

Planning for the climate crisis

Legal and policy background

Wales



The legislative context

Through the devolved government, Wales has brought forward a number of legislative acts that seek to prioritise communities, the environment and health in the way that places are planned and developed.



These include the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Together, they provide a foundation to address climate change, sustainable development and wellbeing from national through to local levels. Wales has also declared a climate and nature emergency, placing action on addressing climate change and reversing the decline of nature as a key priority.

Environment (Wales) Act 2016

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016¹ sets requirements for the sustainable management of natural resources in Wales, including through setting the powers and purpose of Natural Resources Wales. The Act also requires public authorities to maintain and enhance biodiversity within the scope of their functions. This legislation also created the framework for carbon budgets and setting targets for carbon emissions reductions, which is aligned with the UK's target of net zero by 2050.

Why is this relevant?

The Environment (Wales) Act places a duty on Welsh Ministers to set carbon budgets and targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In 2021, the Senedd set interim emission reduction targets for 2030 and 2040, and carbon budgets for the periods of 2021-2025 (carbon budget 2) and 2026-2030 (carbon budget 3).² These are relevant because they are legally binding targets, and therefore development plans and planning decisions should be made in line with these carbon budgets.

In June 2025, a new Environment Bill³ was introduced to the Senedd which, if enacted, would give a legal footing for environmental principles and establish an independent Office for Environmental Governance in Wales.

Planning (Wales) Act 2015

The foundation of the planning system in Wales stems from UK legislation, which was transferred to the National Assembly for Wales through devolution.⁴ The Planning (Wales) Act 2015,⁵ however, represented a divergence from the English system through the introduction of regional strategic planning, meaning there are three tiers of planning in Wales: national, regional and local.

At the time of writing, a new Planning (Wales) Bill 2025 is under consideration by the Senedd. Rather than introduce wholesale reform to the system, the main intention is to consolidate all planning legislation into one coherent framework.

Why is this relevant?

The development plans at a national level (the National Plan) and strategic/regional level (strategic development plans) enabled by the Planning (Wales) Act can be used to strengthen planning policy on climate change.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015⁶ aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the people of Wales. The Act sets out seven wellbeing goals which public bodies must work to achieve:

- *A prosperous Wales*
- *A resilient Wales*
- *A more equal Wales*
- *A healthier Wales*
- *A Wales of cohesive communities*
- *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and*
- *A globally responsible Wales.*⁷

Why is this relevant?

This legislation is powerful because it places a duty on public bodies to consider the impact of their decisions on future generations and take account of the long-term impacts of plans and proposals. It provides a legislative basis through which local authorities can planning and placemaking supports the seven goals of the act. There is also a strong emphasis on working with communities and in partnership and to 'prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change'.⁸

Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013

The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013⁹ provides the framework for improving the provision of active travel infrastructure and encouraging walking and cycling.

Why is this relevant?

Among the core requirements of the Active Travel (Wales) Act is the obligation for local authorities to promote active travel journeys, and secure new active travel routes. It also requires local authorities to produce active travel maps setting out existing and future routes, for agreement by the Welsh Government.



The Policy Context

Planners should be aware of national policies and strategies that enable local planning to address the climate crisis, both at a regional and local level.



Planning Policy Wales

Planning Policy Wales (PPW),¹⁰ last updated in 2024, is the Welsh national planning policy and sets out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government.

Why is this relevant?

PPW's policies on place-making set requirements for high-quality and well-designed communities in which residents can easily access all the services that they need. It seeks a holistic approach to environmental, social and economic considerations in development, including how the causes and impacts of climate change are taken into account.

Another central pillar to Planning Policy Wales is decarbonisation: it contains policies on the promotion of active travel, ultra-low emission vehicles, promoting renewable energy developments, and restricting the extraction and use of fossil fuels (including fracking), and promotes a whole system 'local area energy planning' (LAEP) approach. The latest (12th) edition of PPW gives further emphasis to the importance of green infrastructure and securing biodiversity net gain from planning proposals.

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040¹¹ sets the strategic direction for planning and development in Wales up to 2040.

Why is this relevant?

It has development plan status, so is part of the statutory plan for determining planning applications. It gives spatial expression to long-term economic, social and environmental objectives, and sets out a key role for the planning system in Wales in facilitating clean growth and decarbonisation and in building resilience to the impacts of climate change. The National Plan seeks an integrated approach with other areas of policy, linking decisions on economic development with those on housing, climate change, energy generation, transport, and other infrastructure, and providing a spatial framework for investment.

The Future Wales national plan indicates the geographical and spatial priorities for the four regions where Strategic Development Plans are expected to come forward. It emphasises the need for alignment with spatial plans at the appropriate level of the spatial hierarchy is important, including the *strategic development plans* at the regional level, the well-established *local development plans* within local authorities, and *place plans* for those communities which have them (non-statutory plans).

Llwybr Newydd: The Wales Transport Strategy

Translating as 'new path' or 'new way', the Wales Transport Strategy¹² represents a shift in focus towards embedding modal shift to support efforts to address climate change.

Why is this relevant?

This national strategy provides the framework for new five-year Regional Transport Plans (tranche 1 produced) and new 30-year Strategic Development Plans (first tranche just starting). Both are being delivered via a new tier of regional government known as Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs), with the intention for these to flow through all tiers of the local development plan.

Technical Advice Notes

For some policy areas, the Welsh Government issues technical advice notes (TANs) to provide more detailed guidance for local planning authorities on the preparation of development plans.

Why is this relevant?

The TANs provide direction for how key policy issues that support climate change mitigation and adaptation can be integrated into local development plans, including design, nature conservation, transport, flooding and coastal communities.

The TAN for development, flooding and coastal erosion (TAN15)¹³ was updated in March 2025. It represents a significant shift in flood risk policy for planning to a more precautionary, plan led approach, seeking to direct development away from high flood risk areas.

Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales 2024

The Welsh national strategy for climate adaptation seeks to create an integrated, cross sector approach to addressing the risks posed by climate change in Wales and sets out 15 action plans to address adaptation across identified systems.

Why is this relevant?

Many of the systems identified for climate adaptation action in the Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales¹⁴ intersect with the planning system including buildings, health and wellbeing, towns and cities, rural communities, transport and energy supply. It outlines the actions and policy areas that Welsh Government intend to review to keep pace with climate action and identifies actions for other stakeholders and policy owners to support delivery of the strategy.

References

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- ¹⁰ *Planning Policy Wales*. Welsh Government, 2024. <https://www.gov.wales/planning-policy-wales>
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- ¹⁴ *Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales*. Welsh Government, 2024. <https://www.gov.wales/climate-adaptation-strategy-wales-2024>

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Legal and Policy Background Wales

Policy Resource 5

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