructure	3	2		4	1		13
Competing Demands	4	1		3	2		13
Opportunities	2	3		3	2		13
Neighbouring Zones	2	2	1	3	2		13
Transport Hubs	2	3		2	3		12
Centres	2	2	1	3	1	1	12
Linkages	1	3	1	2	3		12
Irish Links	1	4		1	4		11
The Cultural Economy	3	1		3	1		11
Travel Times	1	2	2	1	3	1	10
Distinctiveness*	4			3	1		10
Urban Area Performance	3	1		2	2		10
Transport to Ireland	1	3	1	1	3	1	10
Brownfield Development	1	1	3	2		3	9
Collaborative Work:							
B) Identify & Develop Mechanisms	2	2	1	4	1		14
C) Ensure that Development	4	1		4	1		14
A) Bangor	3	2		3	2		13
E) Exploit the benefits	1	4			5		10
D) Identify Opportunities	1	3	1		2	3	7
Note: Actions with an asterisk indicate that one or more groups dropped them from the selection. Weighted Priority is determined by multiplying High priority scores by 3 and Medium by 2 and then adding across all priorities Dark cells indicate the degree of consensus light shading indicates little consensus.							



Considering the cards

Added cards

- A number of new cards were introduced to pick up themes absent or underplayed in the Plan:
- Health and Disability provision
- Affordable Housing in all communities
- Potential to maximise Sustainable Development themes
- Promote Public Sector Employment
- Enhance transportation linkage to South Wales
- Realise Holyhead's potential as a centre
- Conserve core facilities
- Assess town's effects on the countryside

Summary

- The highest priorities were given to the creation and retention of skills and the generation of employment, particularly through the knowledge economy.
- A group of priorities - concerned with reconciling competing demands, creating an appropriate infrastructure and developing links with neighbouring zones - all emphasised getting existing structures right before proceeding to new ventures.
- Interestingly, distinctiveness, about which there was much discussion during the day, attained only a middle ranking.
- Development issues such as urban area performance and brownfield development were given a low priority.
- In terms of further collaborative work, the role of Bangor as a centre was a subject of some disagreement.

Comments drawn from the groups and noted by the facilitators were:

Environment

- The environment may always be fragile/at risk, because, in environmental terms the whole zone is somewhat fragile – coastal areas such as these don't appear robust and are always exposed to external forces (such as climate, international transport factors, pollution, etc).

Community

- It was suggested that nothing in the Plan explicitly addresses the issue of *re-distribution* of wealth. The approach to prosperity appears rooted in a growth scenario.

Prosperity

- It was the general view that "sustainability" is missing in all these objectives and can be very challenging in creating and spreading prosperity.

- *“Support employment activities related to Irish links”*: There was a query as to the extent this really benefits Wales. Might a more inward-orientated economy be more beneficial in the long-term?

Accessibility

- *“Improve travel times to the East”*: It was suggested that travel times to the East are already reasonable through infrastructure upgrades. The problem is accessibility to the South, particularly Cardiff.
- *“Support improved road, ferry, and rail connectivity to Ireland”*: As with economic initiatives, it was queried just how much this benefits Wales?
- Transport investment should prioritise public transport needs – and ideally start now – including the infrastructure upgrades
- Improving such transport infrastructure will help trigger lots of other activity as well.



Presenting results

Collaborative Work

- *“Strengthen and spread the success of the Bangor area to neighbouring areas including Caernarfon and Anglesey”*: Should Bangor be seen as a centre? Some considered this would disadvantage areas that are not situated close to Bangor. An alternative of localised growth poles were suggested, in which smaller places could build on their own potential without strong dependency on Bangor.
- *“Exploit the benefits related to the area’s proximity to Ireland and the presence of the transport links”*: Again, Are links to Ireland of such great importance? Was asked. In terms of trading and tourism, such links could have benefits for the area, but on the other hand Wales also has to protect its culture and distinctiveness. There is a danger that Ireland may exploit the Welsh economy and environment and cause dependency on inward investment rather than Wales focusing and developing its own potential. The right balance has to be struck.

	Environment	Community	Prosperity	Accessibility
2				
Robust				
Stable				
Fragile				
	"THEN"			

4.7 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (2)

Based on the implications of the proposals they had identified, the groups considered the impact upon the sustainability matrix.

- Environment: all groups agreed that the actions would not have much affect on the environment rating of the area.
- Community: was generally considered to be moved made towards more a **stable** level
- Prosperity: an improvement to **stable** was indicated
- Accessibility: improvement to **stable** was also indicated

4.8 IMPLEMENTATION DISCUSSION THEMES

From the morning's worksheets the following key themes were selected. Some of these are amalgamations of the clusters of projects on the sheets.

1. Affordable Housing
2. Retaining and attracting skilled people
3. Cross border issues
4. Economic development (ICT, the knowledge economy)
5. Transport and linkages
6. Added value
7. Tourism
8. Services

Each group focused on a sample of these topics for discussion of their delivery.

Distinctiveness

What is distinctiveness? What makes the area distinctive? A number of factors:

- Language
- Heritage
- Natural environment
- Small village communities/settlement pattern

Actions proposed:

- The need for mechanisms that control and encourage distinctiveness (e.g. statutory policies, community strategies, tourist board initiatives)
- The need to integrate different policies was stressed, the need for a wider 'plan', not just development plans.
- Strengthening and improving national policy towards Welsh language and culture. This includes increasing awareness: provision of language training, promotion of the Welsh language not only in schools
- Building on the "wow" factor was also suggested. More specific proposals included:
 - Make Caernarfon a 'cultural' port
 - Improve town centres respecting traditional character
 - Deliver affordable housing to keep local people in the area
 - Respect heritage sites, including for instance the need for sustainable landscape management, to respect nature Enhancing public access to such key locations is also important.
- Encourage local produce – both its growth – but also its branded marketing, to reinforce the special identity of the area.

Actors:

- Land managers, Workers' Educational Association, Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies, Welsh Assembly Government, communities, schools, tourism operators, voluntary groups, local businesses

Blockages:

- Changes on macro-level affect the local level to a great extent. Many factors are out of our control
- Right-to-buy legislation makes affordable housing more complex and difficult.
- A lack of understanding of different interests makes attending to them difficult.
- The overall quantum of time and resources involved
- A lack of the right partnership mechanism
- The risk aversion of the public sector
- Inward looking politicians and political processes locally – which may be linked to the previous point
- A perception in the differences between what has been said and what has been done (cultural attitudes to delivery)

Resources:

Most – certainly many - of these things do not cost anything. A different approach has to be taken which demands a change of attitude and thinking. Cost savings could be achieved through joined-up thinking and action.

Role of Key Centres

What are key centres? What do they provide?

- Generally the discussions came round to the range of services (shops, transport hubs, education facilities, health facilities, etc.)

Actions proposed:

- One view was to define a hierarchy of settlements and seek to make use of economies of scale
- Alternatively, rather than promote the concept of key centres, go for a hierarchy of settlements that builds on local strength and minimises dependency on stronger towns?
- Either way there is a need to create and strengthen linkages between centres and smaller places
- A suggestion was made to build houses only in these centres
- It was also necessary to build on the strength of these centres, whilst retaining their distinctiveness. This might mean prioritising brownfield development and investment and attracting big names to Bangor High Street, in partnership with better vehicle management

- Encouraging tourism was advocated, including re-branding Caernarfon as a heritage town
- Developing local skills was necessary to grasp new opportunities
- Exploiting the University as a research/ development centre, and looking to spin out new ventures was considered important
- This would necessitate identifying and plugging ICT gaps
- An implementation plan was necessary for under 14s & over 14s to capture the next generation
- There is also the potential to exploit Valley airport and its links

Actors:

- Local Authorities, businesses, government agencies, communities.

Blockages

- The reality is that action does not only take place in key centres
- However, achieving any agreement on hierarchies is necessary – but may be difficult
- Transport links can be a constraint
- Housing issues also – particularly affordable
- Coordinated public investment is not always easy to achieve
- Political processes can be narrow and short term
- The shortage of land for new investment in risk free areas is not ideal
- "NIMBYs" who oppose any change – and particularly any development
- Competition between Local Authorities for investment
- The big gap between defining and then actually delivering

Resource implications:

- Specify hierarchy within existing resources
- Need for investment in rail
- Link to community strategies
- Land acquisition

Deprivation

Actions proposed included:

- Improve access to the full range of services
- Expand health services, housing, and jobs
- Attract new ventures to the area to provide new employment opportunities
- Encourage joined up thinking and delivery

Blockages:

- Venture exhaustion, accompanied by lots of initiatives, but a fundamental lack of local entrepreneurship?

Increasing Employment

Actions proposed:

- Decentralise work as much as possible
- Use technology to assist in the process (e.g. broadband)
- Buy locally – support local retail and producers
- Encourage new ventures to start up
- Encourage flexible working practices
- Market the area in terms of branding for visitors and goods
- Develop Holyhead as a port for produce

Transport Infrastructure

Actions proposed:

- Decrease travel times, both by car and public transport, and improve the roads generally
- Improve access to Holyhead Port
- Improve the Britannia (Bridge) congestion situation

Alternative strategies might include:

- Use technology to minimise the need to travel
- Prioritise public transport
- Encourage employers to adopt Green transport plans

National policy tools are important, and include:

- Investment in railways
- Planning policies

Blockages:

- Basically, this revolves around the predominant car culture

Resources:

- Education and research are both needed
- Investment at different levels
- Renewable energy should be a focus of thinking

Infrastructure

The restricted discussion of this theme pointed towards two specific objectives

- Spread growth across the area – do not overconcentrate. It may be most effective as a settlement network along the Menai

- Increase private sector involvement in the investment process to spread the costs and benefits.

Affordable Housing

Actions proposed:

- A clearer definition of the nature of affordable housing and the level being sought – (for instance in the range 30 – 40%)
- The level should really relate to a local needs assessment
→ so a review step was necessary
- Section 106 Agreements are one useful mechanism available, but not the only one
- Equity Sharing provides another positive means of provision
- Delivery needs partnership between:
 - Planning Authority
 - Housing Associations
 - Housebuilders
 - Capital
- Link into planning policies – and choosing appropriate sites is important

Blockages:

- Financial implications
- Builders, who see it as a penalty or local tax

Resources:

- Land
- Time – it can delay the normal development process considerably
- Readiness and desire to follow through

Appendix

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS:

- Arthur Owen Isle of Anglesey CC
- Meirion Davies Cyngor Sir Ynys Mon
- Alan James Beva North Wales Police
- Dafydd Iwan Gwynedd County Council
- David Evans North Wales Fire Service
- Ifan Hughes North Wales Police
- David Evans CPRW
- Arwel E Jones Cyngor Gwynedd
- Stan Yates Conwy CBC
- Dewi Rowlands Cyngor Sir Ynys Mon
- Richard Thomas Cyngor Gwynedd
- Morag McGrath Snowdonia Society
- Dylan William Cyngor Sir Ynys Mon
- David Barraclough RTPi
- Owain Wyn Owain Wyn Consultancy Services
- Ieuan Ellis ELWA
- Gareth A Rennie University of Bangor
- Vin West Arfon Access Group
- Bob Lowe CCW
- David Archer National Park Authority
- Elwyn Thomas Scottish National Park Authority
- Aled Davies Cyngor Gwynedd
- Dafydd Roberts National Museum and Galleries
- Rory Francis Coed Cadw (Woodland Trust)
- Trefor Wyn Jones Welsh Development Agency
- Jas Chanay
- Sharon Warnes Cyngor Gwynedd
- D G Robers North Wales Fire and Rescue Service
- Einir Young University of Bangor
- S.E. Williams Cyngor Gwynedd
- Pete Wight Cyngor Gwynedd
- Lindsey Williams Conwy CBC
- Rob Dix Conwy CBC

- Deborah Hemsworth Environment Agency
Cyngor Sir Ynys Mon
- Bob Newton Retired
- Mair Jones The National Trust
- Professor Gareth Wyn Jones University of Bangor