



Strategic Site Engagement in Conwy: Project Update, 16th January 2024

1. Background

Planning Aid Wales (PAW) was commissioned by Conwy CBC in September 2023 to provide non-statutory community engagement events on 5 Strategic Sites in the emerging Conwy Replacement Local Development Plan. This report provides a summary of activities undertaken, reflections on the process and key areas of feedback received from communities to date. Conwy CBC will use the information collected to inform the Deposit stage of the plan.

2. Scope

The engagement work was intended to explore the views of community representatives near to the sites on how the sites might be developed in future. The information gathered can be used to inform Place Plans / Site Briefs / Masterplans (or even planning applications) and will inform the production of the deposit rLDP in 2024. The original project scope included the provision of one face-to-face and one online event per site (a total of 10 events) between October and December 2023. Venue availability meant that facilitating all of the events during this period and allowing time for advertising was not possible, and as such it was agreed that the events would be extended into January 2024.

The project has attracted substantial feedback on the publicity of the events both from members of the public and their elected representatives. PAW has made every effort to adjust the nature of the activities accordingly and unfortunately, sharing of

rLDP contact lists were not possible due to GDPR reasons. As a result of the above, PAW has undertaken the following additional works outside of the scope of the original proposal:

- Provision of 4 extra in-person events, one each for Llanddulas Quarry and Llanrhos and a further ‘double event’ (two events back-to-back) for Old Conwy, due to substantial bookings and/or at the request of Members.
- Substantial additional advertising of the events, including the preparation, printing and posting of over 1,000 notices to residential properties adjoining or adjacent to the site.

A disbursement record has been maintained and will be discussed with the Strategic Planning Policy team due to the higher than anticipated costs for postage and simultaneous translation fees, but no additional charges will be made for additional events.

3. Advertising, bookings and feedback on publicity

With the support of the Strategic Planning Policy Team, PAW prepared multi-channel advertising that included:

- Email notices were issued to local representatives according to research across 9 categories (Elected Members, Town and Community Councils, adjoining councils, local services, third sector organisations, local groups, local business representatives and businesses and ‘others’ such as local media and hard-to-reach groups). In such instances, PAW was reliant on information publicly available or could be found via internet search.
- Social media posts were issued via CCBC’s social media channels.
- Press releases were issued to the local press via CCBC’s press team.
- Posters were distributed to venues, town council halls, churches and shops close to each site.

- Letter mailouts / leaflet drops were issued to properties adjoining or adjacent to the sites in question, amounting to hundreds of letters for some sites.

Each email notice invited participants to share the invites with their local networks. In some instances, this attracted substantial social media and press attention. Each notice included a link to an event booking form on the Eventbrite platform which was used for PAW to plan around event numbers. A summary of the advertising issued by PAW, the bookings generated and the resultant participation is provided below:

Event	Emails Sent ¹	Letters Sent	Bookings	Attended
Llanrwst – Online, 9 th Nov.	74	47	2	3
Llanrwst – Glasdir, 16 th Nov.			20	30
Llanddulas Quarry – Online, 15 th Nov.	65	143	10	7
Llanddulas Quarry – Ysgol Llanddulas, 22 nd Nov.			26	37
Llanddulas Quarry – Llysfaen, 23 rd Nov.			32	53
Llanfairfechan – Online, 20 th Nov.	69	125	18	15
Llanfairfechan – Community Hall, 7 th Dec.			40	35
Old Colwyn – Online, 12 th Dec.	88	394	20	14
Old Colwyn – Festival Church, 10 th Jan.			50 ²	29
Old Colwyn – Stadiwm CSM (x2), 22 nd Jan			105	62
Llanrhos – Online, 16 th Jan	5 ³	334	16	13
Llanrhos – Old School (x2), 23 rd Jan			92	58
~ Total participants ⁴				356

¹ Indicates the number of unique email addresses researched for local groups that were publicly available via Google Search. Addresses may have been contacted more than once by PAW and Conwy CBC and excludes number of unique emails sent to these addresses (e.g. advertising additional events).

² Participants invited to attend 22nd Jan event(s) after bookings reached venue limit of 80 and a waiting list of 13. This was for health and safety reasons.

³ Given the predominantly residential nature of Llanrhos and the limited number of email addresses available online, a leaflet drop was conducted to every residential property and business within the vicinity of the site in lieu of email advertising, which was limited to local elected members.

⁴ Assumes full turnout at remaining booked events. Several participants attended two or more events unique to the site or even across sites; figure provided is therefore total participants rather than unique individuals engaged (this figure has not been calculated but is likely to be at least 25% smaller).

* Bookings as at 16th January 2024. Booking numbers can increase substantially in days leading up to events.

Feedback on publicity

Whilst publicity of the events was focused on community representatives, there was a strong public impression that the exercise was a formal consultation and that every local resident should have the opportunity to participate. Whilst this was not feasible or affordable within the scope of the exercise, adjustments were made to publicising activities wherever possible as the activities progressed and according to the feedback received from local members and members of the public. This included providing additional events at different times and extending the scope of postal advertising as the project progressed.

It should also be noted that unlike a public survey, where the widest possible population is invited to attract a *breadth* of views, the events were designed to explore and discuss the *depth* of opinion of the views of community representatives local to the sites.

Nonetheless, the main concerns raised included:

- The events were not advertised widely enough and did not reach enough people in time. This was partly limited by the timeframes established to complete the project and partly by the limited contacts that could be supplied to PAW. Nonetheless, all events were advertised to local elected Members, Community and Town Councils, via Conwy's social media channels, via press releases and via local advertising.
- The information provided about the events was insufficient and triggered multiple requests for more information from Conwy CBC and PAW. Whilst every effort was made to be clear about the nature of the events in the initial advertising, many concerns were raised about the lack of information about the proposals on the sites themselves. Whilst it has been emphasised at every opportunity that there is limited information available at this stage and the aim of the exercise is to inform the subsequent statutory consultation on the deposit plan, these concerns persisted. PAW prepared a 10-page FAQ document about the exercise and distributed event slides after the first event had been delivered on each site, which partly eased these concerns.

Based on the above, Planning Aid Wales would make the following recommendations for improving publicity in future:

1. Establish and publicise the scope and limitations of publicity activities at the outset, placing even greater emphasis on inviting community representatives to help 'spread the word'.
2. Allow a minimum 8-week lead-in time for advertising of each event.
3. Ensure a web page is established with all available background information, links to previous exercises and details of how to book into events before advertising is begun.
4. Consider larger / more flexible venues, taking into account proximity to the sites in question.
5. Ensuring the LDP consultation register is available / publicity can take place via the register.

4. Feedback on the Strategic Sites

Despite reservations about the scope of the publicity of the events, each event has been able to generate in excess of 100 individual comments on a wide range of matters relating to local knowledge, site design and community priorities. When taken in total, it is likely that the exercise will have attracted in the region of 1,400 comments that will be highly valuable to subsequent stages of the plan.

It should be noted that for all events a proportion of those who attended would likely object to the site(s) were the exercise a formal consultation. Some of the key areas of concern common to all events included:

- The potential impact on what were considered already pressured local services, primarily:

- Poor GP & dentist availability in the area (long waits for appointments were referenced at every single event).
 - The lack of availability of school places in the area and adding pressures to existing schools.
- The nature, appropriateness and scale of the proposals and their proximity to existing settlements, e.g.:
 - A perception that the houses proposed will be all larger units (e.g. 4/5 bed units) and market housing will not serve local needs or be affordable for local people.
 - Environmental impacts, impacts on wildlife and nature
 - Specific environmental concerns at Llanddulas Quarry, including the enormous remediation works required, impact of increased lorry movements across the site for waste transfer, continued impact on wildlife and nature and the loss of potentially valuable future public open space that would have been regained by the community after the existing operations ceased.
- Local flooding occurrences that would be exacerbated by developments, surface runoff and impact on existing sewerage networks and a lack of confidence in SuDS as a solution.
- The potential impact on existing road networks that are already congested, coupled with already declining local bus services.

Despite concerns on the principle of allocating each site, audience members were willing to participate in in-depth discussions and put forward suggestions relating to the potential design of the site and community priorities should sites go ahead.

Examples of common suggestions included:

- Ensuring all matters above are addressed fully, particularly in the upcoming Deposit consultation and providing a clear rationale for why these sites have been selected over others that may be more appropriate – e.g. brownfield sites.

- Ensuring housing that is delivered includes an appropriate mix of house types that address local needs / the needs of the community and are ‘actually affordable’. Most events concluded as high a proportion of affordable housing as is possible should be prioritised (and enforced).
- Ensuring that any public open space caters to and provides recreation spaces for people of *all* ages (i.e. playgrounds are important, but so are spaces for dog walking and parks, outdoor sports facilities etc.)
- Rather than just placing new housing estates, give much more emphasis to integrating new developments with existing communities, including providing community meeting spaces / cafes / shops / services, good permeability / footpath connections, design that integrates and celebrates the heritage of the area.

5. Outcomes

Community engagement on specific site allocations can be challenging. However, Planning Aid Wales would not have undertaken the activity if there was not a perceived value to the community and it was confident that the feedback raised would be taken into account. It is PAW’s view that the project has achieved the following outcomes:

- Added value to a planning consultation / engagement process and has allowed more local people to have a more meaningful say early in that process, going ‘above and beyond’ normal planning requirements - the entire exercise is being delivered in addition to ‘statutory’ consultations that have and will take place on the rLDP.
- Raised public awareness of:
 - The emerging rLDP
 - Past rLDP consultations and the outputs and background papers available on Conwy’s website
 - Changes made since the Preferred Strategy
 - The forthcoming Deposit Plan consultation, and
 - The sites themselves.

PAW's publicity activity involved notifying 300 people PAW identified as community representatives, some of whom might not have been contacted in a normal consultation exercise. PAW has posted 1,043 letters to residents surrounding the sites which goes way beyond normal statutory notification requirements; those might not otherwise have been aware of proposals at statutory stages at all.

- Generated enormous public interest (particularly via social media), in part by focusing directly on specific site engagement rather than generic plan stage consultation. Whilst it is difficult to control information circulated outside of authority channels, it is PAW's view that awareness is far higher as a result. Despite concerns raised over publicity, the 1,343 communications issued by PAW resulted in 398 active participants. Whilst noting that press releases and Conwy CBC social media are not included, this is a response rate of 29%, which is far higher than might be expected for such an exercise.
- Helped build public understanding of:
 - The rLDP process,
 - Evidence-based strategic planning,
 - The nature of strategic site allocations,
 - The relationship between LDPs and planning applications, and
 - Material considerations
- Improved the Strategic Planning Policy team's understanding of community concerns, ideas and aspirations, arguably 'raising the bar' for a quality placemaking approach and potentially identifying new constraints that might have not otherwise been considered. It is likely that the project will generate over 1,400 unique comments across the five sites which will provide far greater and more granular detail on local knowledge (and concerns), site design and community priorities that can be considered when preparing policies for the sites.
- Provided opportunities for learning for future the design of future engagement activities for both Conwy and Planning Aid Wales.

- It has been a dynamic project that has taken into account community feedback during (rather than after) the project. Despite some reservations made, engagement activity has been consistently adjusted and extended to meet community needs. This has included extending advertising activity, providing more information and providing four additional events at different times and locations in order to meet requests by members of the public and elected members. The running of additional events has been done at no additional cost to the authority.

6. Next Steps

Following completion of the final event on 23rd January, PAW will prepare five written reports that summarise the feedback gathered, one report per site. These reports will include:

- A summary of the activity and the most common issues raised.
- A summary of the advertising activity undertaken, including groups contacted and a map of properties targeted.
- Annexes of including all points raised at each event and further comments received via email.

It is anticipated that that all reports will be completed and circulated to all event participants and Conwy CBC by 9th February 2024 at the latest.