

Strategic Site Engagement in Conwy County Borough by Planning Aid Wales: Llanrwst Report

1. Background

Planning Aid Wales (PAW) was commissioned by Conwy County Borough Council (CBC) in September 2023 to provide non-statutory community engagement events on the 5 suggested Strategic Sites in the emerging Conwy Replacement Local Development Plan. This report provides a summary of activities undertaken with respect to the Llanrwst Strategic Site. It summarises the feedback received from local communities who participated in the facilitated events for the site delivered by PAW. This report and all additional comments received by email will be forwarded to Conwy CBC who intend to use the information collected to inform the Deposit Stage of the plan.

As an organisation that supports community engagement in the planning process, PAW only undertakes commissions that:

1. Align with its mission for a fairer, more transparent and more responsive planning system.
2. It believes can add value to a planning consultation / engagement process and will allow more people to have a more meaningful say in that process.

As well as meeting these priorities, PAW particularly welcomes this engagement activity. Whilst there are lessons learned that can be applied to future activities, it goes above and beyond what Local Planning Authorities are required to do in planning regulations - the entire exercise is being delivered in addition to 'statutory' consultations that have and will take place on the Replacement Local Development Plan.

2. Scope & Methodology

This engagement work was intended to explore the views of community representatives on how the sites could be developed in future. The information gathered can be used to inform site specific policies / Place Plans / Site Briefs / Masterplans (or even planning applications) and will inform the production of the

Conwy Deposit Replacement Local Development 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 some events would be extended into January 2024 and additional events would be provided subject to demand.

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, use of existing Local Development Plan contact lists were not possible due to Data Protection reasons. As a result of the above, PAW has undertaken additional works outside of the scope of the original proposal, including preparation and postage of letters to residents close to the site (see section 3, below).

Both the online and face to face event followed broadly the same format. PAW delivered a presentation and then facilitated audience discussion around a set of broad, overlapping topics. The presentation included information on:

1. PAW's role and the nature of the events.
2. A brief overview of the Local Development Plan (LDP) preparation process, land allocations, candidate sites and how LDPs influence planning application decisions.
3. A recap of activities already taken place on the Conwy Replacement Local Development Plan to date (including the Preferred Strategy consultation in 2019) and the anticipated forthcoming Deposit Plan Consultation in 2024.
4. A definition of Strategic Sites, how they are assessed and selected.
5. The current authority-wide targets (4,300 homes including 700/20% contingency and 1,500 jobs on 16.4ha employment land).
6. A review of the intended site allocation in the 2019 Preferred Strategy and a comparison with the current proposal.
7. Details of the current proposal as follows:
 - a. A reduction in the overall area of the site since 2019.
 - b. Allocation of housing in a range of 80-120 homes, including affordable housing.
 - c. Intention for open space provision to be defined.

PAW addressed procedural questions wherever possible and asked follow-up questions to explore matters further where appropriate, it was also emphasised that

any feedback (including questions) gathered would be presented back to Conwy CBC word-for-word.

For the online event, the entire session was recorded and feedback from participants was transcribed. For the face-to-face session, participants were provided with physical copies of the site map and discussion prompt sheets and were invited to record their feedback either directly on the sheets or on sticky notes.

Four broad discussion topics were facilitated as follows:

1. **First Impressions**, where initial comments, issues and questions on any topic were invited.
2. **Local Knowledge**, where participants were invited to describe the character of the existing site and its surroundings and share their views on the proposal and impacts in the context of this knowledge.
3. **Site Design**, where participants were invited to consider design implications in relation to access / highways, movement across the site, Active Travel, the form and nature of open space, environmental matters, safety and any potential improvements that would make the allocation better.
4. **Community priorities**, where participants were invited to consider community wants / needs, gaps in provision and any improvements or benefits the site might bring.

A summary of all of the feedback gathered as part of the exercise is presented in part 4, below. Appendix A presents the full feedback as provided at both events. It was also emphasised that further comments could be provided in writing by 19th January 2024, all communications received have been forwarded to Conwy CBC alongside this report. A summary of the additional comments received is provided in Appendix B (NOTE: full comments have not been published in this report for Data Protection reasons).

3. Advertising, bookings and feedback on publicity

With the support of the Strategic Planning Policy Service at Conwy CBC, 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 CCBCs social media channels.
- Press releases were issued to the local press via CCBCs press team.
- Details were shared on the CCBC website.
- Posters were distributed to appropriate venues e.g. town council halls, churches and shops close to each site.
- Letter mailouts were issued to properties adjoining or adjacent to the sites in question.

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.

74 emails¹ were researched and contacted and 47 letters to properties closest to the site were posted. the bookings generated and the resultant participation for the Llanrwst site is provided below:

Event	Bookings	Attended
Llanrwst – Online, 9 th November 2023	2	3
Llanrwst – Glasdir, 16 th November 2023	20	30
	Total:	33

Feedback on publicity

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 undertaking postal advertising, which was not originally part of the project scope.

In the case of the Llanrwst site, letters were sent to 47 properties nearest the site using addresses established using Royal Mail address records, prioritising adjoining / facing properties on Llanddoged Road, Ffordd Yr Orsaf, Pen Y Bryn, Station Terrace and Poplar Grove.

However, at both events some residents reported not receiving the letters issued. This was taken into consideration on subsequent exercises where the scale of letter advertising was increased and the source of addresses was mined using Conwy CBC's more detailed online maps.

¹ 1 Indicates the number of unique email addresses researched for local groups that were publicly available via Google Search. Addresses may have been contacted independently by PAW and Conwy CBC.

It should be noted that unlike a public survey, where the widest possible population is invited to attract a breadth of views, these 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, and particular, did not reach the tenant of the farm on the site directly. This was partly limited by the timeframes established to complete the project and partly by the limited contacts that could be supplied to PAW. The tenant's concerns were addressed by Conwy CBC directly. All events were advertised to local elected Members, Llanrwst Town Council, via Conwy's social media channels, via press releases and via local advertising and letter.
- 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 of the Replacement LDP process 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 as a result.

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

- 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'.
- Allow a minimum 8-week lead-in time for advertising of each event.
- 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.
- Consider larger / more flexible venues, taking into account proximity to the sites in question.
- Ensuring the LDP consultation register is available / publicity can take place via the register.

4. Summary of feedback on the Llanrwst Site

33 participants attended the events and a further 3 individuals forwarded comments by email. In total, each event has been able to generate in excess of 223 individual comments on a wide range of matters relating to local knowledge, site design and community priorities.

It was PAW's impression that the majority (but not necessarily all) participants who attended would likely object to the site were the exercise a formal consultation. Participants who did express support for new housing 'in principle' also expressed concerns about the potential associated impacts.

Whilst the sessions were divided into four broad discussion topics, each topic overlapped with the next, and for ease, the following summary takes into account feedback from all events and discussion topics and has been divided into i). Issues of concern and ii). Mitigations and Improvements to the site.

i). Issues of concern to the community

The following points have been ranked by the number of times referenced by different individuals across all events and additional comments received by email.

NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of all issues raised – see appendices A and B for notes of all feedback generated.

The most common areas of concern, in order of frequency raised (highest first) included:

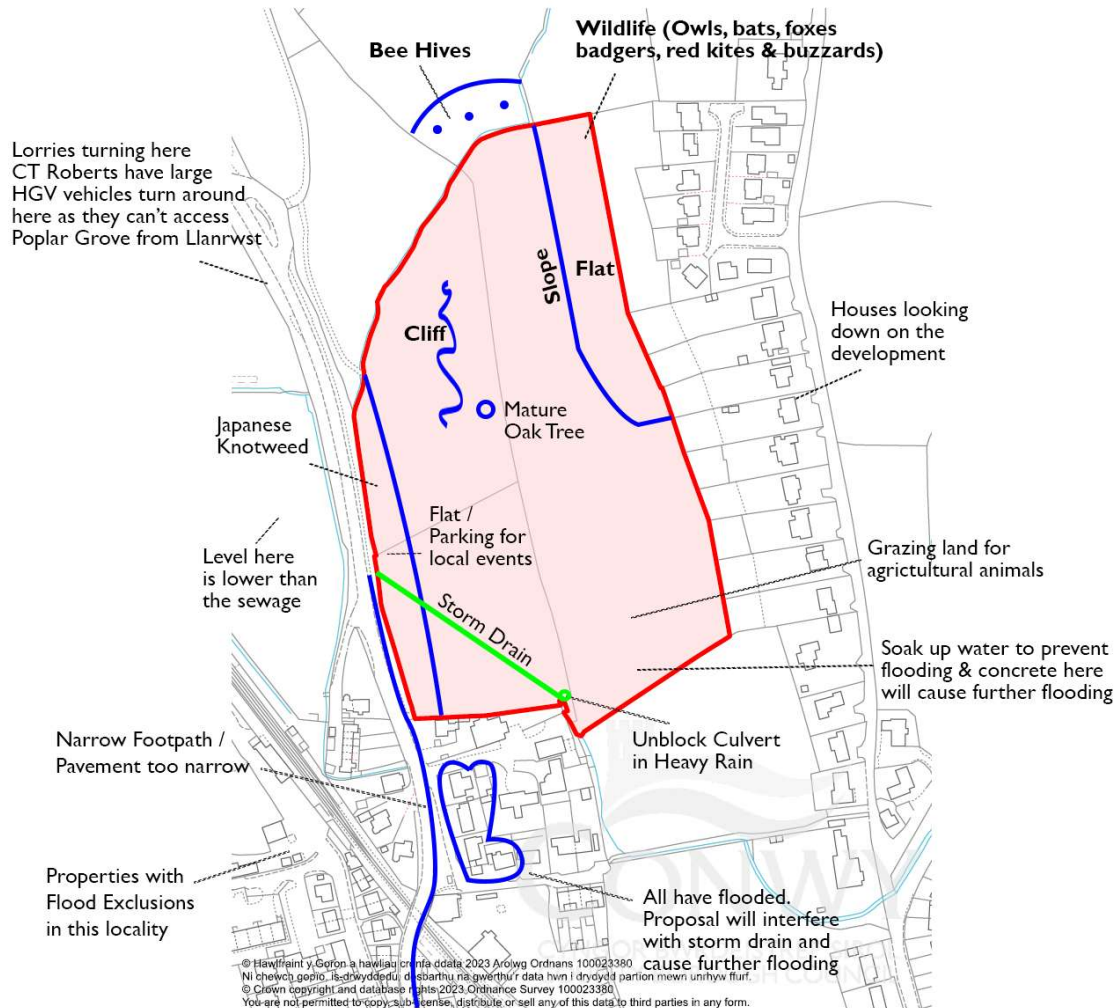
- 1. Access, Highway Safety & Public Transport.** The most common concern raised was that the access to and from the site on foot to Llanrwst town centre is inadequate. Participants reported that pavements, where they exist, are narrow along a busy main road and would be inadequate for passing and would pose risks to pedestrians, especially at the railway bridge which would be a bottleneck. Access to and from the site from the A470 was considered to be difficult and the proposal would generate substantial additional traffic. Inadequate public transport serving the area was also identified as a concern several times.
- 2. The appropriateness / suitability of the allocation.** Several participants questioned the need to lose prime agricultural land for the allocation. Many (although not all) felt the field was not suitable for the scale of housing proposed and the number of units represented a significant increase to the overall

population of Llanrwst. Others felt that housing was needed in the area, but the concentration of housing on the site in question was out of proportion and should be distributed across smaller sites. Several participants asked for more information on the housing mix and the justification for the scale of the proposed allocation. Many had concerns about there being insufficient employment opportunities in the area and questioned where the new residents would work. Finally, several participants questioned whether the influx of new residents would detrimentally affect the use of the Welsh Language in Llanrwst.

- 3. Impact on existing infrastructure & services.** The majority of participants felt that the influx of new residents would negatively affect already stretched local services. Many reported that existing services including doctors, dentists, schools, emergency services, public transport, sewerage facilities, shops and sports facilities were struggling to meet current demand and Llanrwst was not ready for a population increase. Some specifically referenced wait times of 2-3 weeks for a doctor's appointment and others stated a new school would be needed, although another indicated that there is space at Llanddoged school.
- 4. Flooding / drainage.** Multiple participants had concerns about the impact of the allocation on local flooding instances that were already on the rise. Several instances of existing flood occurrences on or near the site were identified (including on the A470, which has knock-on effects on commuters) and that existing drainage solutions were poorly maintained. Others referenced the poor topography and drainage on the site itself (see map 1 below). Others questioned whether there was sufficient water supply to the site and whether the sewer network could cope with the scale of housing.
- 5. Affordable Housing.** Many participants identified the need to provide quality, affordable housing that should be provided for local people first. Some referenced a need for a percentage of affordable housing to be identified before they would submit further comments, but there appeared to be a consensus that this percentage should be as high as possible to benefit the local community.

Other issues identified included the potential impact of the proposal on biodiversity and the loss of trees and hedges which was a strong feature of the current site. Some referenced that the site would have a negative impact on active travel and there were concerns raised regarding the impact of the construction of the site including noise.

Whilst local knowledge was reflected in all of the points raised, participants were also invited to identify matters on physical maps – a composite of multiple maps is provided below:



ii). Mitigations and Improvements

Whilst many participants felt the principle of the allocation was inappropriate, many were willing to participate in discussions and put forward suggestions relating to the potential design of the site, mitigations against impacts and priorities for the community should the site go ahead. It should be noted that there were far fewer comments in these discussions in comparison to the first two discussions and concerns were still expressed about the site even in these discussions.

There was broad agreement that the concerns identified in part i) should be addressed fully in the design of the site and full justifications should be provided in the upcoming Deposit Plan regarding all matters raised.

The most common suggestions, in order of frequency raised (highest first) included:

1. **Access, Highway Safety & Public Transport.** Safety concerns should be addressed, particularly as to how the site would safely access the A470 – a roundabout would likely be needed. Improvements in Active Travel connections (particularly for pedestrians) was considered essential as existing pavements are poor or non-existent, both via the A470 and Llanddoged Road, although it was not clear how this could be provided. Concerns about the connectivity to the rest of Llanrwst should be considered in order to properly integrate the site. Access through Poplar Grove was not considered suitable as it was too narrow, and similarly, limited visibility, limited passing space and the absence of pavements on Llanddoged Road is concerning. Likewise, if children are to be sent to Ysgol Llanddoged, this would add pressure to the already poor and dangerous Llanddoged Road. Limited bus and train services were referenced as problematic; bus stops should be installed near the site and safe access to the train station should be considered. This is likely to create an over-reliance on car transport which should be addressed with sufficient parking, but this would not help with integrating the site to the rest of the town.
2. **Affordable Housing / Local Needs Housing.** There was a consensus that housing provided should cater to local needs and several participants suggested that the housing should be 100% affordable for local people or be restricted to local people only (several asked for clarification on the percentage of affordable units / formula to determine affordability). At the least, the housing should cater to the local population and affordability should be established around local earnings. Provision of a high percentage of bungalows was suggested, as was suitable properties for young people including help to buy schemes. The use of the site for second homes and / or AirBNBs should be restricted.
3. **Nature of Development / Site Design.** Some participants wanted to ensure that the design of the site is suitable for Llanrwst, has quality architecture that reflects its setting, maximises integration of the surrounding landscape and provides suitable public spaces. As suggested above, the type of units should prioritise affordable housing for the local population and their needs should be considered in the design of the homes – for example, providing accessible bungalows for the elderly and disabled. Some participants felt that the site wasn't big enough for the number of houses proposed and others noted that better space should be

provided per unit including sufficient parking space. Several suggestions desired quality homes that should be energy efficient with solar panels as standard. Consideration should be given to ensure that the houses are actually deliverable, given recent failure of building firms in the county.

4. **Open Space / Other provisions within the site.** Suitable spaces should be identified for dog walking and spaces for pets as well as green spaces, parks, playing fields and footpaths. Playgrounds were suggested, but also good access to nature / wider open space – e.g. a wildlife / nature corners was suggested, as was planting of woodland. Designing out anti-social behaviour was also referenced. Allotments should be sited near to existing dwellings and should not be used as a reason to limit garden sizes. A community energy scheme (Hydro / Solar / Wind) to benefit locals was also suggested.

Other matters off-site included suggestions that Llanrwst Town Square should be improved and that Welsh language lessons for all new people should be provided to try and help limit the impact on the language in the area.

Llanrwst Town Council have worked with the community in the previous year to identify what broader community priorities were as part of a 'Kickstarter Place Plan' exercise, and participants agreed these priorities should be considered as part of this LDP process. That activity attracted 212 participants who identified improvements to the riverside walk, reuse of vacant properties, vibrant shopping opportunities, better maintenance of roads and public facilities, a greater range of entertainment facilities, flooding infrastructure, affordable housing and better / more frequent train and bus services as priorities.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Of the 36 residents of Llanrwst who participated in this exercise, it is clear that there are strong concerns about the principle of the proposed allocation as well as the potential impact on existing services, transport infrastructure and flooding. Were the site to go ahead, the provision of affordable local needs housing was the most common issue raised.

It is recognised that the participants represent 1.15% of the total population of Llanrwst and in that regard, the results of the exercise cannot be taken as either statistically significant or a representation of the views of those who did not participate. However, given the frequency and commonality of the issues raised independently at events, it is possible similar issues may be reflected in a wider engagement exercise.

The issues identified by the community within this report (both in the body of the report and the Appendixes) are submitted to Conwy CBC for consideration as they prepare the Deposit Plan; at the least, PAW recommends that all of the issues raised are addressed, justified and clarified in the Deposit Plan consultation, and ideally a response is prepared to the issues raised and circulated back to those who participated and published on their website. In terms of the forthcoming consultation, PAW also suggests that the recommendations in section 3 are taken into account when planning and publicising the Deposit Plan consultation exercise.