

# NRW Development Planning Advice Service: Annual report to Welsh Ministers 2025-2026

**1 July 2026**

The land use planning system is a key strategic delivery mechanism for managing the environment and natural resources sustainably. In 2025, we published our third State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR). This evidence base continues to strengthen our collective understanding of the scale and urgency of the nature and climate emergencies facing Wales. SoNaRR sets out that Wales remains on a trajectory that continues to degrade nature and undermine resilience. The associated Bridges to the Future document highlights the need for collective action, including systems level approaches to land-use policy, to deliver resilient ecosystems.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) acts as a specialist and statutory consultee within the development planning process. This means that applicants and decision-making authorities must consult us on proposed developments where they meet defined criteria. When consulted, we are required to provide a substantive response within prescribed timescales. NRW carries out this role in line with our statutory purpose to pursue the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR).

As a specialist consultee, we are required to provide an Annual Report to the Welsh Ministers, which sets out our annual performance in relation to providing substantive responses to Minor and Major Town & Country Planning casework, Developments of National Significance (DNS) and Significant Infrastructure Projects (SIP). This report also includes information on our involvement in Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) determined by the UK Government. The reported statistics exclude Local Development Plan consultations and non-statutory service requests, such as those provided through our Discretionary Advice Service.

## Performance overview

NRW has continued to deliver a high level of performance during a period of increasing demand and system change. During the reporting period (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026), a total of 7,832 responses were issued, of which 7,755 (99%) were

submitted within prescribed or otherwise agreed deadlines, maintaining performance levels consistent with 2024/25.

During 2025/26:

- 7,898 consultations were received
- 7,832 responses were issued
- 6,382 responses were delivered within prescribed timescales
- 1,373 responses were delivered within agreed extensions

The use of agreed extensions remains significant reflecting externally driven service demand and finite resource. The number reported within agreed extensions also includes those that are planning authority or applicant initiated, for example where preapplication consultations are issued with longer response deadlines than statutory prescribed.

A total of 77 responses were issued outside statutory or agreed deadlines, compared to 47 in 2024/25. This reflects the combined impact of increasing workloads, case complexity, and recruitment challenges.

The number of consultations relating to Developments of National Significance (DNS) has increased from 69 in 2024/25 to 72 in 2025/26. While this increase is modest, it continues an overall upward trend in major infrastructure proposals.

Alongside the established DNS regime, NRW is now responding to the introduction of Significant Infrastructure Projects (SIPs) under recent Welsh infrastructure consenting reforms, operationalised in December 2025. DNS remains in place; however, the introduction of SIPs marks the beginning of a transition to a new infrastructure consenting regime in Wales. During this transition period, NRW must support both systems, creating additional complexity and demand.

5 SIP scoping consultations were received, with 4 responses issued, all within statutory deadlines.

In addition to the consultation numbers reported above, we are also consulted on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, determined by UK Government. We received 41 Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) consultations, providing 39 responses, all within statutory or agreed deadlines.

Major infrastructure proposals are complex and require significant input from multiple specialisms across NRW, placing sustained pressure on resources.

Figures 1–6 provide further detail on performance by consultation type. The difference between consultations received and responses issued reflects work in progress, where statutory deadlines fall across reporting periods.

## Wider context

We recognise the importance of early and proactive engagement with developers throughout the planning process, as this can lead to improved environmental outcomes and reduce delays. We encourage use of our Discretionary Advice Service to support the development of planning applications. The service is constrained by available resources, priority is given to statutory consultation responses, and discretionary services have been oversubscribed during the reporting period.

In recognition that the land use planning system across Wales, including NRW, is increasingly struggling with serious capacity issues, the Welsh Government provided additional permanent uplift in grant in aid to NRW from April 2025. This additional £5 million per year funding will provide additional resource toward the existing planning and permitting services, helping us respond to increased demand from major infrastructure projects and support us to drive incremental improvements.

Across the sector, recruitment of skilled planning staff remains challenging. In response we have:

- Provided input to the [Public Sector Planning Resources in Wales report](#), commissioned by the Welsh Government and undertaken by the Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru (RTPI Cymru).
- Participated in the Pathways to Planning graduate scheme to attract early career planners to work in the sector. Two 2-year placements will commence with us in September 2026.

The new infrastructure consenting regime for SIPs came into operation on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025 and we have been working at pace to implement new processes and procedures to support our role as a statutory consultee in the SIP process. We have also developed external guidance to assist developers on how to engage with us in the SIP process at pre-application stage. During this reporting period, we have:

- Updated our ICT system so that it can record SIP consultations and support our annual reporting requirements.
- Published a new webpage providing advice for developers proposing SIPs.
- Developed an online register in readiness for receipt of statutory preliminary service applications and the requirement to publish associated application details and our response.
- Published a new webpage providing details of fees for SIPs, including a fixed fee for our statutory preliminary service and an hourly rate applied to DAS and cost recovery associated with the provision of infrastructure consenting services at pre-application stage.

The consequences of some Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) being in unfavourable condition due to failing water quality targets for phosphorus in rivers, or nitrogen with an associated biological failure in marine sites, continues to have a significant impact on developers, planning authorities, and our statutory consultee role. We continue to work collaboratively with the Welsh Government, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), Nutrient Management Boards, and stakeholders across different sectors to develop new approaches and solutions. During the reporting period, we

have updated our planning advice to local planning authorities in their determination of planning applications for schemes, particularly in relation to marine SACs. We have explored and provided a position on an integrated approach following advice from DTA Ecology and scoped out a Catchment Nutrient Recovery Plan (CNRP). Following the publication of the marine SAC condition assessment in June 2025, NRW have worked closely with LPAs on specific cases to provide advice and reactively responding to actions from the Ministerial Taskforce meetings.

During the reporting period we responded to the following Welsh Government and UK Government consultations on their proposals for legislation, strategic policy, and guidance:

- Implementing the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 (WG52553)
- Changes to permitted development rights (WG51387)
- Strategic planning guidance for the Gwent Levels National Natural Resource Area (Future Wales Policy 9) (Welsh Government)
- Promoting a resilient and high performing planning service (WG50622)
- ISA Scoping Report: Gwent Levels Strategic Guidance (Welsh Government)
- Planning for new energy infrastructure: 2025 revisions to National Policy Statements (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero)
- Consultation on streamlining infrastructure planning (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)

We have also produced the following website guidance to support applicants and planning authorities:

[Natural Resources Wales / Guidance for planning applications for telecommunications apparatus in designated and sensitive landscapes](#)

[Natural Resources Wales / Assessing air quality impacts as part of your planning application](#)

# Our performance figures in more detail

Figure 1: Pre- application consultation responses for major development

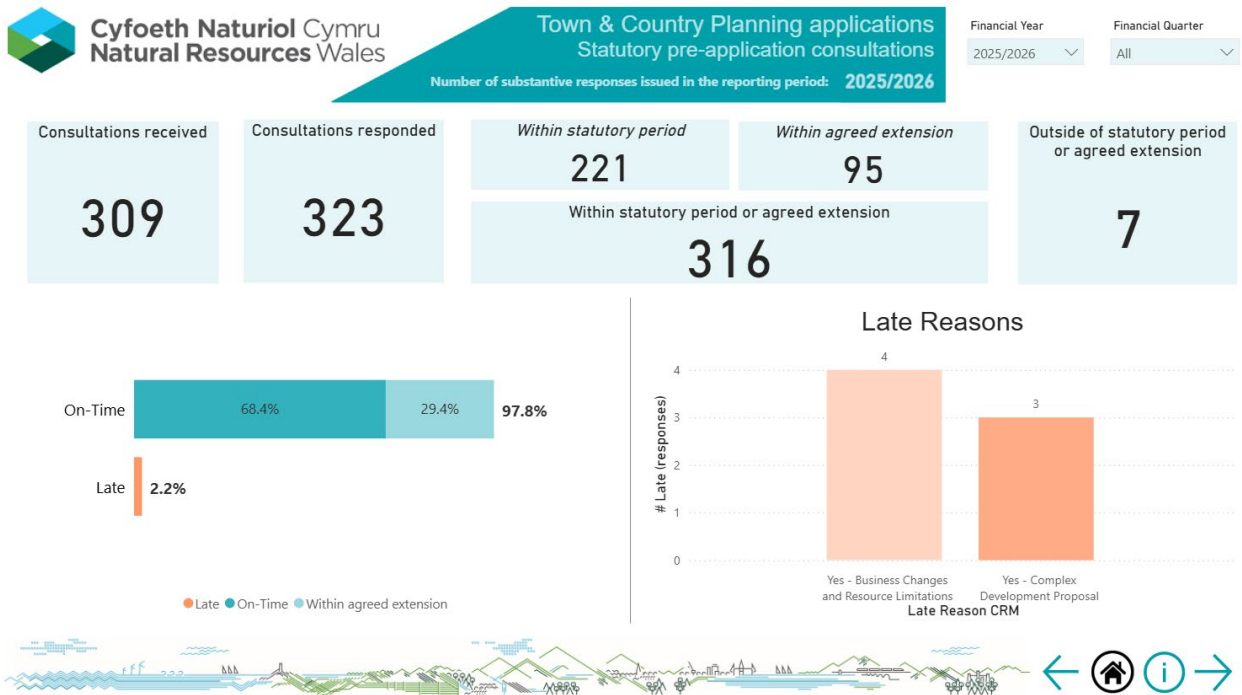
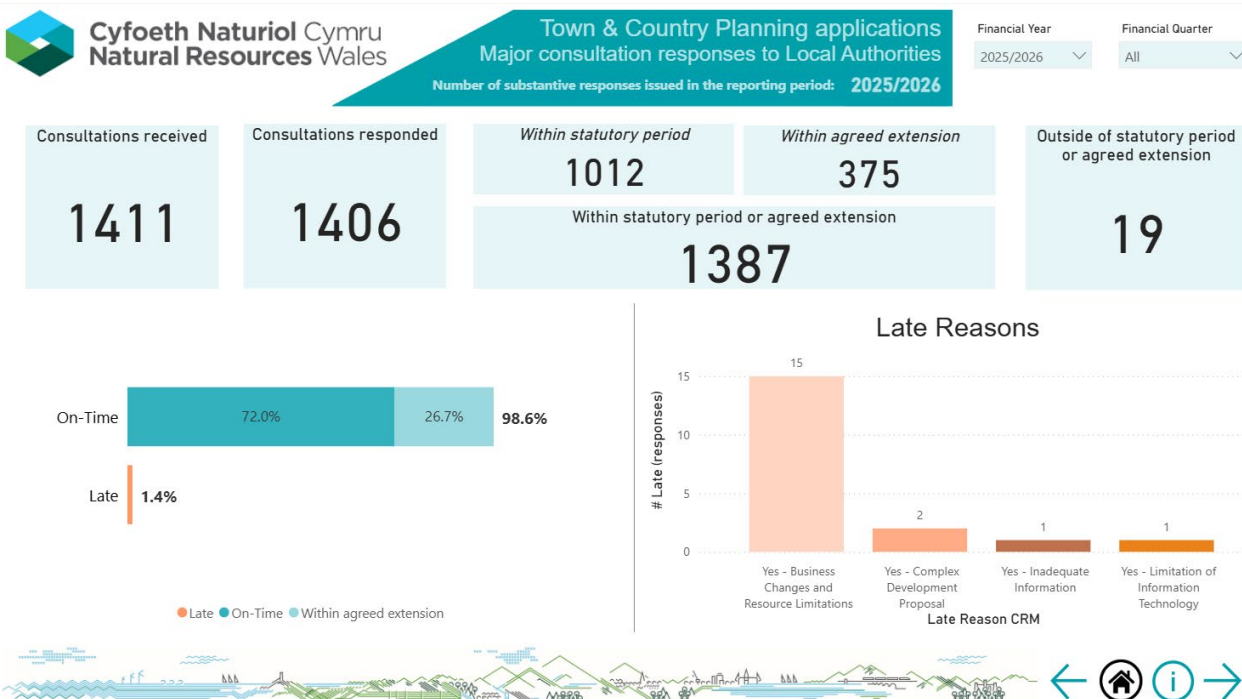
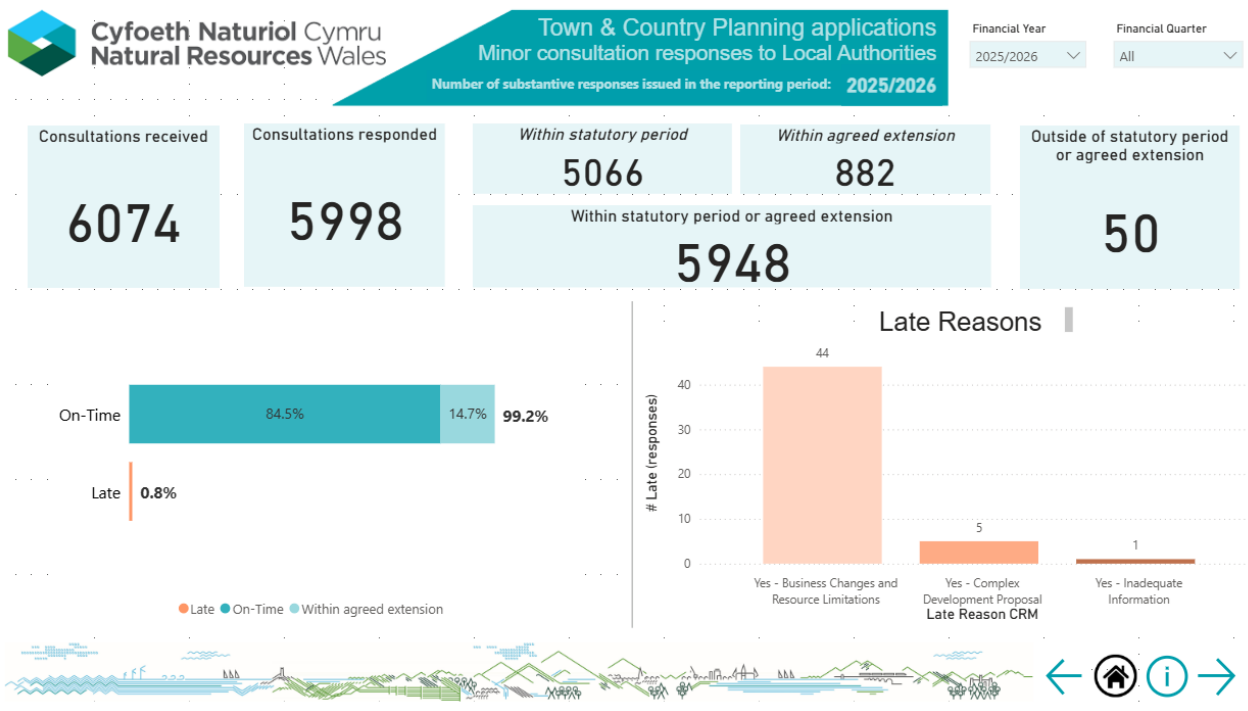


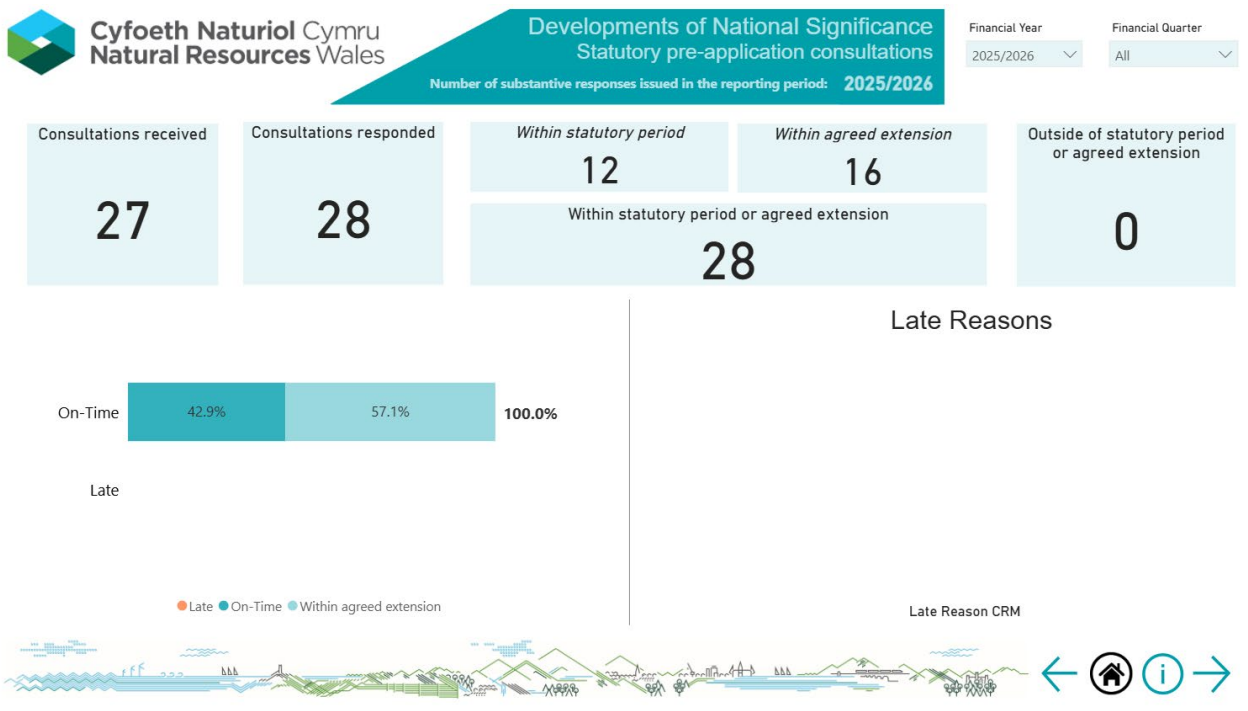
Figure 2: Application consultation responses for major development



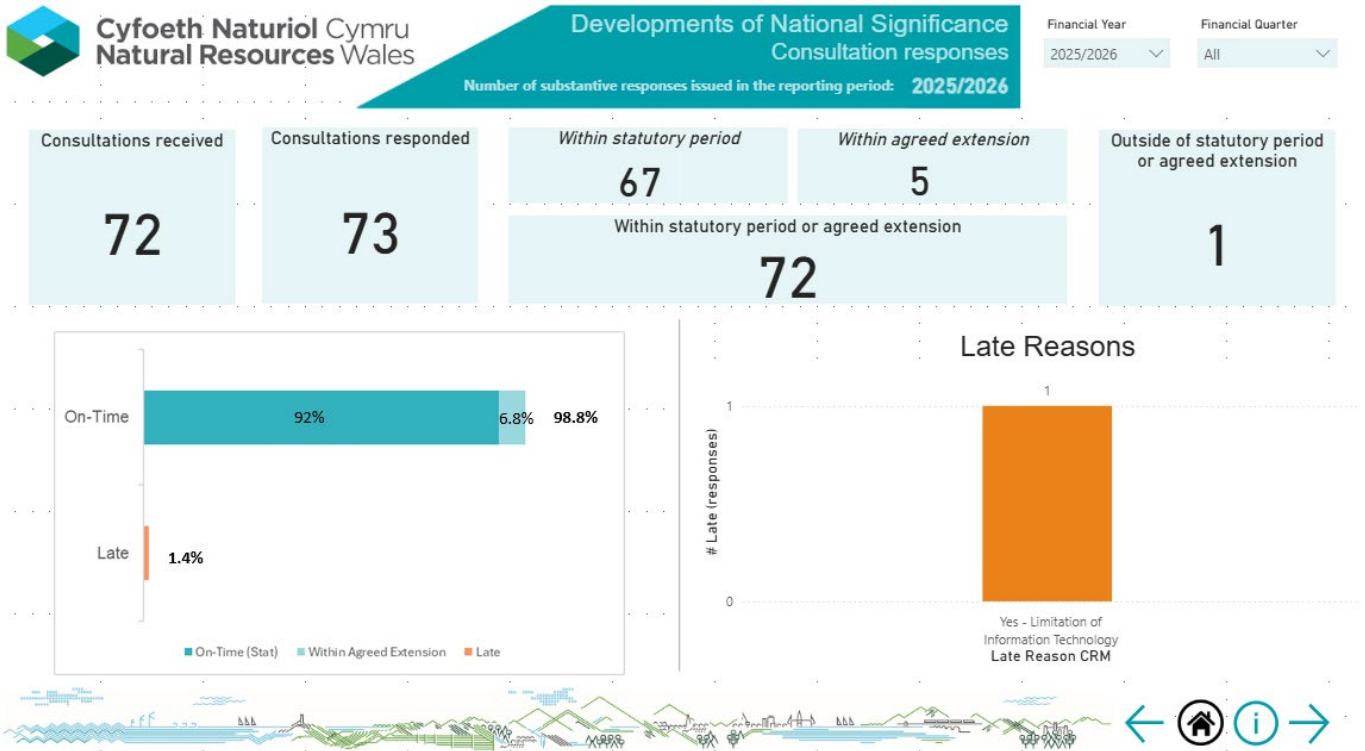
**Figure 3: Application consultation responses for minor development**



**Figure 4: Pre-application consultation responses for Developments of National Significance**



**Figure 5: Application consultation responses for Developments of National Significance**



**Figure 6: Application consultation responses for Significant Infrastructure Projects**

