Update on *The List of Historic Place Names of Wales* for the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

We are grateful for the invitation to contribute to the panel discussion on the protection of Welsh place names.

What is the List of Historic Place Names?

The List of Historic Place Names of Wales is an index of names for identifiable geographical locations gathered from a variety of historical sources by a number of different projects. Drawing upon existing place name research, the List includes the various names and spellings used to denote settlements, buildings, fields and landscape features in Wales. This is a living list that will grow and develop as new research becomes available.

Recognising the importance of historic place names to the history and culture of Wales, the Welsh Government included a provision for a statutory list of historic place names in the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales compile and maintain the List on behalf of the Welsh Ministers.

What is the List for?

The List aims to raise public awareness of the rich legacy of historic place names in Wales and encourage the continuing use of these important elements of our nation's heritage.

Freely available online and through the historic environment records, the List is a developing record of authoritative information on historic place names that can be used to:

- help members of the public learn about the history of their communities;
- support academic research; and
- inform decisions on the management of the historic environment.

Local and National Park authorities and Natural Resources Wales are expected to use the list when taking decisions on the naming or renaming of streets and properties. The statutory guidance, Historic Environment Records: Compilation and Use, sets out how those public bodies should use the List in the exercise of their functions.

How can it be used?
The List of Historic Place Names of Wales is a resource designed for use by both public and professional users. It is:
- A bilingual website, allowing text and map-based searching. Users of the website are able and encouraged to enhance the List by making comments on place names, which may include spelling variants, alternative names or suggestions for corrections. Users can freely download their search results (up to 4,000 geo-located records can be downloaded per search).
- A live Web Feature Service (WFS), accessible within all historic environment records, local planning authorities and government departments in Wales.

How has the List been put together?
The place names included in the List at its launch have been drawn from three principal sources:
- names collected by online volunteers from historic Ordnance Survey maps through the Cymru1900Wales project;
- names collected by online volunteers from tithe apportionments through the Cynefin project; and
- names collected by Dr David Parsons in his research for the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies on the 'Historic Place-Names of Wales'.

Since its launch in May 2017, work on the list has continued and place names within the list are now drawn from over 1,000 different sources and, over time, many more names will be added as further projects and research are completed.

Staff

A full-time member of staff is responsible for the curation of the List and is able to assist with enquiries. Our Historic Place Names Officer, Dr James January-McCann, is also very actively promoting use of, and contribution to, the List through his programme of talks and lectures with local groups and societies across Wales.

Use of the List

There are at present (October 2019) 664,551 Recorded Names within the List of Historic Place Names of Wales. During September 2019 5,450 users conducted 6,642 sessions on the website and viewed 15,676 pages (an average of 182 users/day and 221 sessions/day). These figures do not take into account access to the List by planning authorities who access the data through their corporate Geographical Information Systems in the form of a live Web Feature Service – this facility allows any user to view the List in conjunction with other geographical data.

Both the website and Web Feature Service have been promoted to Local Authority Street Naming and Numbering Officers, alongside Cadw's statutory guidance, to assist them with decision making in the naming and renaming of streets, properties and other places. Our Place Names Officer has received direct enquiries from a number of street naming and numbering officers requesting advice on appropriate names for new developments and has also corresponded with developers directly to offer guidance on historically relevant place names. We also regularly receive enquiries and comments from members of the public.

Plans for the future

The Royal Commission will maintain and enhance the List of Historic Place Names of Wales by:

- creating new historic place name records from data gathered from multiple sources;
- reviewing and amending existing records to correct transcription and other errors;
- coordinating the exchange of place name data between organisations;

- responding to enquiries relating to records in the List; and
- producing articles and organising outreach activities that promote the List and increase understanding of the value of historic place names in Wales.

We would like to work more closely with the Cymdeithas Enwau Lleoedd Cymru to act as a permanent publicly-accessible repository for the valuable data they have gathered, ensuring this data is considered when Planning Authorities are making decisions about new developments or applications for change of name, and reaches as wide an audience as possible.

We would also be keen to assist the Cymdeithas with future crowd-sourcing initiative to gather further place name records, basic metadata from which would be published through the List.

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
21 October 2019