



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1369
Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/01620/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

16 October 2023

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter, dated 26 September, requesting my views on the petition which calls for the use of only Welsh names for places in Wales.

Safeguarding Welsh place names is an important part of the Welsh Government's work, with our [Programme for Government 2021-26](#) stating that we will 'act to protect Welsh language place names' and the [Cooperation Agreement](#) with Plaid Cymru stating that we'll 'act to ensure that Welsh language place names in the built and natural environments are safeguarded and promoted for future generations'.

Thus far, our focus has been on the wealth of names we have for topographical features, land and property, including farms and housing. Many of these names are historic in nature. By focusing on these areas, it becomes evident how complex are the factors which impact on place names, with different issues to be taken into consideration in relation to different types of names. This is equally true of settlement names. The names of villages, towns and cities in Wales, for instance, have developed over hundreds, if not thousands, of years, and though the majority of names for settlements in Wales have their origins in the Welsh language, a number of them also have their roots in English, French, Latin, Irish or Norse.

Things get more complicated when a town or city has different names in Welsh and English. Every town, village or city has its own unique history, and that history will have influenced how its name or names have taken root, developed and changed over the course of centuries. In some instances, it isn't always clear what the "original" name of a given settlement is.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

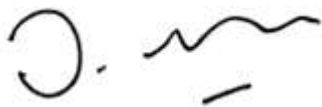
We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

In previous correspondence to you on a similar topic, I alluded to the example of Cardiff – the modern Welsh name for the city, *Caerdydd*, comes from the mediaeval Welsh form, *Caerdyf*, which in English has developed into the modern spelling of *Cardiff* (*with the Welsh 'f' (or v) becoming 'ff' in English*). In this case, therefore, it would be difficult to determine which of its modern names is truer to its old form. By discarding the modern English name, for instance, one could argue that we would be erasing the connection with the city's mediaeval Welsh name. What I've learned when dealing with place names is that each individual name has a unique history.

In some examples, where the pronunciation of the Welsh and English names for a town or city is so similar that there's a strong argument for having only one spelling, I think it can make sense to stick with the Welsh spelling. In these cases, I would support the principle promoted by the Welsh Language Commissioner, namely that we should aim for one spelling when there are only a few letters of difference between the Welsh and English versions. In this context, our policy on [Welsh Language Linguistic Infrastructure](#) notes the need to promote and emphasise the status of place-names which have been standardised, and to raise awareness of the List of Standardised Welsh Place-names which is maintained by the Commissioner. But these are very often local issues – we've seen in the past how changing only one letter in the name of a town or village, or adding a hyphen in order to standardize orthography, can lead to strong disagreements in local communities. I therefore continue to believe that we need to find a way of reflecting the wider range of perspectives and implications which exist.

The petition refers specifically to the cases of Eryri National Park and Bannau Brycheiniog National Park. These are independent organisations which have conducted exercises to get to know what local people think about their suggestions for renaming. For instance, during the two years before rebranding, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority held conversations with volunteers, residents, visitors and businesses about their identity and about what it means to be a national park. This included a stakeholder reference panel, a citizen's assembly and a brand consultation process. I believe that thorough engagement and open public discussion would be necessary for any decisions of this kind, as it goes to the heart of local democracy and how people see themselves.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Miles', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language