

## [Live music protection: Assembly Members to debate petition](#)

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On Wednesday 12 July, Assembly Members will debate a [petition calling for live music venues to be protected](#). The petition caught the imagination of live music lovers in Wales and collected over 5,000 signatures.

This is the first time that an Assembly petition has been signed by over 5,000 people since the [new petitions process](#) was introduced back in March. The changes allow the Petitions Committee to request an Assembly debate on any petition which collects over 5,000 signatures.

What does the petition ask?

The petition asks for Welsh planning policy to be changed to protect live music venues from being forced to close down because of complaints about late night noise. Specifically, it called for two things:



- the ‘agent of change’ principle to be introduced into the Welsh planning system; and
- local authorities to have the ability to designate ‘areas of cultural significance for music’ in their local plans and policies.

## What does ‘agent of change’ mean?

Agent of change is a straightforward concept. It simply means that those responsible for a change must also be responsible for managing the impact of that change.

In the case of live music, this could mean that the developer of a new residential building near an existing live music venue would be required to include noise mitigation measures as part of the new development.

Those who support introducing the agent of change principle say that local authorities tend to favour complaints from residents in new developments over noise levels from established music venues nearby.

They maintain that this is the case irrespective of how long the ‘nuisance’ noise has existed – i.e. there is currently no difference between historic instances of the same noise being a nuisance, or whether someone has just moved into the vicinity of the noise with full knowledge of it.

This has been cited as a major reason for live music venues across the UK closing down in recent years.

## Why is this an issue now?

The issue has shot to prominence in Wales recently because of planning applications for new apartments and a hotel on Womanby Street in Cardiff.

Womanby Street is the heart of Cardiff’s music scene and home to a number of live venues. Campaigners feared that, if approved, the developments could jeopardise Womanby Street’s future as a live music destination. This concern led to a high profile campaign: [‘Save Womanby Street’](#). The campaigners released this video:

This isn’t just an issue in Wales. For example, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Kahn, has recently consulted on [new planning guidance](#) that would introduce the agent of change principle to help protect cultural venues and support London’s night time economy.



## How did the Welsh Government respond?

On 19 May, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, [announced that she would update Welsh national planning policy](#) 'in a move to support live music venues' as a result of the Womanby Street campaign.

[Planning Policy Wales](#), the Welsh national planning policy, already enables local authorities to take noise into account when deciding planning applications, including for proposals near an existing source of noise. It also says that new uses should not be introduced into an area without considering the nature of existing uses.

However, the Cabinet Secretary said that she now wants the policy to make explicit reference to the agent of change principle.

She also said that Planning Policy Wales will be updated to allow local authorities to designate areas of cultural significance for music in their local development plans.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

Although the continued vibrancy of areas like Womanby Street depends on the ongoing participation of a number of different parties, including local authorities, the venues themselves and their customers, I have heard the calls to update our national planning policy to protect live music venues.

I am delighted, therefore, to confirm I have asked my officials to start revising Planning Policy Wales at the earliest opportunity.

I am sure this news will be music to the ears of Wales' live music fans and I hope local planning authorities will have the confidence to apply these measures when considering planning applications.

The Cabinet Secretary [wrote to all local planning authorities in Wales](#) on 26 May instructing them to apply the agent of change principle with immediate effect.

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