

## Accelerating our Planning & Consenting system



Three strategic barriers stand in the way of Wales securing a clean energy future: our grid network, planning & consenting system, and port and supply chain readiness. Each has its unique challenges but impact one another and must be tackled in unison.

This briefing underscores the critical necessity for Wales to speed up its transition to renewable energy, highlighting **deficiencies within the current planning framework**. Most of the levers required to fix this sit with Welsh Government. It discusses the substantial benefits that overcoming these barriers could bring, alongside the risks associated with failing to do so. Finally, it concludes by outlining key steps policymakers can make to address these issues, including policy alignment, increased resources, and streamlined decision-making.

Demand for clean electricity will rapidly increase in the next decade as we look to heat our homes, power our vehicles, and clean up our industries. While the Welsh Government's targets and policy ambitions back renewable energy initiatives, the current planning framework is failing to approve projects at the scale and speed required. This results in a significant disparity between our ambition to derive 100% of electricity from renewables by 2035 and the actual progress being made on the ground to meet that goal.

### The benefits of renewables are vast, providing:

- Low-cost energy for bill payers
- Community benefit schemes
- Jobs and green economic growth
- Funding for environmental programmes
- A pathway to decarbonise our heavy industry
- Security of generating our own energy

RenewableUK Cymru estimates Wales **needs to install four times as much wind power capacity by 2035** to meet its expected electricity needs. Yet for the third year in a row, we are seeing fewer projects getting up and running. All the indications point to a consenting regime which is grinding to a halt rather than ramping up to meet this demand.

- **Less than 50%** of Developments of National Significance (DNS) applications were determined on time in 2023.
- Of the 9 energy projects refused to date, almost half (44%) involved the Minister going against Inspector recommendation.
- Between 2020 and 2023, it took an **average of 1,030 days** to decide onshore wind planning applications in Wales.
- Latest stats from the Welsh Energy Generation Report show **only 44MW of renewable energy capacity was installed in 2022**, which included just one micro-scale wind installation of 6kW. By comparison Scotland added 1,621 MW of additional capacity that same year.

This poor performance can be attributed to two primary factors: chronic under-resourcing of statutory consultees and a clash in the conflicting interpretation of Welsh Government energy and environmental policies.

Delays and uncertainty lead to increased costs and together, risk Wales becoming less attractive and competitive as an investment opportunity. The role of the Welsh Government is critical to attracting inward investment and providing a stable and effective policy environment to support Wales' ability to deliver projects. With the introduction of the new Infrastructure (Wales) Bill, it is imperative we achieve clear policy alignment and a steadfast commitment to improve the efficiency of the decision-making process.

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## What does Wales stand to gain?

Renewable energy projects provide **major economic investment** into Wales. According to RenewableUK's Onshore Wind Prospectus, an additional 2.2GW of new onshore wind in Wales could deliver an expected **£4.4bn in GVA and create 3,000 jobs by 2030**.

These projects also offer substantial benefits for local communities and environmental initiatives, such as peatland restoration.

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## Pen y Cymoedd Onshore Wind Farm

Located in Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taf, Pen y Cymoedd wind farm funds a 25-year £3m habitat restoration scheme of 1500 hectares. In collaboration with the Lost Peatlands Project, Pen y Cymoedd has led one of the UK's largest peatland restoration projects.



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## A future-proofed planning system

Planning officers at all governmental levels are already seeing a rise in submissions which are forecast to increase rapidly over the next five years.

Consenting and planning is one of the most considerable success factors for our Welsh port and supply chain readiness. With the leasing and port investment processes now underway for floating offshore wind projects in the Celtic Sea, the need for upgrades to be approved on time is critical.

A recent opinion poll shows the majority of people in Wales support both onshore and offshore wind farms, with 63% of people agreeing the planning process needs to be sped up. Businesses and communities recognise they are missing out on both clean energy and the economic and associated wider benefits projects can deliver.

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## How can you help?

1. Show your support by endorsing an independent task and finish group with a Welsh Government Ministerial lead made up of government officials and industry representatives. Working together, we can set out the needs case for resourcing and aligning policy.
2. Urge the Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Planning to use this evidence base to agree the appropriate funding for additional staffing and training within Welsh Government, PEDW and local authority planning teams.
3. Arm yourself with the necessary knowledge to serve your constituents on this issue. Read our handy FAQs and case studies.

