



Maniffesto Cymdeithas Ddinesig Caerdydd 2021
Cardiff Civic Society Manifesto 2021

Cardiff Civic Society

About us

Cardiff Civic Society campaigns for the protection of our fantastic urban green spaces and our built heritage, as well as fighting against inappropriate development.

In recent years we have fought more than 35 campaigns.

The Society lobbies the council and Welsh Government on issues such as better, cleaner public transport, improved air quality, protection of our mature green infrastructure, reduced mowing and banning of glyphosate to protect nature and human health.

We have set up a Green Advisory Group to help create a more nature friendly Cardiff, and have planted wildlife hedging and launched Cardiff Meadows Project to help pollinators.

We also run a successful tree planting project, Canopy Cardiff/Canopi Caerdydd to increase the city's canopy.

We are always happy to help communities faced with the might of developers. We don't always succeed, but in the immortal words of the late Bob Crow:

"If you fight, you won't always win, but if you don't fight, you will always lose"



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Registered charity number 517544

Key Messages

This year's elections to the Welsh Parliament - Senedd Cymru provide an opportunity for the people of Cardiff to elect representatives committed to improve the quality of built and natural environment of our capital city. We ask Welsh Parliament - Senedd Cymru candidates for Cardiff to consider our proposals and to commit to implement them when elected. Our proposals are borne of our experience in Cardiff but they are relevant to town and cities across the nation.



Planning

The Welsh Government would appear to have adopted a progressive approach to planning. But there is a striking gap between aspiration and implementation. Planning authorities must be made to involve communities in setting goals and in assessing applications; and must address the following:

- Change the planning mindset from consultation to involvement, engaging people in plan design.
- Recognise that effective placemaking is bottom-up from residents as well as top-down by planners.
- Convene Citizens Assemblies to consider both Strategic (regional) and Local Development Plans.
- Directly elect chairs of local planning committees to increase their accountability to voters.
- Improve early visibility of major development proposals and allow residents more time to respond.
- Increase transparency around planning applications, lifting the veil of 'commercial confidence'.
- Set the new Welsh Planning Inspectorate objectives that put the needs of the people of Wales first.
- Give residents a funded right to petition the Planning Inspectorate to review planning decisions.
- Give greater powers to community councils in the planning process.

Environment

With climate change, the pandemic and biodiversity loss, we are now at a tipping point in our relationship with nature. Alongside, the Climate Emergency, we are also faced with a Biodiversity Crisis, driven largely by habitat loss. These twin crises must be given equal footing. Admirable though the Environment Wales (2016) Act is in theory, in practice it has little traction, and needs to be strengthened if it is to fulfil its purpose.



Public

Green Space



As the pandemic has illustrated beyond doubt, and campaigns to protect local green space throughout the city amplify, the public loves and needs its green spaces.

The towns and cities of Wales, including Cardiff should aim to achieve 30 per cent green space by 2030 and pledge to increase urban biodiversity at the same time. This should be achieved by through the restitution of parkland, protection of mature green infrastructure, the creation of pocket parks and gardens, defending of informal green space, and identifying unused open space that can be transformed into publicly available green space.



The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

This Act offers a vision of Wales as more prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal, culturally vibrant, globally responsible, and with cohesive communities.

However, it needs strengthening if it is to translate to everyday practice in order to prevent developers and local authorities simply paying lip-service to this notion.

Community Land Trusts

A community land trust is a non-profit corporation that holds land on behalf of a place-based community, while serving as the long-term steward for affordable housing, community gardens, civic buildings, commercial spaces and other community assets on behalf of a community. The Welsh Government should provide funding to make community land trust projects a reality.

Compulsory purchase of empty homes to alleviate the housing crisis



Wales has 27,213 empty private homes a rise of 43% in ten years. The scale of the problem has been described as a ‘wasted resource’ when so many people need affordable homes. The Welsh Government needs to dedicate resources to overcome the obstacles that prevent housing associations taking vital steps to convert empty dwellings to homes, including taking action such as a compulsory purchase orders.

Design buildings future generations can be proud of

Design is widely recognised as the key to improving the quality of the built environment. It is clear - with the occasional notable exception - that few recent edifices in Cardiff will stand the test of time. The principles of people-centred urban design should be applied to the design of buildings and urban spaces in Cardiff and all Wales’ towns and cities.



Transport

Welsh towns and cities need to address air quality, and reduce our dependence on cars. The UK has the worst rate of childhood asthma deaths in Europe – much of this caused by air pollution. The Welsh Government should ensure.



- A commitment to active travel in urban areas, and a reduction in private car use where possible.
- Proper cycle paths on roads rather than through parkland and other areas of green space.
- 20mph limits introduced – and enforced – on all residential roads.
- Encouraging walking – from an early age – to break the pattern of unnecessary car use for short journeys.
- Financial incentives for people to stop owning cars, or to car share.
- Better, cleaner public transport/more affordable train travel.
- Incorporating future-proof transport plans into new developments.

Planning

The Welsh Government would appear to have adopted a progressive approach to planning. But there is a striking gap between aspiration and implementation.



Corporate developers have backroom access to planning processes which exclude communities. Planning Departments treat residents as adversaries to be defeated, rather than citizens with a voice to be heard.

After a decade of cuts, even well-intentioned planners struggle when confronted by consultants backed by corporate money. Austerity-starved councils are desperate for any crumbs they can extract from a developer. Any considerations lacking immediate commercial value are discarded.

Despite the claims that development in Wales is ‘plan-led’, in practice corporate profit sets the pace. Planning Committees are intimidated by the threat of legal challenge. Communities have no right of appeal when planning decisions are made, yet developers do.

Planning Policy Wales aspires to see places which are productive and enterprising, active and social, natural and distinctive. It advocates placemaking as an inclusive process for planning, decision-making and delivering developments that contribute to the creation and enhancement of sustainable places. It must now deliver these goals.

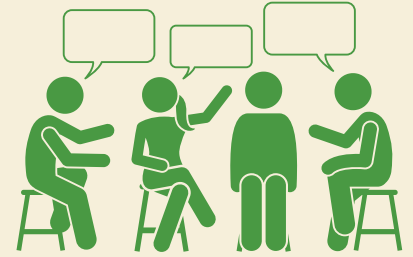
Planning authorities must also be made to involve communities in setting goals and in assessing applications; and must address the following:



Change the planning mindset from consultation to involvement, engaging people in plan design.



Recognise that effective placemaking is bottom-up from residents as well as top-down by planners.



Convene Citizens Assemblies to consider both Strategic (regional) and Local Development Plans.



Directly elect chairs of local planning committees to increase their accountability to voters.



Improve early visibility of major development proposals and allow residents more time to respond.



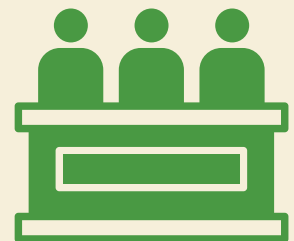
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Give residents a funded right to petition the Planning Inspectorate to review planning decisions.



Give greater powers to community councils in the planning process.

Environment

With climate change, the pandemic and biodiversity loss, we are now at a tipping point in our relationship with nature.

Alongside, the Climate Emergency, we are also faced with a Biodiversity Crisis, driven largely by habitat loss. These twin crises must be given equal footing.

Wales' wildlife continues to decline according to the State of Nature 2019 report, with the latest findings showing that one in six species in Wales are at risk of extinction. Since rigorous scientific monitoring began in the 1970s, there has been a 13% decline in average abundance of wildlife studied across the UK. The UK, and with it Wales, is recognised as one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.

Insect numbers have dropped by a quarter in just three decades. Conservation charity Buglife states that insects are declining at an unsustainable rate, heralding an ecological disaster. Insects are the most varied and abundant animals, outweighing humans by 17 times. Their importance has been vastly underestimated. Insects are essential to the ecosystems that humanity depends upon. They pollinate the plants humans rely on for food, provide food for many wildlife species, and recycle nature's waste.



Nature is our life support system, and we are at risk of losing it unless immediate action is taken. Along with protection of habitat, a mosaic of nature-friendly areas, along with natural dispersal corridors, needs to be created. The importance of urban habits needs to be recognised, given that the farming landscape has become increasingly hostile to biodiversity - and habitat protection must be enshrined in a law that has impact. Admirable though the Environment Wales (2016) Act is in theory, in practice it has little traction, and needs to be strengthened if it is to fulfil its purpose.

If nature is to thrive, there needs to be a better understanding of what constitutes habitat. For example, brownfield sites, often dismissed as wasteland, can be immensely rich in biodiversity.

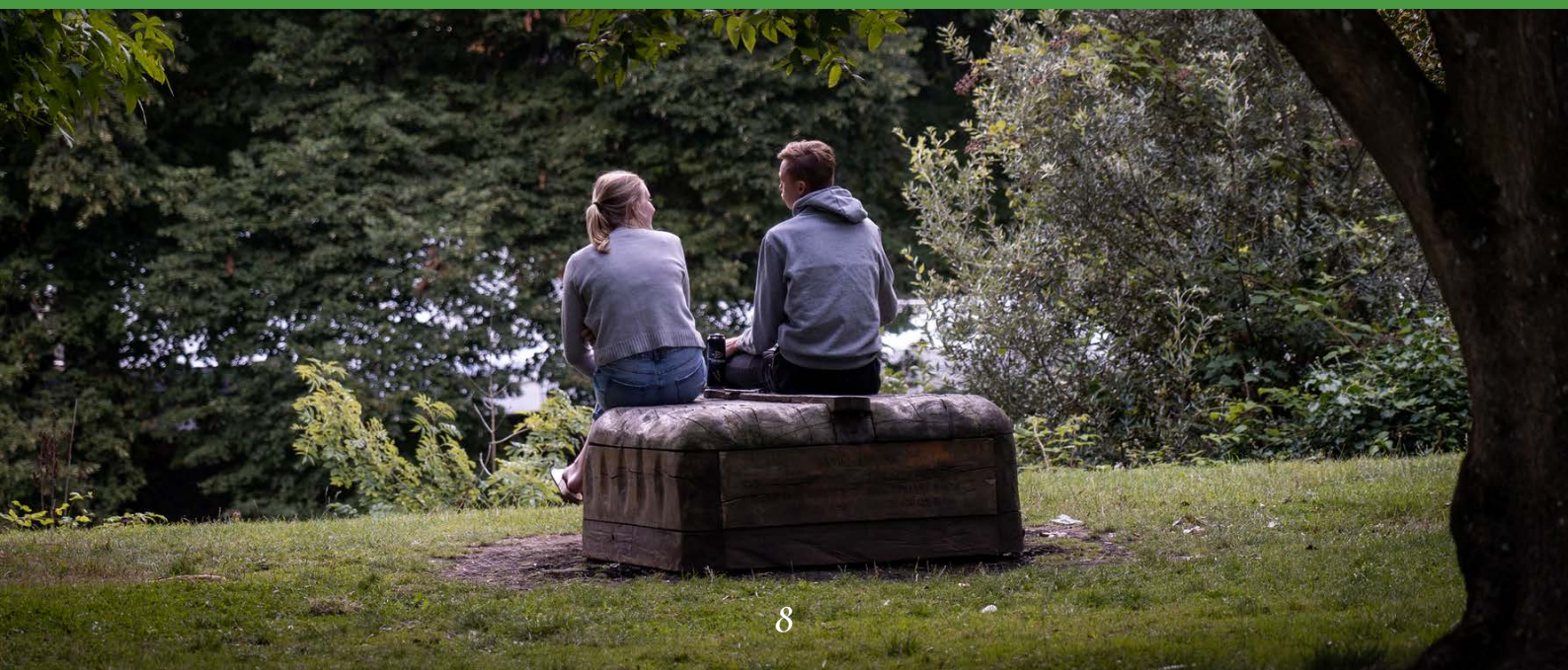
Public Green Space

While Cardiff is often described as a 'green city' this is something of a myth. Cardiff has only 8 per cent publicly available green space. This compares with:

18%	London
17%	Edinburgh
15.58%	Birmingham
15.34%	Nottingham
13.49%	Glasgow

As the pandemic has illustrated beyond doubt, and campaigns to protect local green space throughout the city amplify, the public loves and needs its green spaces. The benefits to public health and well-being provided by access to green space are well documented. Comprehensive studies demonstrate that those who have access to green space are less likely to suffer from anxiety, stress and depression. The WHO states: Urban green spaces, such as parks, playgrounds, and residential greenery, can promote mental and physical health, and reduce morbidity and mortality in urban residents by providing psychological relaxation and stress alleviation, stimulating social cohesion, supporting physical activity, and reducing exposure to air pollutants, noise and excessive heat.

Belfast Council is aiming to achieve 30 per cent green space by 2030, and has passed a motion to support this, and pledged to increase urban biodiversity at the same time. Cardiff should be emulating this, with the restitution of parkland, protection of mature green infrastructure, the creation of pocket parks and gardens, defending of informal green space, and identifying unused open space that can be transformed into publicly available green space.



The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act offers a vision of Wales as more prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal, culturally vibrant, globally responsible, and with cohesive communities.



Many outside Wales aspire to such a vision. But while we can be proud of this, there is much to do to make it a reality. Over two decades of devolution, Wales has begun to manage many of its own affairs, but it remains one of the least prosperous and most unhealthy parts of the UK.

The desire for a better world to live in has inspired visions such as garden cities. Socialists in power have built desirable social housing, most famously in 1920s 'Red Vienna', with quality developments that provided social and cultural facilities alongside homes. Other examples can be found from Chile to Scandinavia.

Wilful neglect has decayed British council housing, but once it too was desired. Now some councils are thinking ambitiously about zero-carbon quality housing in green environments – we need the same in Wales – and we need to prevent developers and local authorities simply paying lip-service to this notion.

As with the Environment Wales Act, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act is admirable in principle, but it too needs strengthening if it is to translate to everyday practice.

Community Land Trusts

A community land trust is a non-profit corporation that holds land on behalf of a place-based community, while serving as the long-term steward for affordable housing, community gardens, civic buildings, commercial spaces and other community assets on behalf of a community.

Community land trusts are set up and run by ordinary people to develop and manage homes as well as other assets. CLTs act as long-term stewards of housing, ensuring that it remains genuinely affordable, based on what people actually earn in their area, not just for now but for every future occupier. The movement of urban CLTs is growing, and there are examples of success stories in many cities, among them Oxford, Liverpool, Middlesbrough and Bristol.

Oxford is officially the least affordable city in the UK, with average house prices almost 15 times average wages. Rocketing land values mean that even the major extensions planned on the city's fringes are seeing the affordable housing component squeezed out. Oxfordshire CLT is leading the movement to put control back in the hands of local citizens, and to see meaningful affordability in the city's housing plans. Their plans for an Oxford Land Fund will suggest a radical alternative to land disposals and will sow the seeds for citizen-led housing right across the city.

Their first scheme at Deans Court will develop six affordable, cooperative rental units. The scheme will be built to Passivhaus standards (standards for quality, comfort and energy efficiency), already putting them in a tiny minority of environmental best-practice in the country. Meanwhile, the CLT is building partnerships across the city to lead a strong challenge to the development status quo.

The Scottish Government believes that a more socially just Scotland cannot be created without tackling land ownership. Half of the country's privately owned land is held by just 432 owners and a mere 16 owners hold 10% of Scotland (Wightman 2013) – the government wants to see more of Scotland's land in the hands of more of Scotland's people. The concept of community ownership is also shaping towns in Scotland: “The challenges facing towns are not new but have become even more acute over the course of the pandemic. With a real need to rethink the regeneration of towns beyond the high street, our aim is to facilitate a thought-provoking and enlightening event that brings together a range of perspectives from some of the pioneering groups taking on this challenge. We'll be looking at the holistic approach required to tackle key issues and the innovative thinking required for community ownership to really shape the future of towns”.

Wales faces similar issues, and Cardiff, even as the capital, is seeing a massive decline in footfall in the city centre. The Scottish Government provides funding to make CLT projects a reality – the Welsh Government should formulate a similar policy.

Compulsory purchase of empty homes to alleviate the housing crisis

Wales has 27,213 empty private homes, figures from Data Cymru for 2018-19 show, compared to the earliest set of available StatsWales figures - 18,980 in 2009-10: a rise of 43%.



The scale of the problem has been described as a ‘wasted resource’ when so many people need affordable homes.

The Welsh Government has given councils £40m to bring empty properties back into use. However, in 2019, Shelter Cymru said that although councils have powers to take over some homes to bring them back into use, they do not do so out of a fear of "getting it wrong".

Housing associations have also commented that they are "well placed to work with local authorities and the private sector to bring homes back into use".

A study conducted by United Welsh recognised that as a housing association, it was well placed to support such work. As the organisation commented: “Indeed, we feel it is our duty to shoulder some of the burden in terms of resources and finances, but ultimately we lack the legal authority to take enforcement action ourselves. We felt it was a clear and simple concept – if we worked in partnership with local authorities we would have all of the necessary tools at our disposal to bring empty homes back into use, and provide much needed homes. Welsh local authorities don’t always have the dedicated resources that are needed to complete the often complex and extensive processes involved with taking enforcement action. This usually meant that other tasks took priority, making empty homes reactive rather than proactive. More recently there has been increasing demand for results from Welsh Government, which showed its commitment to tackling empty homes by making £20 million available for a recyclable loans scheme. Frustratingly though it is still the case that empty homes does not appear to warrant a dedicated full time role in many local authorities.”

The Welsh Government needs to dedicate resources to overcome the obstacles that prevent housing associations taking vital steps to convert empty dwellings to homes, including taking action such as a CPO.



Design buildings future generations can be proud of

Design is widely recognised as the key to improving the quality of the built environment.

Numerous benefits arise from good design, such as civic pride in the urban environment, the stimulation of urban regeneration, corporate identity, occupant productivity and health in offices, improved learning in schools, better patient recovery rates in hospitals, as well as reduced environmental impact.

It is clear - with the occasional notable exception - that few recent edifices in Cardiff will stand the test of time. The rampant construction of student tower blocks, for example, has generated widespread public opprobrium. Developments within the city are developer-led and piecemeal, rather than being part of an holistic vision for an attractive, sustainable, liveable city. The city is primarily, a Victorian and Edwardian city, yet little emphasis is placed on maintaining that heritage and its context.

Thriving, vibrant independent niches within the city also fall foul of the development imperative that dominates the local authority's ethos. Modern buildings should and could be designed with citizens in mind, and spaces around them created that people wish to spend time in. People are often the overlooked asset in cities – yet creating a city that people want to live in and visit, is a vital component in a thriving economy. Architect practices such as Gehl, are world leaders in people-centred urban design. Their principles should be applied to the design of buildings and urban spaces in Cardiff.

Transport

The city needs to address air quality, and reduce our dependence on cars.

The UK has the worst rate of childhood asthma deaths in Europe – much of this caused by air pollution. Research conducted by the Royal College of Physicians found that 40,000 deaths each year are attributable to exposure to outdoor air pollution. Air pollution has also been found to damage lung development in children and worsen existing respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, especially in older people.



However, it has to be noted that electric vehicles are not the complete answer, particulate pollution is just as damaging as nitrogen dioxide pollution, and electric vehicles still produce the former – from tyres, brakes, road surfaces. Half of all non-exhaust emissions occur on urban roads, owing to greater braking per kilometre than on non-urban roads. We need:



A commitment to active travel in urban areas, and a reduction in private car use where possible.



Proper cycle paths on roads rather than through parkland and other areas of green space.



20mph limits introduced – and enforced – on all residential roads.



Encouraging walking – from an early age – to break the pattern of unnecessary car use for short journeys.



Financial incentives for people to stop owning cars, or to car share.



Better, cleaner public transport/more affordable train travel.



Incorporating future-proof transport plans into new developments.





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