

Development Planning Advice Service: Annual Report to Welsh Ministers 2024-2025

1 July 2025

Summary

The land use planning system is a key strategic delivery mechanism for managing the environment and natural resources sustainably.

We are a specialist or statutory consultee in the development management process. This means that applicants, and authorities determining planning applications, should consult us on proposed schemes, which meet one or more of the criteria for where we are identified as a specialist or statutory consultee. When consulted we are required to provide a substantive response within prescribed timescales.

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, Major and Developments of National Significance (DNS). The reported statistics do not include Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, determined by the UK Government, Local Development Plan consultations nor non-statutory service requests e.g. our Discretionary Advice Service.

During the reporting period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, we received 7,607 Minor, Major and Development of National Significance (DNS) consultations requiring a substantive response. We responded to 7,513 consultations, with 7,466 (99%) of those submitted within statutory or an otherwise agreed deadline.

Figures 1-5 below provide further detail on our performance according to consultation type. The numerical difference between consultations received and substantive responses submitted reflects work in progress where prescribed deadlines fall across different reporting periods.

Key issues and trends

The number of consultations received involving a DNS has increased by 16% from 77 in the last reporting year to 92. This represents a continued upward trend over recent years. Given the nature of such schemes, they usually involve significant level of resource commitment across a number of specialisms within Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

Although we have responded to consultations within statutory or an otherwise agreed deadline in 99% of cases, we required an extension in 28% of cases involving Major Development, and 50% of casework involving a DNS. 47 consultation responses were submitted outside statutory or other agreed deadline, primarily due to resource limitations.

During the reporting period we have been working towards implementing a new structure in response to financial constraints and to focus on areas where it can make the most meaningful impact for people and nature. During this time recruitment has been constrained and we have been carrying a number of vacancies in both our casework and technical specialist teams.

We value the importance of engagement with developers throughout the development planning process as this can result in better environmental outcomes and can help to minimise costly delays for our customers. We therefore encourage customers to engage with us throughout the process of developing a planning application via our Discretionary Advice Service. Our service offer is limited by available resource. Priority has been given to statutory responses and this year we have found the service oversubscribed.

We therefore welcome the Welsh Government commitment to provide additional funding to support delivery of our planning responsibilities beginning from 2025/26. Recruitment of posts is underway; it is expected that many of these posts will be in place late in year.

As part of wider measures to provide a resilient, consistent, effective and efficient planning advice service, we will be looking for opportunities to enhance our standing advice provision to enable planning authorities to make environmentally informed decisions without the need to consult us. We will be keeping Welsh Government officials abreast of the progress of this work.

The consequences of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) failing water quality targets for phosphorus continues to have a significant impact on developers, Planning Authorities, and NRW's Development Planning Advice Service. We continue to work collaboratively with the Welsh Government, Local Planning Authorities, 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 with the potential to affect nutrient sensitive riverine SACs. We have undertaken an evaluation of our Review of Permits for wastewater treatment works discharging into river SAC catchments. We have also contributed to the development of an all-Wales nutrient calculator for use by applicants and Planning Authorities.

Advice

In addition to casework advice:

We have advised the Welsh Government on its consultation for:

- Implementing the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 (19 September-13 December 2024)
- Call for Evidence for the Infrastructure (Wales) Bill: Requirements for pre-application consultation and methods of engaging stakeholders and local communities (13 May-22 July 2024)
- Infrastructure (Wales) Bill: Fees for performance of infrastructure consent functions and services (13 May-22 July 2024)

We have also advised the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) on its consultation for National Policy Statements:

- EN 8 Fusion Energy with Appraisal of Sustainability and Habitats Regulation Assessment (8 May-17 July 2024)
- Appraisal of Sustainability Scoping Report for updating the NPS for Energy (20 February-12 March 2025)

- EN 7 Nuclear Energy with Appraisal of Sustainability and Habitats Regulation Assessment (6 February-3 April 2025)

In more detail

Figure 1: Pre- application consultation responses for major development

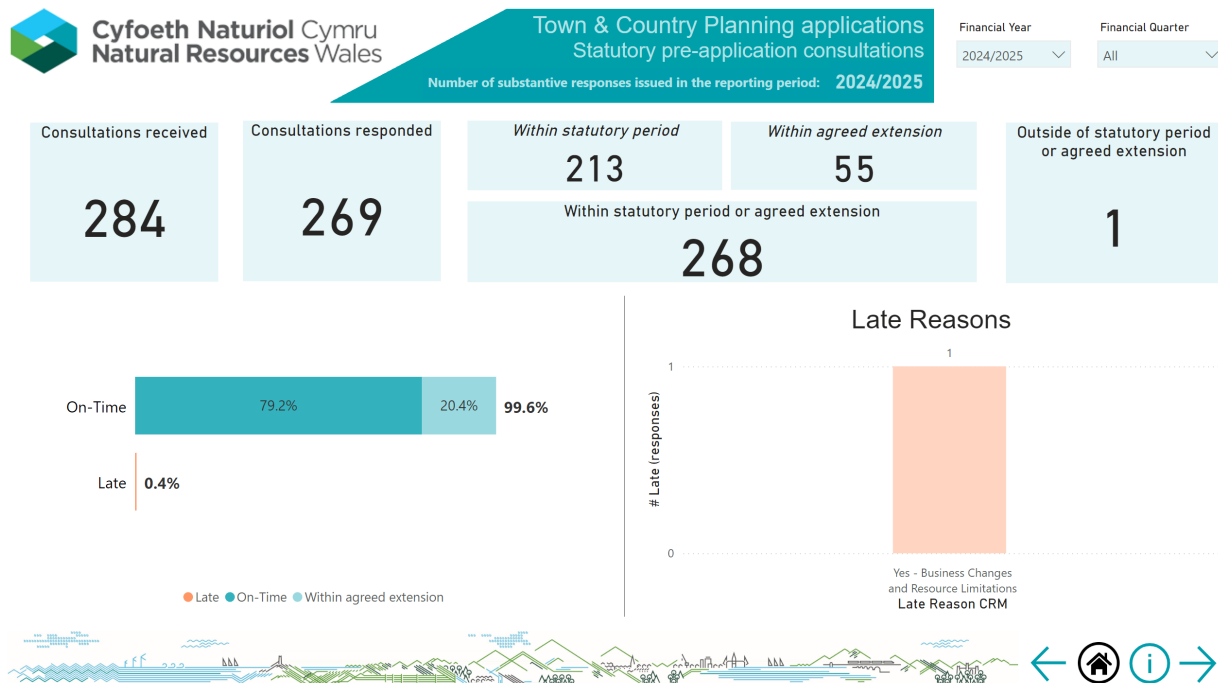


Figure 2: Application consultation responses for major development

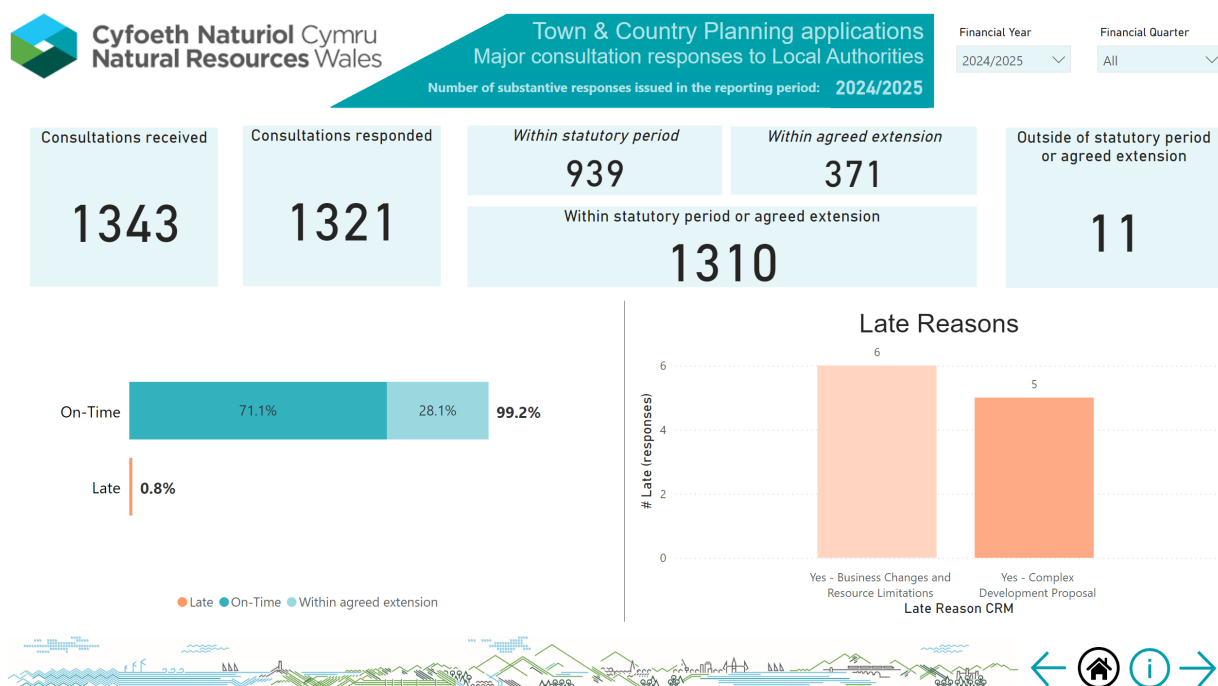


Figure 3: Application consultation responses for minor development

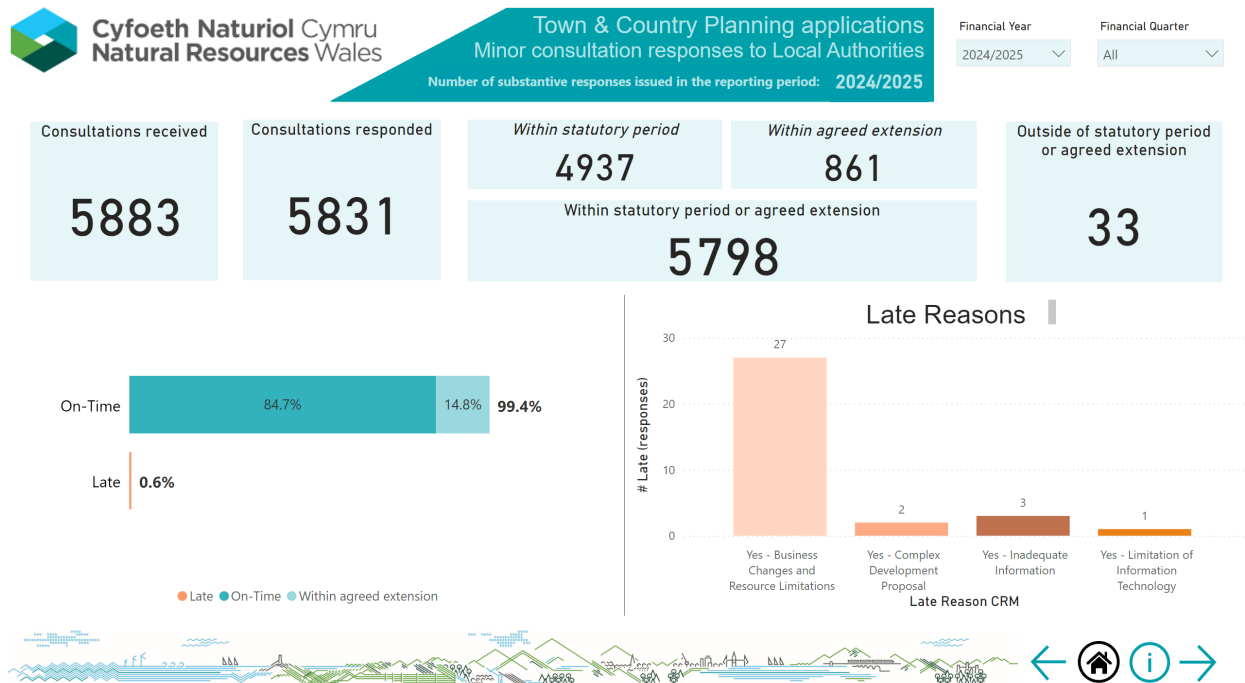


Figure 4: Pre-application consultation responses for Developments of National Significance

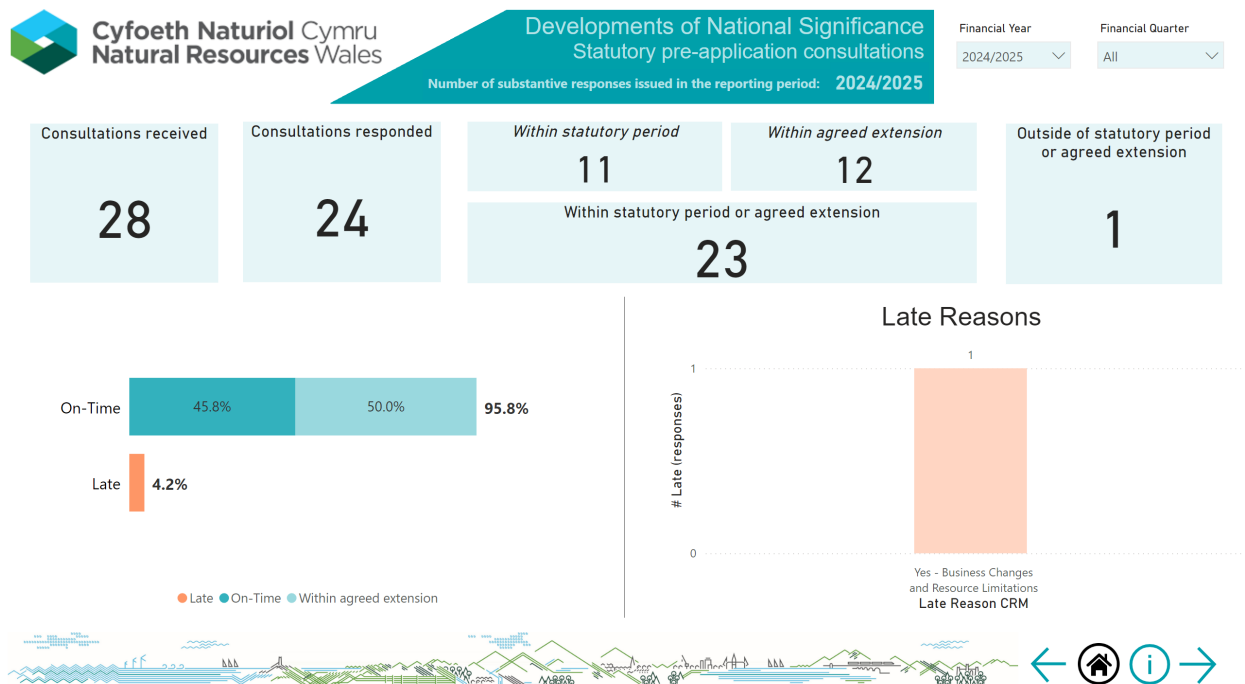
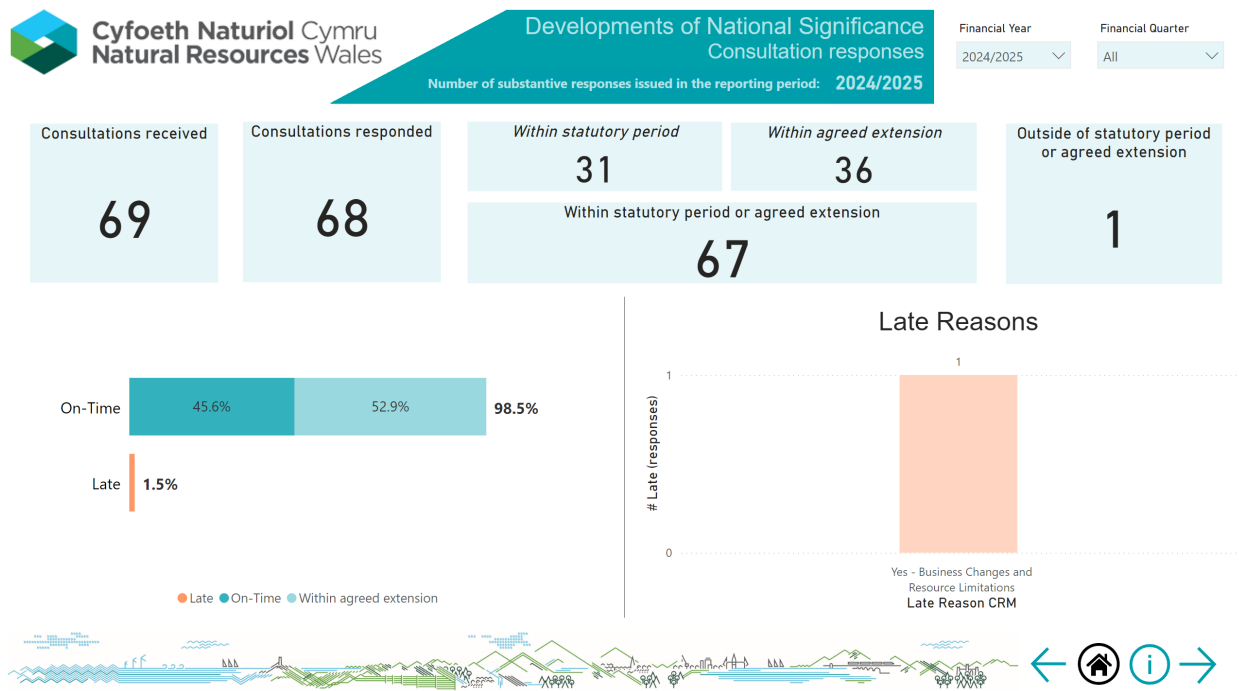


Figure 5: Application consultation responses for Developments of National Significance



Published by:
Natural Resources Wales
Welsh Government Offices
Cathays Park
King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

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

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

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