



**Cyfoeth
Naturiol**
Cymru
**Natural
Resources**
Wales

Developers' views on Natural Resources Wales' Development Planning Advice Service (2017-18)

Contents

1. Background	3
2. Results from the survey	3
2.1 Type of advice requested from NRW	3
2.2 Satisfaction with NRW's advice	4
3. Guidance and NRW's role	6
4. Overall satisfaction	7
5. Summary of issues raised	8
6. NRW's response to the issues raised	9

1. Background

In October 2017, NRW carried out a survey asking customers for their views on NRW's development planning advice service. Surveys were sent out to local planning authority staff, as well as developers and members of the general public who contacted NRW for advice on development planning issues between July 2016 and July 2017.

The aim of these surveys is to establish how well NRW is meeting the needs of its customers and if there are areas where NRW's service could be improved.

This report summarises the findings from the survey aimed at developers and other applicants. The findings from the local authority surveys are available in a separate report.

In total 274 surveys were sent out to developers and members of the public, which resulted in nineteen completed surveys. Respondents were asked a range of questions about different aspects of NRW's advice, and whether it had an impact on their final application.

The outcome of this survey was, broadly speaking, positive, but a few areas have been identified where there may be scope for improvement. These are summarised in section 6, with NRW's response outlined in section 7.

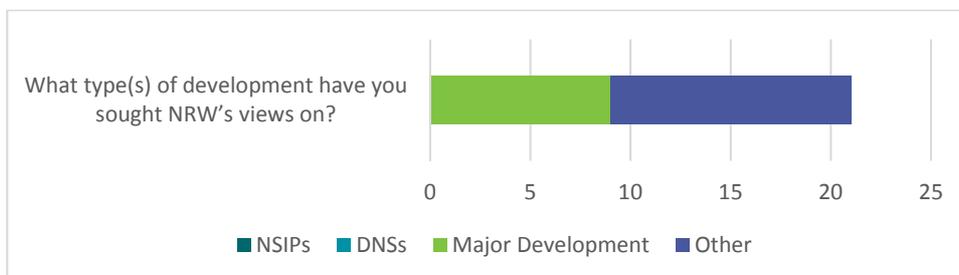
As the total number of responses is low, care needs to be taken when interpreting the findings of this survey throughout this document.

2. Results from the survey

2.1 Type of advice requested from NRW

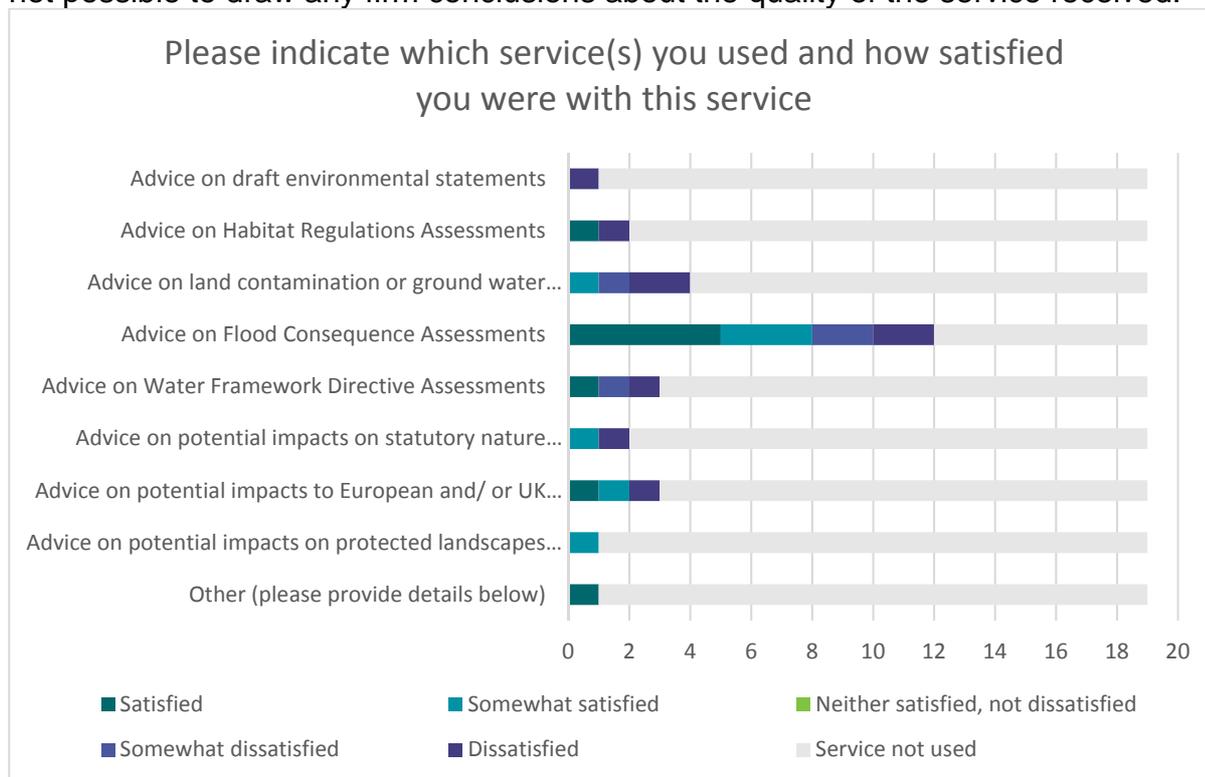
The first question respondents were asked covers the type of planning application advice had been sought on. Respondents were able to select multiple options in response to this question.

Nine of the respondents contacted NRW with a query relating to major developments, 12 others indicated that they had sought advice on other development types. None of the respondents had sought advice from NRW on NSIPs or DNSs.



Next, respondents were asked what topic(s) they had sought advice on and how they rated their satisfaction with the service they received. Respondents were able to select multiple services and the responses to this question are summarised in the graph below. Please

note that because the number of responses in relation to most services was very low, it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about the quality of the service received.

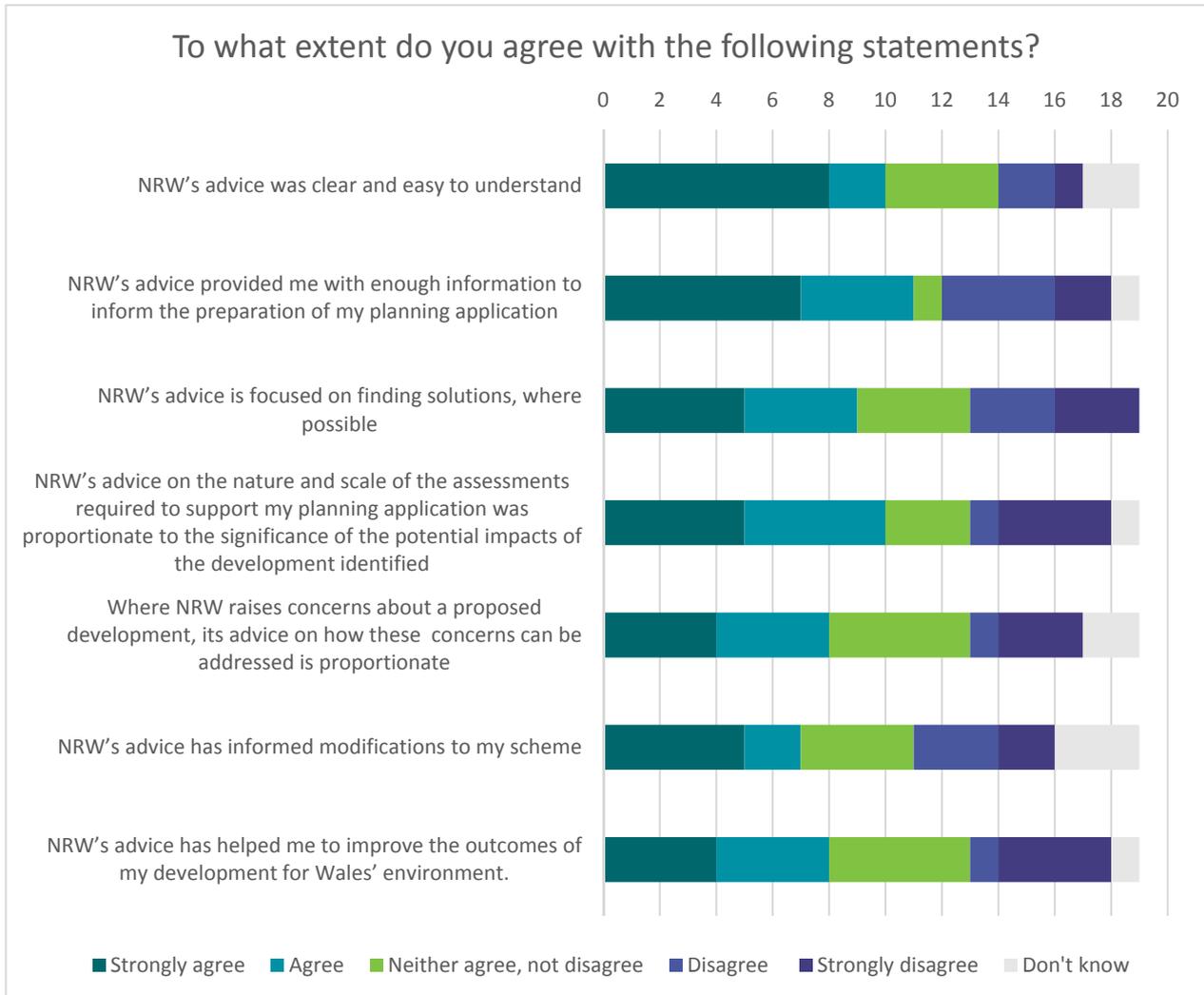


This graph indicates that respondents' view on most of these services was split; as well as positive responses, there were some negative responses to most questions. The only services where the responses were consistently negative were advice on environmental statements and advice on land contamination. However, because of the small number of responses received on these services (one and three responses respectively), it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the services provided.

2.2 Satisfaction with NRW's advice

NRW has set out how it intends to deliver its service in "Development Planning Advice: Our Service Statement for Delivery", which sets out a number of service standards. website.

To better understand how well our service performed against these service standards, we asked respondents for their views on a number of statements:



All answers provided were given a score between 10 (strongly agree) and 2 (strongly disagree). Following on from this, an average score was calculated for each question. The result of this exercise can be found in the table below.

A score of 6, or above, indicates that more respondents agreed than disagreed with a statement. We will use all findings from the survey to inform the future development of our service, but will focus in particular on improving those individual areas of our service which scored below 7.

NRW's advice was clear and easy to understand	7.6
NRW's advice provided me with enough information to inform the preparation of my planning application	7.2
NRW's advice is focused on finding solutions, where possible	6.6
NRW's advice on the nature and scale of the assessments required to support my planning application was proportionate to the significance of the potential impacts of the development identified	6.6
Where NRW raises concerns about a proposed development, its advice on how these concerns can be addressed is proportionate	6.6
NRW's advice has informed modifications to my scheme*	6.6

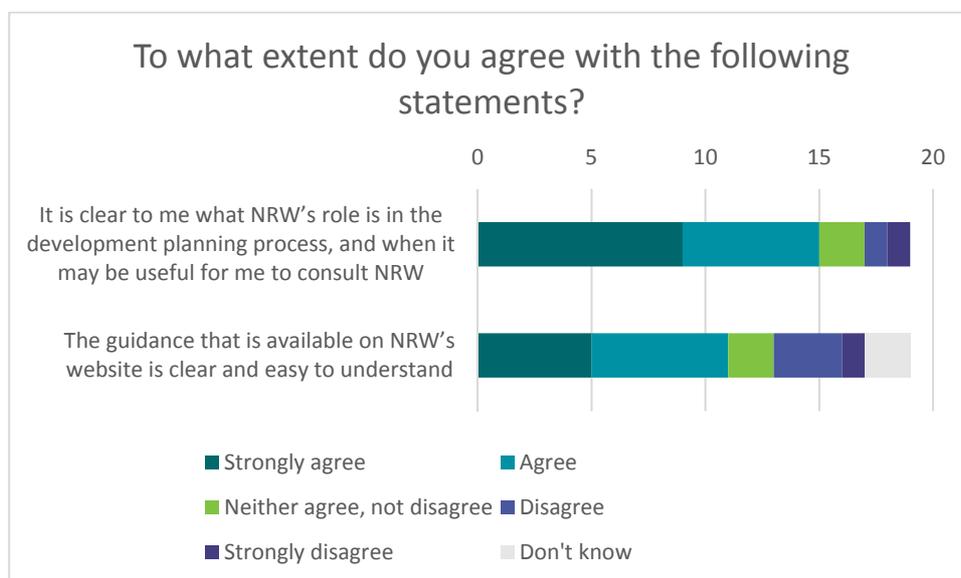
NRW's advice has helped me to improve the outcomes of my development for Wales' environment.*	6.4
---	-----

The table above shows that respondents were most satisfied with the questions relating to the clarity of NRW's advice. The score against all other statements is roughly the same.

Respondents were also asked for their views on how NRW's advice could be improved. Only a limited number of respondents answered this question, but in summary, there was some criticism about the extent to which NRW offers solutions, as well as praise for the way NRW operates.

3. Guidance and NRW's role

Following on from the questions above, respondents were asked two questions about whether they knew when to contact NRW and their thoughts on the guidance that is currently available on our website.



Answers to this question indicate that, in general, awareness of when to contact NRW is high. The majority of the respondents also indicated that they agreed that NRW's guidance is clear and easy to understand.

It is clear to me what NRW's role is in the development planning process, and when it may be helpful for me to consult NRW	8.2
The guidance that is available on NRW's website is clear and easy to understand	7.2

Respondents were asked for suggestions on how NRW's guidance could be improved. One comment was received in response to this question which asked for additional guidance on a specific subject.

4. Overall satisfaction

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the service they received from NRW. The graph below shows that the majority of the respondents were either satisfied, or somewhat satisfied with the service received. Around a quarter of the respondents indicated that they were somewhat dissatisfied, or dissatisfied with the service.



How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the service you received from NRW over the last 12 months?	7.6
--	-----

Respondents were asked for their views on which aspects of NRW's service were working well and which could be improved. This resulted in a number of responses. The majority of the positive responses focussed on NRW's staff, for example:

"Individuals being willing to speak to me personally rather than a tick box approach..."

"Friendly conscientious staff"

"Ground level staff do a wonderful job given the lack of resources available to them"

When asked, which aspects of the service could be improved, the answers were more varied and included the following:

"Sometimes my emails have been lost in the system and I haven't received a response. When chased, there has also not been a prioritised response."

"More concise planning application responses with a clear opinion."

“You could attend more site meetings which could in some instances negate the need for FCAs to explain the obvious”

“You could facilitate more direct contact with your front-line staff instead of having to rely on support staff to pass on information requests”

“Employ more people at ground level”

5. Summary of issues raised

In summary, the main areas where respondents indicated that there may be some room for improvement are as follows:

Solution focussed advice	NRW’s advice is focused on finding solutions, where possible	6.6
Proportionate advice	NRW’s advice on the nature and scale of the assessments required to support my planning application was proportionate to the significance of the potential impacts of the development identified	6.6
	Where NRW raises concerns about a proposed development, its advice on how these concerns can be addressed is proportionate	6.6
Impact of the advice	NRW’s advice has informed modifications to my scheme	6.6
	NRW’s advice has helped me to improve the outcomes of my development for Wales’ environment.	6.4

In addition to the topics above, a few issues were raised in the comments to some of the questions, which are summarised below.

Please note that due to the size of the survey group, only one or two comments were received about each issue. It is therefore difficult to establish if these comments are indicative of more significant issues, or if these describe isolated incidents. We have nevertheless considered all these issues in our response.

The most significant issues that were raised relate to:

- The clarity of NRW’s advice, and particularly the length of the response (multiple comments)
- E-mails getting lost in the system and/ or not being acknowledged (multiple comments)
- The consistency of NRW’s advice
- The way in which NRW provides advice, and in particular respondents wanting more staff on the ground and easier access to staff

6. NRW's response to the issues raised

NRW has considered all the feedback received as part of the survey and will aim to do the following:

- To improve the clarity of our advice, we will review the response categories we use in our responses. In the time since the survey was undertaken, NRW already made changes to the way it structures its responses, which should help to clarify which aspects of our advice are planning advice, and which relate to other matters.
- NRW has undertaken a review of the guidance that is available on its website and will consider if this guidance can be improved/ expanded upon
- We intend to streamline the process for consulting NRW, by removing the all Wales planning email account and pointing applicants in the direction of the appropriate Area Team

We also note the concerns of a small number of respondents about the proportionality of NRW's advice and the perception that NRW's advice should be more focussed on finding solutions.

We would like to clarify that in our role as an advisor, it is our duty to highlight concerns about a development, or the assessments undertaken to support it. More detailed advice about how these concerns could be addressed falls outside of NRW's remit.

We would also like to reassure respondents that NRW has guidance and sign-off procedures in place that should help to ensure that NRW's advice is consistent and proportionate. In the event that these procedures fail, we recommend that applicants make use of NRW's complaints procedure, which can be accessed here:

<https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/contact-us/making-a-complaint/?lang=en>

Please DO NOT DELETE THIS SECTION BREAK



**Cyfoeth
Naturiol**
Cymru
**Natural
Resources**
Wales

Published by:
Natural Resources Wales
Cambria House
29 Newport Road
Cardiff
CF24 0TP

0300 065 3000 (Mon-Fri, 8am - 6pm)

enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk
www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

© Natural Resources Wales

All rights reserved. This document may be reproduced with prior permission of
Natural Resources Wales