



Environment Department



The Environment Department leads on the following main areas:

- **Planning and Building Control**
- **Public Protection**
- **Transportation and the Countryside**

Together with the day to day work outlined below, this department leads on the following improvement priority projects:

- Public Protection Capacity - (Improvement Priority 7)
- Climate Change Action Plan - (Improvement Priority 8)
- Managing the use of dwellings as holiday homes and second homes (Improvement Priority 4)

It is also noted that the Department contributes towards improvement priority 1, **Tourism - forming a Sustainable Tourism Plan** (Economy and Community Department) and the Environment Department leads on the project to improve management of motorhomes. This will include regulating and, where possible, enforcement as well as developing a pilot scheme to provide facilities for motor homes to stay overnight, for Gwynedd to include up to 6 sites with the first in place before the end of March 2023. This work will be part of the Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism.

Naturally, the Covid-19 crisis and the restrictions pertaining to it have had a considerable impact on all the department's services, with many e.g. our **Public Protection** services delivering quite different work to the norm, and this under pressure. We also have a completely new service, the Test, Trace and Protect Service, since June 2020 and we have had to find different solutions to ensure that we can continue to provide other services. All of this has had an impact on the usual way the department is run, and on our priorities during 2021/22 and although we were able to stabilise some services, the challenge of recovery and lack of capacity continues to face us as we step into 2022/23. We will use the lessons that have arisen from the crisis when considering the shape of our future services.

Planning and Building Control

Our Planning and Building Control Services comprise our Planning Service, our Joint Planning Policy Service (Gwynedd and Anglesey) and our Building Control Service.

The purpose of the **Planning Service** is to facilitate and manage sustainable developments for the benefit of our communities, the economy and the environment within the Gwynedd planning authority area (which does not include the National Park area).

The service is responsible for determining planning applications to develop land, as well as giving advice on any pre-application enquiries. They also take enforcement measures with developments that have not received planning permission and deal with all types of developments such as housing (including affordable housing), new schools, factories and substantial infrastructure developments such as National Grid schemes. The Service also investigates planning control breaches and undertakes enforcement when there is justification to do so.

Periods of long-term sickness over the last eighteen months has highlighted the lack of resilience in the Service that has had an impact on how quickly applications are determined and enforcement cases resolved, and therefore on the Service's performance.

Our **Joint Planning Policy Service** with the Isle of Anglesey County Council prepares planning policy documents, including preparing and monitoring the Local Development Plan that promotes sustainable development and includes maps and written policies used to determine planning applications. Alongside the work on the Local Development Plan, the service is responsible for preparing a series of [Supplementary Planning Guidance](#) for adoption. The guidance add details to the planning policies, and strengthen the Development Plan's ability to provide a firm foundation to make decisions on planning applications in the future. Guidance is also given on planning policy matters to the Gwynedd Planning Authority, the Isle of Anglesey County Council Planning Authority and to external organisations and the public.

During 2021/22 Annual Monitoring Reports (Local Development Plan) for 2019/20 and 2020/21 were submitted to the Welsh Government. The statutory process of reviewing the Joint Local Development Plan has commenced since the start of August 2021, with a public consultation on the Review Report that comes to the conclusion that a full form review is required, which is tantamount to the preparation of a new plan.

As a result of Legislation that will come into force in 2021 to create a Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) for the north Wales region (and the other regions), there will be a statutory requirement to prepare a Strategic Development Plan for the region. The Council will be expected to contribute towards any costs of creating a New Unit that will be responsible for preparing the Strategic Development Plan, at a time when the Service will also need to prepare a Revised or New Local Development Plan. The service also collaborates regionally with other planning authorities, and a report and recommendations to provide a Strategic Development Plan has been presented to the Chief Executives of north Wales in 2021/22.

The purpose of the **Building Control Service** is to ensure that construction work is delivered in accordance with the Building Regulations to keep people safe while improving fuel and power conservation, protecting and improving the environment and promoting sustainable development. We also ensure that access and essential facilities are provided for the disabled in new buildings and as part of adaptations, and operate a 24 hour service to respond to dangerous buildings.

Following a Ffordd Gwynedd review of the Service, it was highlighted that fee earning work (Building Control applications) should be prioritised over non-fee earning work, such as regulation enforcement work when there was justification to do so. Since transferring to the Department in April 2020 the Building Control Service collaborates closely with other Services in the Department (and the Council) - to respond to problems that are associated with empty / untidy property on top of the work of dealing with dangerous buildings. The method of funding the Service was reviewed in 2021/22 to seek a more accurate split to reflect the work that does not attract fees, namely enforcement work.

It is a commercial Service that competes for work with Approved Inspectors (private sector) but they also compete for staff, and the Service lost two officers during 2021/22 and unable to recruit. Following 'Building Safety Reviews' as a result of the Grenfell tragedy by the UK and Welsh Governments, there will be legislative amendments to the Building Act in 2023 where there will be legal requirements in terms of competencies to undertake the work. As a result, the Service will review the structure that will plan for the competencies requirements that will come into force in 2022/23.

The main priorities of the Planning and Building Control Services for 2022/23 will be:

- Strengthening resilience in the Planning Service to deal with planning applications quicker and to resolve more enforcement cases.
- Preparing a Delivery Plan that will commence the process of preparing an Amended Local Development Plan and commence gathering an evidence base.
- Establishing arrangements to identify the bulk of the Building Control enforcement work and identify performance indicators for this.
- Implementing the Building Control Service based on budget that includes more enforcement work, with a staffing structure that will meet the requirements of the new Building Act.

Public Protection

Our Public Protection Services protect our residents and visitors in relation to a range of environmental and health matters.

This includes:

- Control of pollution from substances or noise in the air, land, or waters and investigate complaints of pollution and statutory nuisance.
- Assessing the safety of private drinking water supplies and enforce improvements as required.
- Monitor industrial processes in various sites and regulate industrial emissions to the air (oil waste incinerators, mobile crushers, cement machines).

- Licensing various areas (e.g. alcohol, gambling, animal establishments, vehicles and taxi drivers) in order to protect users, businesses and the communities of Gwynedd from any detrimental impacts; again, taking enforcement action if required.
- Ensure that food and drink sold and manufactured, stored, distributed, treated or used in the Gwynedd, is free of any risk to health and complies with the appropriate standards.
- Prevent deaths, injuries and conditions that are associated with workplaces
- Protect the public from infectious diseases and harmful chemicals.
- Assist Gwynedd businesses to meet with the required statutory requirements in relation to food and safety.
- Enforcing a wide range of trading standards legislation involving the supply and distribution of goods and services and deal with a variety of subjects such as product safety, raising awareness of scams and illegal money lending, e-commerce and internet investigations, animal health and welfare and more.

In 2020/21 and 21/22, as a result of the Covid crisis, these services focused on:

- Preventing the spread of Covid-19
- Dealing with high risk issues.
- Although continuing to undertake work to prevent Covid-19, proactive work has recommenced mainly with the inspection programmes including food inspections in accordance with the Food Standards Agency's Recovery Plan, to include dealing with the backlog of inspections.
- Day-to-day licensing work, pollution control and trading standards.

We are also responsible for the **Test, Trace and Protect Service (TTP)** since June 2020. The main aim of this service is to reduce the spread of Covid-19 across our communities by supporting people infected with the virus to isolate appropriately. This includes identifying people who have been in contact with positive cases of Covid-19, supporting people with symptoms to get access to a Covid-19 test and work with specialist partners to control any risks to people who are isolating together with wider communities and businesses in Gwynedd. This service also undertakes significant work on behalf of other Welsh local authorities; this enables us to be more resilient across Wales and ensure the best use of public funding.

The demand on this service over the last year have been very significant as restrictions were relaxed leading to an increase in cases and in the average number of contacts to every positive case, especially amongst school-aged children. The workload has been more than ever and recruiting and retaining staff has been difficult due to the nature of the work and length of contract. In addition, the need to respond swiftly following issuing new guidelines is challenging and dependent on being able to regularly re-train staff.

We have received confirmation that the Welsh Government will fund this service until June 2022, however, presently there is no further guidance regarding what will happen beyond this period.

During 2021-22 the Department has undertaken a review of staffing structures in the Public Protection Service, as dealing with Covid-19 and trying to undertake day-to-day work has highlighted the lack of resilience as a result of the cuts implemented by the Council over the last 10 years. It is proposed to introduce new structures that meet with the requirements of the Services in April 2022.

The main priorities of the Public Protection services for 2022/23 will be:

- Present structures that will give the Services long-term resilience.
- Continuing to recommence the programme of food safety inspections in accordance with the Food Standards Agency's Recovery Plan, inspections and product safety campaigns, fair trading, animal health and animal feed inspections, private water supplies and industrial processes.
- Seek guidance from the Welsh Government regarding what is expected in relation to the Test, Trace and Protect service beyond June 2022, working towards a digital method of sustaining this service (where there is a requirement for people to complete their on-line tracing form rather than over the phone) to reduce pressure on our services.
- Where circumstances allow, divert resources set aside wholly for Covid-19 work back to 'usual' public health work by also noting that the enforcement of Covid-19 requirements in businesses are likely to continue.

Transportation and the Countryside

Our **Transportation and the Countryside Services** encompasses work in several areas, including parking and street care, traffic and projects, integrated transport, road safety and countryside access and management. The work includes:



- Ensuring that our highways are safe with no barriers for users, including ensuring there is no unnecessary barrier to the use of the highways as a result of activities and events.
- Deliver projects dealing with road safety, improving the network and integrated and sustainable transport in a cost effective, timely and safe way.
- Ensure that new developments that impact our roads network have been designed and implemented safely.
- Providing a network of footpaths and cycle tracks and promote active travel.
- Parking enforcement on and off our streets and maintaining our car parks in a safe manner.
- Licensing the siting of skips and scaffolding on our roads and enforce property owners to remove obstructions off the road and so on.
- Provide safe, quality and cost-effective transport for Gwynedd residents, including public transport, transporting learners to educational establishments, community transport and transport for social services.
- To facilitate this we prepare public transport contracts and service timetables for the various routes, and the fact that over half the routes in Gwynedd are not commercially viable and are therefore dependent on financial support to run them.
- Seek to reduce injuries and accidents on our roads by undertaking appropriate educational initiatives, training and publicity e.g. offering cycling training and training to cross roads safely in schools, specific training for young people on our roads or for older people who continue to drive, and training on various areas such as speeding, wearing a seatbelt and installing baby seats safely.
- Look after the Gwynedd paths network by giving priority to maintaining those paths that give recreational and active travel opportunities within reach of communities. We also deal with

applications to divert and create paths and maintain and update the County's rights of way network maps.

- Maintaining and developing the national Coast Path which is approximately 300km long in Gwynedd.
- Ensuring that we comply with our duty to protect our biodiversity by giving specialist advice on planning applications, developments and enquiries.
- Coordinating the work of managing the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau Special Area of Conservation, as well as protecting and seeking to manage the quality of the Llŷn Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The **Parking Task Group** was established in 2019 to conduct a review of the Council's existing parking strategy as a great deal had changed since the Council conducted the last review in 2015. Stemming from the review, a new fees structure is now in operation and Members of the Council's Cabinet have authorised the Environment Department, in consultation with the Economy and Community Department, to hold a pilot project to use up to six of the Council's parking sites (or part of the sites) within the Gwynedd Planning Authority Area, to provide facilities for motor homes to stay overnight, including the designation of the locations; but subject to securing capital funding and necessary permissions.

The **Bus Reform Programme** aims to make wider improvements to the network across Wales. Welsh Government has commissioned consultants to deliver this work. The aim is to stabilise the network, increase the number of passengers using the bus service to encourage a modal shift and a change in travel behaviour. We are currently in discussion with Transport for Wales to establish this new network and we hope to commence the operation of parts of this early in 2022/23.

We have also secured funding from the Welsh Government to purchase 6 electric buses that will operate between Blaenau Ffestiniog - Porthmadog - Caernarfon from April 2022 onwards, and we intend to buy a smaller electric bus to travel around villages in Ffestiniog. This is in line with the Welsh Government's wish for public buses and taxis to be carbon neutral by 2028.

Following concerns about road safety outside Penygroes primary and secondary schools and some schools in Caernarfon, there are plans in the pipeline to improve road safety in the vicinity of Ysgol y Gelli, Ysgol Syr Huw Owen and the Arfon Byw'n Iach Centre. This scheme will include traffic calming measures, extension to a car park, provision for taxis and a new footpath. In Penygroes, a feasibility report has been undertaken this focuses on the traffic situation near Ysgol Bro Llew and Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle. Bids for capital funding have been submitted to undertake all these improvements.

It is noted that establishing a Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) for north Wales can also impact on transportation services as dealing with preparing the Regional Transportation Plan will be one of the CJC's duties. The Council will be expected to contribute towards any costs to create a new unit that will be responsible for preparing the Regional Transportation Plan.

In relation to our biodiversity work, the availability of grants via the **Local Nature Partnership** has enabled us to support and stimulate work that improves nature locally across the County. For 2022/23:

- It is anticipated that financial support from the Welsh Government towards the work of the Local Nature Partnership and the Local Places for Nature measure will continue and, subject to confirmation of funding, it will be possible to continue to support local groups in the Caernarfon, Porthmadog and Bangor areas to undertake work that supports and protects biodiversity. Resources will also be earmarked towards the management and safety work on some of the Department's woodlands and reserves, such as Coed Nyrseri, Tremadog, Coed Doctor Llanberis and Parc y Borth, Borth y Gest.
- New methods of land management of the Lonydd Glas will be trialled with the aim of increasing the variety of wild-flowers parallel to the footpaths.

A grant programme to improve access has allowed improvements to paths across the county and the improvements and tree safety work on Lôn Eifion have been completed, however, the work of widening part of Lôn Las Menai was postponed for environmental reasons. The work has been scheduled for the first months of 2022. A Welsh Government Access Improvement grant programme has enabled a number of improvements to popular and well-known paths across the County, including y Lôn Goed, Llanystumdwy and a multi-use path around Trawsfynydd lake. Subject to grant availability, further improvements will be made during 2022/23.

The main priorities of the Transportation and Countryside Services for 2022/23 are:

- Conducting a pilot project to provide overnight facilities for motorhomes in six parking sites in Gwynedd.
- In response to the climate change challenge and the Council's carbon reduction targets, work will be commenced to identify and measure the value of Council land to absorb carbon. The field of work will place emphasis on woodlands and how they can be managed better together with identifying opportunities to extend or to create new woodlands.

This year we have earmarked £25k to develop the scheme to construct a Cycle Path between Tywyn and Aberdyfi. As a part of the work, the service will need to purchase land near the road verge and discussions with the landowner have been difficult as a result to the social distancing restrictions.

In 2022/23, we intend to hold a meeting with Councillors in the area to give them an update on where we are, the barriers we face and how we propose to proceed with the following scheme.

Negotiating and agreeing on an agreement to create new rights of way or changing the status of existing paths is a process that can take time and in 21/22 we managed to ensure an agreement to create a section of the coastal path between Talybont and Porth Penrhyn, it is anticipated that the path will open during 2022. The discussion is continuing to ensure a multi-use path between Pwllheli and Llanbedrog.

In recent years sections of the Coast Path has been affected by several landslides that have resulted in work to recover the path, however, there are several locations in the areas of Nefyn, Cricieth and Penllech Beach where there is no further option but to negotiate to divert the path. With the likelihood that further landslides will occur, resources and efforts will need to be directed in response if we wish to protect the Coast Path.

Business, Programmes and Projects Service

These services support other services in the Department to deliver their purpose and the work includes the management of contracts, finance and income; attracting grants and project delivery; managing the development and effective operation of information technology systems; integration of tendering and procurement provision, land charges and providing support and administrative assistance to the different services.

The service also prepares, implements and manages a large number of the Department's contracts; monitors the progress and performance of providers and contractors in terms of agreements, contracts and finance of services; designs the Department's operational systems and support procedures in cost-effective ways and prepares and presents work papers regarding savings, changes to the staffing organisation and fees and charges.

We need to manage the development and implementation of information technology systems, design the operational systems and the procedures for all the services that are used across the Department in cost-effective ways, which will lead to more effective and efficient work practices.

In 2022/23 the business, programmes and projects service will:

- Transfer to a national digital system for Local Land Charges for searches.
- Try to attract grants for improvement plans on our roads network, paths and 'active travel' multi-use network, improve coastal connectivity and undertake Wales ecosystems studies.

Corporate Category Management

This service collaborates and supports the Council's services to spend public funds in a strategic and correct manner by providing a deeper understanding of the market, products, suppliers and the supply chain to develop cross-departmental strategic category plans. The service priorities value for money and keeping the benefits local when undertaking its work. This includes early engagement with the local market and working jointly with

percentage of local expenditure within Gwynedd



Business Wales who provide advice and support to prepare bids. They also work with Council suppliers to encourage them to increase their local expenditure within their supply chains.

During 2022/23, this service will continue to prioritise Best Value for Money and Keeping the Benefits Local as the Council procures goods and services. In addition, we will look at how we can reduce the impact of our procurement activities on the environment and on our carbon emissions, which corresponds with the work noted under Improvement Priority 8 in our Plan to Respond to Climate Change.

This Department's day-to-day work contributes towards the Gwynedd Well-being Objectives, ensuring that Gwynedd residents can:

Enjoy happy, healthy and safe lives

Live in quality homes within their communities

Benefit from the beauty of the County's natural environment.