

## P-05-819 Historic Welsh Place Names

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 19 Mehefin 2018

Petitions Committee | 19 June 2018

### Research Briefing:

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**Petition number:** P-05-819

**Petition title:** Historic Welsh Place Names

**Text of petition:** The Welsh language is one of the main distinguishing features of Wales, and our history and culture is intimately linked with one of the oldest languages in Europe.

Increasingly historic Welsh place names and house names are being replaced by English names. This kills the local culture and one of the elements which makes Wales unique. These old Welsh names are often very descriptive, and connect with the history of a place.

Maintaining our cultural identity and heritage is important to non-Welsh speakers and Welsh speakers alike.

**Additional information:** Old Welsh place names/building names should be protected by law; and new developments should have a mandatory Welsh name in order to preserve our unique culture and language. This would be appreciated by Welsh speakers and those who are learning or don't speak the language alike. It would also aid with the fostering of our unique trademark to the world – something which tourists love to see.

### Background

In the Fourth Assembly, the idea of using the heritage protection system (which includes consent schemes for changes to listed buildings and scheduled monuments) to protect historic place names was discussed during the scrutiny of the *Historic Environment (Wales) Bill* (which became an act in 2016).

During Stage One scrutiny of the Bill, the Community, Equality and Local Government Committee raised this issue with the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, Ken Skates AM (who is now Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport) who stated that he was “not convinced that there are any legislative controls that could be regulated to enhance the protection of place names.”

The Deputy Minister believed that the proposal to place Historic Environment Records ('HERs': these are records which store and provide access to systematically organised information about the historic environment and specific historic assets in a given area) on a statutory footing (section 33) would "help to promote the connection and the preservation of information on place names" and "ensure that there is a better gathering of information concerning Welsh place names". He emphasised the need to work with owners to ensure that they "fully appreciated" the historical significance of their assets, and that this was "the best course of action, and the best way of preventing unnecessary changes to place names".

In its subsequent report, the Committee recommended:

We recommend that section 33(2) of the Bill is amended to include a specific reference to historic place-names and that the Deputy Minister brings forward an amendment at Stage 2 to give effect to this.

The Bill was subsequently amended in this manner. The *Historic Environment (Wales) Act* now states that "The Welsh Ministers must compile and maintain a list of historic place names in Wales".

In terms of what this list is meant to contain, the Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill stated:

Historic place names provide invaluable evidence about social, cultural and linguistic history. The names of settlements, houses and farms, fields and natural features provide information about past and present agricultural practices, local industries, changed landscapes and current and former communities. They provide evidence for the development of a rich linguistic heritage — Welsh, English and other languages.

Further information is contained on p.31–33:

<http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/pri-ld10184-em-r/pri-ld10184-em-r-e.pdf>

## Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government has provided a response detailing its action in this area. It notes that, following the *Historic Environment Wales Act*, the Welsh Government has introduced a statutory list of historic place names. It states:

Statutory guidance requires local and National Park authorities and Natural Resources Wales to take account of the list when their functions involve naming or renaming places. This includes the naming or renaming of streets, properties and other places, either directly or by another party. The intention is that the operation of the list and the statutory guidance together will lead to a reduction in the number of formal changes to historic property names. It will also encourage the use of historic names for new developments.

The Welsh Government is planning to publish good practice guidance on the use of historic place names in 2018.

However, the Welsh Government notes:

...these measures stop short of providing formal protection for historic place names. Detailed consideration was given to providing statutory protection for historic place names during the development of the 2016 Act, when a number of representations similar to the current petition were made. However a number of significant issues, including enforcement, potential additional burdens on local authorities and human rights, militated against it.

## National Assembly for Wales action

In January 2017 Dai Lloyd AM won the ballot to propose a Member's bill: [Development of the Protection of Welsh Historical Place Names Bill](#). Dai Lloyd AM provided the following [Explanatory Memorandum](#) prior to the Plenary debate, which was held on the 15 March. The Explanatory Memorandum stated that a range of approaches that could be taken to protect place names, including:

- Ensuring that landowners are aware of the historical significance of place names;
- Introducing a requirement on landowners or public bodies to consult with an identified public body (or identified public bodies) when changing a historical place name;
- Introducing a consent regime when seeking to change a historical place name;
- Introducing a general prohibition on changing a historical place name;
- Requiring landowners or public bodies to use historical place names, when producing publicly accessible information; and
- A combination of the different options above, potentially dependent on the type of name or situation in which a name change may occur.

The Welsh Government did not support the bill, and it did not receive leave to proceed. A transcript of the Plenary debate can be read [here](#).

As part of its recent inquiry into the [Historic Environment](#), the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee considered the List of Historic Place Names of Wales. It stated that the Welsh Government should keep the matter under "active review and should be willing to introduce further protection for historic place names if the current list does not prove effective".

The Welsh Government's briefing for this petition states:

We have already made a commitment to review the effectiveness of the List of Historic Place Names of Wales and the associated non-statutory measures in encouraging the retention of historic place names. My officials at Cadw are liaising with local authority street naming and numbering officers to establish mechanisms for the regular collection of data on the use of the list in the naming and renaming of properties in accordance with the statutory guidance. It is expected that it will take a least four or five years to collect sufficient evidence to evaluate the impact of these measures.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

