



Staying in Wales Limited

Response to:

Towards E-Wales: A Consultation on Exploiting the Power of ICT in Wales

8th November 2006

Version 3.1

Foreword

Owing to a strong belief in culture as an economic driver in rural areas of Wales and the adaption of ICTs to this end, Staying in Wales–Aros yng Nghymru has made available much of the content contained in this response to Wales Rural Forum for inclusion in its own response. Whilst this may result in a considerable amount of duplication, we urge the E-Wales Team to consider both responses in their different contexts.

Background to Staying in Wales Limited

Staying in Wales Limited was established in 2003 in the wake of the foot and mouth epidemic to sustain the work and good practice of the Taste of Wales–Blas ar Gymru initiative, discontinued by the WDA. Much of the good practice and investment was in the adaption of ICTs to deliver information to visitors on points of interest in Wales using GI technology, This was recommended in 1996 in the original blueprint for a Wales destination marketing system (DMS).

Developments have been maintained throughout in collaboration with VisitWales.com, Cadw, the National Trust, RSPB, Youth Hostels Association, Sustainable Transport for Tourism Wales (STTW) and the Countryside Council for Wales.

A number of beta projects involving GI-embedded ICTs are under development as part of this collaboration and are mentioned in this response. Similar projects involving the *Wales.info* national domain are also mentioned because of their advanced nature.

Staying in Wales seeks to complement the work of Visit Wales within DEIN and the Food Division within DEPC in developing the visitor economy in Wales and substantially increasing its contribution to Wales Plc.

General Comments

The E-Wales consultation is long overdue and Staying in Wales Limited is delighted to furnish this response. Implementation of an E-Wales strategy is more likely to succeed now the process of integration is almost complete.

Consultation Questions and Responses

Knowledge

Q. Do you believe that there are particular groups of citizens in Wales who are not covered by existing initiatives to promote understanding and confidence with ICT?

That there will be individuals and groups not covered is inevitable and bridging the digital divide will often be a process of evolution rather than intervention.

Q. What methods do you believe have proved most effective at reaching large numbers of people? What has made them effective?

LEADER groups (LEADER 1, LEADER II and LEADER+) have played an invaluable and innovative role in both training and initiating employment opportunities for rural workers.

Q. What additional action might be necessary to ensure robust advice and information reaches all citizens?

Citizens in general need to be able to navigate their way easily to information on products and services available to them. This calls for a whole set of new skills in web design and marketing.

Q. What might be the most effective vehicles for achieving and sustaining this?

Empowering creativity and innovation in developing these new skills and using ICT-enabled social networks to help convey 'word-of-mouth' messages of reinforcement.

Q. Could we be doing more to draw attention to Welsh exploitation of ICT to an international audience? What might this be?

Wales has gained a lead in geographic information service applications outside Government, which, owing to the fact that they have not been led or funded by agencies such as the WDA or WTB are largely out of view, or – worse still – ignored. It will be necessary to draw more attention to these in Wales before they can be brought to the attention of an international audience.

Increased use of the worldwide web for product sourcing and procurement has rendered international exhibitions, trade events and overseas missions expensive alternatives to highly-targeted search engine marketing. Much more can be done to position 'Wales Plc' more prominently in the digital marketplace but there are few able to use the ICT tools necessary to accomplish this.

Time to market, too, is of the essence when, according to ICT entrepreneurs and venture capitalists across the world, every year on the internet compares with seven in the real world.

The E-Wales Strategy states that 'The pace at which ICT applications emerge, and new capabilities become possible make it all the more important that our approach to knowledge capture and sharing is rapid and robust' (6.10)

Lack of understanding and risk aversion of the public sector in grant funding innovation, however, slows the pace at which new ICT applications emerge in Wales.

Q. What sort of examples could be captured?

GIS good practice examples in all sectors:

MyBusiness.VisitWales at <http://mybusiness.visitwales.com> uses an online application for tourism businesses to plot their location on a map of Wales and to capture their geographic reference points.

A digital tourism map of Wales developed in the mid 1990s and made up of 146 separate datasets is maintained by Staying in Wales–Aros yng Nghymru at <http://www.stayinginwales.com/> A - 'hidden' GI application allows visitors to gain information on items of interest clustered around any given point in Wales.

A dataset of 6,058 settlements in Wales accounting for 6,568 placenames has been developed by Wales.info for use in Google Earth and Google Maps with beta products currently under test at http://countryside.wales.info/ccw_tour.asp and http://castles.wales.info/Castles_tour.asp

Wales Rural Form's Rural Resource project is beta testing Google Maps at <http://gallery.cefnwlad.org/mapping/cymru.php> to assist in developing social networks – showing geographic and themed clusters of organisations and individuals involved in rural regeneration and community development.

Other good practice examples:

An online program at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cymru/vocab/> using open source code, for anyone using a Welsh-language website to get an instant English translation. Other sites can use the program free, promising a number of exciting new applications.

Q. Do you believe that there might be benefits in having '.Wales' domain?

The Wales.info national domain has been procured to develop a transactional, GI-empowered, consumer-facing directory for Wales. Wales' natural assets and producers of goods and services in rural areas will be represented at <http://countryside.wales.info>.

However, it's not simply procuring and creating high-level 'Wales' domains and sub domains so much as having the new skill sets to make them work for the Welsh economy and society as a whole.

Q. What existing sources of research and information should be exploited to support greater ICT knowledge in relation to the agendas of sustainable development, equality of opportunity and bilingualism?

Wales Rural Forum's 'Rural Resource' project at <http://www.cefngwlad.org> is funded to use ICTs to develop a knowledge-based management tool drawing together information relating to rural affairs and issues affecting rural communities in Wales. Among its objectives are economic sustainability, equality of opportunity in disadvantaged rural areas (e.g. helping to counter the deficit of middle-management knowledge in managing work remotely, and encouraging broadband-enabled video conferencing with the added benefit of cutting travel), and promoting the Welsh language in the application of ICTs.

A main aim of the project is the creation of the technological infrastructure to showcase initiatives, and provide opportunities for users to develop and improve their ICT skills.

The Rural Resource is being developed as a conduit for the Welsh Assembly Government, using ICTs to inform organisations and the rural community alike of programmes relevant to rural Wales, and to enable all members of the rural community to become involved in debate about issues that directly affect them.

Another important source of research and information critical to the development of ICTs in Wales is the Geographical Information Strategy Action Plan for Wales, which should be embedded in the E-Wales strategy. The GI Strategy for Britain should be used to underpin both strategies.

Q. What knowledge gaps need to be filled?

There is a distinct lack of knowledge outside hitherto relatively closed circles concerning the importance of geographic information (GI) and geographic information services (GIS) to ICT development and applications. It is the 'C' for Communications in ICT that is relevant here with all its spatial connotations and the development of an 'infostructure' for Wales giving people access to information on goods, services and their locations. This is particularly important in rural areas where points of production and delivery are not found so easily as those in urban areas.

Q. How best can knowledge and research be captured?

The role of communities in capturing knowledge and contributing content should be highlighted in the context of culture as an economic driver.

The Beecham report suggests the key driver of change in Wales has to be local pride, ambition and accountability – with all public sector bodies using their joint resources to secure better outcomes for citizens in their areas. Rather than just ticking boxes for managers in this process, citizens must have a pro-active role and understand how it benefits them directly. If they provide content for ICT applications in pursuit of economic outcomes, they should be full stakeholders in projects.

This might be achieved with support from BLF's 'People & Places' fund, which is exclusive to Wales.

Knowledge and research on GI can be captured through AGI Cymru, a group of professionals from both the public and private sectors with a track record for innovation in this field.

Q. What role could an e-Wales observatory play in this specific context?

It could in the first instance produce an audit of all ICT projects or projects using ICTs for implementation, which have been funded by earlier structural funding programmes. This will help provide baseline measurements for new projects, prevent duplication of expenditure and avoid re-invention of the wheel.

It could then keep an eye on new developments and help spot roll-out opportunities.

Capacity

Q. What additional action do you believe the Assembly Government should take to exploit ICT effectively in policy on?

- **Local government services?**
- **Education, lifelong learning and skills?**
- **Health and Social Services?**
- **Culture, Welsh language and Sport?**
- **Social justice, social inclusion, community regeneration?**
- **the environment, countryside and planning?**
- **Enterprise, innovation and networks.**

Google Earth and Google Maps are prime examples of freely-available geographic information services (GIS) applications available to all.

The use and application of Creative Commons licences covering attributions, non-commercial use and no-derivative uses has a major role to play in the use of digital content.

In relation to the Welsh language and culture, the official names of places must be respected and available for use, along with commonly used alternatives. As mentioned earlier, there are over 6,500 Welsh placenames for some 5,000 settlements in Wales. Issues of this nature have been addressed by the recently revised BS7666, but there is evidence of inconsistency and lack of attention to the Welsh Language Act, which requires equality in the use of Welsh and English.

Culture has long been acknowledged as a powerful economic driver – more so in new knowledge economies where content is king, content management and distribution the monarchy. ICTs have a hugely important part to play in this and nowhere more so than in the tourism sector/visitor economy and creative industries, including export of cultural products (indigenous foods, crafts, music, fine arts etc).

Content is more important than technical sophistication. It offers opportunities for rural communities to claim a stake in the knowledge economy as providers as well as consumers of information. There are issues surrounding copyright and commercial applications to be considered but much of this can be dealt with through Creative Commons licensing mentioned earlier in this response. It should be made clear to rural communities, however, that there are economic 'returns' to be enjoyed from active participation in ICT.

Encouraging not just the infrastructure builders but also the content creators is also key to capacity building, particularly in the Creative Industries where providers are sometimes prejudiced because they do not fit the corporate world's definition of 'professional'.

'New technologies and the Internet bring the world closer together by providing powerful interactive tools for interpretation, research and understanding. IT (ICT) enables tourists and visitors to familiarise themselves with cultural destinations around the globe.' (see *Cultural Tourism; Information Communication Technologies, Tourism, Culture and Art* at <http://www.stayinginwales.com/b2b/docs/Cultural%20Tourim.pdf>)

Establishing a centre of excellence in this important area is long overdue. It will place Wales in the forefront of development and use of new technologies embedding GI (one of the next generation of digital services) to 'map out' Wales' language and culture and make it more accessible to the people of Wales and visitors to Wales alike.

Q. What area(s) do you believe to be of highest priority? Why?

There are a number of public and private sector developments that show the scope for good provided by ICTs embedding GI. These are often known within the GI sector, but less so outside. Both public- and commercial-sector developments should be showcased to illustrate ways in which innovative use of GI can benefit communities and organisations alike, particularly in rural areas most disadvantaged by geography in the access of services and amenities. This should coincide with efforts to increase capacity for applying these techniques.

Q. What priorities do you identify for exploiting ICT in public services in Wales?

Procurement policy changes to reflect the 'second model' of more effective co-ordination and co-operation advocated by 'Making the Connections'.

Q. What strengths do we have which can support the development of consistent ICT policy capacity?

New strengths in the development of a consistent ICT policy capacity have yet to be realised from the merger of the WDA and WTB into the Welsh Assembly Government. This will only occur, however, if the 'territorial' boundaries of the old agencies are removed totally rather than escalated to Ministry levels. If the cross-cutting nature of ICTs doesn't make them supra – transcending politics – then fragmentation and the silo effect will prevail.

Q. How can we ensure the right balance between cohesion and co-ordination, and creativity and innovation?

This question would lose none of its meaning if it read: ‘How can we ensure the right balance between public sector and private sector activity?’

It’s government’s role to develop a framework for cohesion and co-ordination in pursuit of order, while the private sector delivers the creativity and innovation in pursuit of profit to help pay for it. The right balance is struck at the point where intervention is needed to help encourage embryo markets. Markets, however, are not fail-safe and government interventions need to be less risk-averse when encouraging enterprise in the development and application of ICTs.

Q. What national interventions need to be made to support local action?

Interventions that are less risk-averse and provide space for creativity and innovation amongst micro-enterprise.

Q. How do we ensure that key decision makers have robust information and advice about the opportunities and challenges presented to their organisations by ICT and are able to exploit these?

There is a supposition here that key decision makers are predisposed to learning about the opportunities ICT presents. This may not necessarily be the case and perhaps some emphasis needs to be placed on promoting those with more capacity to learn to key decision-making posts at all levels to gain a consistent approach.

Given that micro-enterprise community ventures are a growing medium for economic growth in rural areas where there are too few SMEs, these need also to benefit from decision-makers with a capacity to understand what’s at stake in the application of ICTs.

Q. What more needs to be done to ensure that public services have a workforce that is able to exploit ICT in the design and running of public services?

Despite work by the WDA in the 1990s to introduce and popularise teleworking, its potential for bringing skilled administrative work to rural areas has yet to be realised, except in niche sectors (i.e. translation). Arguably, the reasons for this remain relatively unchanged from the 1990s: failure of middle managers to understand the potential or to manage work remotely. WAG should consider leading by example and initiating programmes for outsourcing more of its work telematically.

Assuming that service provision will increasingly be hived off onto the voluntary sector, volunteers must also be provided with training and awareness raising, although in such a way that it does not discourage people from volunteering.

Invest more in developing ICT opportunities for activities, particularly in rural Wales, which are perceived as being ‘key’ to the Welsh USP. i.e. countryside, music, language. Many of these

depend on the voluntary and community sectors and are not funded to present themselves well through ICT, although their activities are considered iconic by many business and leisure travellers/tourists.

Q. What good practice can we build on when identifying effective means of measuring progress?

The Wales Spatial Plan was built on an ability to deploy geographic information (GI) datasets to identify fresh outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in Wales and to quickly contain them. This establishment of good practice in an emergency situation was reactionary. The knowledge gained must now be turned to exceptional good practice in the use of GI in management, marketing, measurement of progress, and communicating information on all these elements via ICTs.

Q. What additional priorities (to those already identified in WAVE) might there be in terms of exploiting ICT for economic growth?

Investment in ICT research in Welsh Universities seems to be the most likely route to seed innovative ICT companies in Wales ready for incubation in Techniums such as the Centre for Advanced Software Technology (CAST) in Bangor <<http://www.techniumcast.com>>. *‘Wales is a dynamic destination for business. Technium gives companies the edge in a global marketplace where innovation is a cornerstone of commercial success enabling the realisation of tomorrow’s ideas in Wales today.’* (Sir Terry Matthews, Entrepreneur)

Combined with ICTs, visualisation models developed at CAST for the environmental sciences will assist in the management of natural assets, bringing economic benefit to rural areas.

Another well-proven route is technology transfer to the private sector from university research programmes for commercial development in which universities maintain an interest.

Q. What additional opportunities might there be in Wales to encourage leading edge ICT enterprise and innovation?

WAVE emphasises the fact that ICT is an enabler rather than an end in itself. Previous structural funding programmes in Wales tended to place the emphasis on ICT as an end in itself, which though helpful in building an ICT infrastructure, rendered projects wishing to use ICTs for implementation a bad fit within the relevant ICT Priority Measures.

This must be avoided at all costs in the Convergence Funding and Rural Development Plan programmes ‘...if we are to ensure that Wales is genuinely at the forefront of adoption of ICTs.’ (WAVE 3.35). Also, in monitoring the progress of projects using ICTs for implementation, outcomes need to be measured in new- rather than conventional-media terms. The success of a website in reaching its target market needs to be measured by frequency of visits to, time spent on, and items downloaded from the website by identifiable users, rather than the number of ‘seminars’ conducted or ‘conferences’ held attracting x number of people to a physical place. Seminars and conferences, in any case, can be held online along with discussion groups and should be included in measurable outcomes.

Consideration should be given to tax regimes and incentives that enable and encourage micro-enterprise and other enterprises to form new 'marketing clusters' in geographical 'cool spots' where ICTs can, nevertheless, enable access to global markets. GI enables marketing clusters to be 'assembled' and packaged for worldwide consumption.

WAVE also states that 'Alongside transport, ICT infrastructure is becoming increasingly important.' A year on from publication of the consultation document, ICT infrastructure – or 'infostructure' as it is becoming increasingly known – is of equal if not greater importance than the infrastructure as we know it.

This is brought out well in the Sustainable Transport for Tourism Wales (STTW) Phase 3 Draft Strategy at <http://www.sttw.wales.info/consultation.asp> where information about the public transport network in Wales is as important as the network itself 'You cannot have an integrated transport system without an integrated information system' that describes both the network and the services provided by it.

The spatial nature of public transport networks (including services where time is of the essence) presents a substantial opportunity for leading edge ICT enterprise and innovation incorporating geographic information systems (GIS) to help improve delivery. This is especially important in relatively poorly-served rural areas where 'Transport is vital in opening up commercial opportunities available...' and 'ITC networks and services are likely to be increasingly important, particularly for the more remote areas.' (WAVE 2.15).

Q. What additional actions can help ensure citizens are empowered with the skills and confidence to exploit ICT when, where and how they choose?

The ICT explosion in agriculture driven by the foot and mouth outbreak placed farmers at a considerable advantage both in terms of accessing current information online and maintaining a social network when travel was restricted.

This, however, was progress in adversity and for the majority of citizens empowerment will occur through simplification of ICT interfaces, good functional design, better navigation features, and different options for access. The application of ICTs in this respect calls for a complete new range of knowledge and skills as demonstrated by Google and other such leaders in the field.

Wales Rural Forum's *Rural Resource* project is an additional action already trail-blazing a new approach to ICT exploitation in rural communities. 'Helping community organisations to make the most of ICT helps to broaden opportunities for individuals and enable all communities to benefit from such developments and to integrate more with wider society.' (WAVE 2.15).

The project is currently hampered by an insistence that its outcomes are measured in conventional terms, which rather defeats the object but the project is nevertheless making good headway and will be held up and promoted as a good practice example.

Funded currently under the Objective 1 (Priority 5 Measure 4) programme with match funding from the Department of Environment Planning and Countryside (DEPC), it is anticipated that the new heads of agreement with the Department for Enterprise Innovation and Networks (DEIN) will enable the project to deliver across a wider spectrum of rural economic activities.

Innovation

Q. What successful practice to encourage ICT innovation can we build on?

Content management was referred to earlier as having a hugely important part to play in the new knowledge economy. Management should not, however, be confused with marketing. The public and voluntary sectors have a substantial role to play in the former, whilst the private sector has the motivation and skills necessary for engagement with consumer markets where time to market is of the essence.

Successful practice must be gauged then in terms of both, with examples like 'My Business at Visit Wales' representing a good example of digital content collection and management.

Meanwhile 'Staying in Wales' at <http://www.stayinginwales.com> represents a good example of taking such content to market via the innovative application of Google Maps and the development of tourism business clusters.

An example of good marketing practice at an early stage of development is the innovative beta application of Google Earth for a Wales Castles Tour at http://castles.wales.info/Castles_tour.asp and a Wales National Nature Reserves Tour at http://countryside.wales.info/ccw_tour.asp

Another good example of digital content collection and management is the National Library of Wales' 'Gathering the Jewels' initiative. It is likely that this too will benefit from the Wales.info content marketing project.

Q. What are the main challenges faced by businesses wishing to innovate with ICT in Wales, and how might they be met?

Government procurement policies are a serious challenge to small and micro-size businesses with innovative ideas and solutions that can help contribute to the nation's wealth.

All too often tenders are awarded to organisations with second or even third-rate ideas and ability to innovate but with an 'ability' to tender. Other tenders suffer from a lack of imaginative thinking in their drafting and in doing so suppress innovation and new ideas.

These situations can be met by a process of single negotiated tendering where new ideas and innovation are actively sought from small private sector businesses without fear of them being dampened or completely discouraged by the bureaucratic process.

Q. What IP issues must be taken into account?

In inviting ideas and innovation into a single negotiated tender process, IP must be respected and Government must be prepared to offer assurances of non-disclosure.

Q. Where do you believe high impact ICT innovation might be of most value to public services?

In the field of Geographic Information Systems, where locations ties different pieces of information together and lets us see new patterns and trends and spot relationships that would otherwise be missed. The Wales Spatial Plan has demonstrated this and that GI delivered through GIS can link up data from a number of different agencies. It does, however, need a willingness from organisations to make their data available and for the delivery vehicle to be effective.

Q. What strengths and structures do we already have which could support an approach?

The Welsh Assembly Government sponsored 'Geographical Information Strategy Action Plan for Wales 2003' represents a substantial strength to build on. Wales Rural Forum is working in association with AGI Cymru accordingly to bring this strength to rural communities and rural enterprise.

There is also a developing GI Strategy for Britain which will have a bearing on the E-Wales Strategy where geographic information (GI) enables a better understanding of Wales. AGI Cymru has recently submitted its comments and recommendations. It is important, however, that in a devolved economy the strategy for Britain underpins rather than sits above the GI strategy for Wales (see next question)

Q. How else might opportunities best be exploited or private sector engagement with the public sector over ICT innovation?

Information communication technologies embedding GI provide powerful development, management, marketing and communication tools. Wales is capable of taking a lead in the development and application of these tools to produce a knowledge economy involving all sectors, private, public and voluntary.

However, the commonly-used geo reference systems in Britain are subject to commercial property rights. For the benefit of the Wales, the use of these locators should be maximised and not restricted by a commercial interest in creating income. The irony is that any excess income from public sector use of location references, goes back to the UK Treasury from whence it came. This creates a 'value lost' situation (cost of transactions) each time there is a need for a financial payment between organisations, before the UK Treasury receives the money back.

This dampens innovation in this important area.

Q. What other implications might need to be taken into account in investigating this approach?

An E-Wales Strategy and associated action plan will require a strong vision which shows senior management the importance of embedding GI in associated technologies, not only to develop successful organisations but also a successful Wales plc. Political backing for this is important.

GIS-embedded ICTs can, for example, be used to:

- provide information about and the location of enterprises in rural areas where there is a greater likelihood for self employment,
- identify areas to see why they provide a good environment for enterprise, and
- apply good practice to areas with poorer prospects.

The consultation will have had to be as wide as possible across public, voluntary and commercial sectors, involving such organisations as FSB Cymru representing small and micro businesses in Wales. Ongoing reviews, updates and continual promotion are all extremely important in this sector. All successes, lessons learnt and reviews must be widely communicated; it is often difficult to associate a GI-related success (e.g. wider data sharing), for example, to the success of ICT in general. E-Wales Strategy achievements need to recognise and highlight these.

Infrastructure

This Strategy seeks to ensure that:

- The people and businesses of Wales have access to an advanced and open infrastructure network which supports them however and whenever they want which will result in Wales having a ubiquitous networked society.
- Wales is viewed as an ICT test-bed from which new products and services are created and refined which result in the creation of both indigenous growth and export opportunities.
- Wales is seen as a country which excels in all areas of technology.
- Wales as an infrastructure which is future proof and able to respond to technological advances.

No comment other than to recommend the word 'infostructure' is adopted to underpin the paradigm shift from the 'old' infrastructure as we know it – roads, railways and other transport networks – dealing with the physical movement of people and freight; to a digital age where people communicate online – across the world, in seconds – at all times of day and night.

Contact Details

Aros-yng Nghymru

Staying in Wales Limited

Unit 4, Parc Busness Penamser, Porthmadog LL49 9GB, Wales UK

Tel: 01766 543011

Email: info@stayinginwales.com

Web: www.stayinginwales.com

Contact: Terry Jackson

Mobile: 07770 574130

Email: terry@stayinginwales.com