

Invitation to contribute to the consultation

The Committee would like to invite you to submit written evidence to assist in its consideration of the inquiry. It would be helpful if you could use the above terms of reference to frame your response.

The closing date for submissions is **Friday 24 June 2022**.

Submitting evidence

If you wish to respond to the Committee's consultation, email an electronic copy of your submission to SeneddHousing@senedd.wales or send by post to:

Local Government and Housing Committee,
Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff,
CF99 1SN.

Dear Senedd Local Government & Housing Committee,

24/6/2022

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your inquiry into community assets. We are residents of Peterstone Wentlooge, on the Gwent Levels and are writing to draw your attention to efforts in our village to bring a derelict local pub, the Six Bells into community ownership and reopen it as a multi-purpose community venue.

The Six Bells was the only pub in Peterstone Wentlooge and one of three pubs on the Gwent Levels that have closed in recent years. Its closure was a particular blow for our village, which has no shop, school, church or bus service. We didn't just lose a place to drink, we lost a centre of community life and social cohesion.

Inspired by many successful community owned pubs across Wales and the rest of the UK, we now are working together as a village to develop our plans to set up a vision for the Six Bells. Proposals so far include a community owned gastro pub, café, local farm produce shop, a post office and an information / tourist centre celebrating the ecology, history and culture of the Gwent Levels.

Community Businesses are a tried and tested sector and business model – and one that is growing significantly. This sector grew 3% in 2021, with around 840 businesses trading across the UK by the end of the year. There has been significant growth in the number of community shops and pubs over the last 20 years:

- In 2001 there were just 67 community shops and 4 community pubs.
- By 2021, there were 413 community shops and 147 community pubs.

Community businesses can have significantly positive impacts on local economies and have excellent success rates. In fact based on 5 year survival rates 92.5% of Community Shops are successful with a 99% success rate for Community Pubs. This compares to only a 44% success rate for SME's.

As we are at the beginning of the process and seeking to purchase a community asset from a private individual, rather than public body, we cannot address all the Committee's lines of inquiry. However, our situation already highlights a number of areas where policy could be improved as well as identifying what is working well.

What is working well

We are already in discussion with [Cwmpas](#) (formerly Wales Cooperative Centre) about setting up a Community Benefit Society and issuing community shares in order to raise funds. Their support has been invaluable to us in helping us to navigate an entirely new process, understand the steps we need to take, providing important resources on crucial legal processes, CBS structures, rules and roles.

We hope that Welsh Government will ensure that Cwmpas and other organisations that support community enterprises have sufficient resources to continue to provide this important service.

What needs to be improved

Whilst we are optimistic about the future prospects for the pub, it should never have been allowed to get to its current state. Since its closure, the Six Bells has deteriorated and what was once the heart of the village, is now an eyesore. Our experience is not unique, **approximately 8,600** pubs have closed in the last 10 years, 4 out of 5 people have seen a pub close down within 5 miles of their home and many villages that are then left without any amenities.

Whilst this is a problem across Britain, communities in Scotland and England have more rights and opportunities to bring such assets of community value into community ownership, than we do in Wales. This needs to change.

Right to register assets of community value: Welsh communities should have the right to register public and privately-owned assets of community value as they can in England and Scotland.

Right to buy or right to bid: community organising and fundraising to purchase an asset can be significantly more challenging than private or commercial purchases. The limited time that volunteers have, the limited financial resources of many community groups and the need to ensure full local community consultation all create challenges. Legislation should reflect these unique challenges.

When assets of community value are being sold, Welsh communities should be given the opportunity to purchase them and allowed the time to organise and raise funds to do so. In England communities are given six months, to organise and raise funds before bidding for the asset, whilst in Scotland they are given first right of refusal to purchase. Both these show models of how communities can be supported, which the Senedd Committee should explore. The fact that communities in Wales do not have either of these rights is an injustice that needs to be changed.

Measures to tackle derelict buildings: we believe stronger measures are needed to prevent derelict buildings falling into a state of disrepair and becoming eyesore for local communities. The Senedd Committee should explore ways in which this could work with community right to buy legislation.

We welcome this opportunity to respond and would be happy to speak to Senedd members in more detail about our plans.

Kind regards,

Ellen Law