

COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 17 December 2020

PRESENT: Councillor F. Akhtar (Chair)

Councillors:

D.M. Cundy (In place of S. Matthews), C.A. Davies, W.R.A. Davies, H.L. Davies, R.E. Evans, S.J.G. Gilasbey, B.W. Jones, H.I. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis (In place of G.B. Thomas), H.B. Shepardson and D. Thomas

Also in attendance:

Councillor P. Hughes-Griffiths, Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism
L.M. Stephens, Deputy Leader of the Council and Leader of the Independent Group

The following Officers were in attendance:

L. Quelch, Head of Planning
I. Jones, Head of Leisure
J. Jones, Head of Regeneration
M. Bull, Economic Development Area Manager
I.R. Llewelyn, Forward Planning Manager
N Thomas, Senior Outdoor Recreation Manager
M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator
J. Corner, Technical Officer
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer
R. Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Virtual Meeting - . - 10.00 am - 12.15 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Matthews and G.B. Thomas

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

There were no declarations of personal interests.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

No public questions had been received.

4. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ORDERS CARMARTHEN TOWN CENTRE AND AMMANFORD TOWN CENTRES

The Committee received a report presented by the Executive Board Member - Deputy Leader (with responsibility for Planning Services) on the Council's

proposals (as agreed at its meeting on the 9th December 2020) to introduce Local Development Plans for Carmarthen and Ammanford Town Centres. The report detailed the potential role LDO's could play as part of broader regeneration proposals within a Town Centre context, particularly in relation to Carmarthen and Ammanford, in both supporting the Vibrant Places Initiative and ensuring they were resilient to the economic effects of COVID-19. The proposals also had due regard to the Council's Corporate Recovery Plan and the Welsh Government's Planning Guidance – 'Building Better Places'.

It was noted that a LDO provided a Local Planning Authority with an opportunity to streamline the planning process by removing the need for developers/applicants to make a planning application to the Authority and for development proposals to be submitted as an LDO application in lieu, thereby allowing an authority to act proactively in response to locally specific circumstances within its geographical area. However, should a formal planning application be necessary, that would have to be submitted as at present. It was further confirmed that works to listed buildings were excluded from the Orders. The proposal would now be subject to a 6 week consultation period and, thereafter, would be submitted to Council for its consideration of the responses received and on whether to proceed with introduction of the Orders.

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to the existing LDO for Llanelli Town Centre and to how effective that had been in regenerating the centre

The Executive Board Member advised that whilst that Order incorporated different aspects than those proposed for Carmarthen and Ammanford, one being the requirement for the preparation of a Flood Risk Assessment, the benefits were beginning to gather pace. She advised that lessons learnt from its introduction were being applied to the proposed Carmarthen and Ammanford LDO's

- Reference was made to the Council's regeneration proposals and a comment made that whilst they were welcomed, one element that needed to be addressed to promote regeneration was the level of the Business Rates and the impediment they could be to enhancing regeneration within the County.
- Clarification was sought on the statement on page 17 of the report para A1.4 that Section 106 planning obligations could not be required under an LDO, and to whether that was releasing developers from making such contributions

The Forward Planning Manager advised that the purpose of a LDO was to provide a stimulus to encourage change and dynamism to promote development within its boundaries and the requirement for a Section 106 Agreement could act as a barrier to potential developers. However, the Order would be continually monitored to assess its effectiveness, as required under legislation and, should circumstances dictate, it could be amended within a period of 21-28 days.

- Reference was made to the time the LDO had been in place within Llanelli Town Centre and to whether examples could be provided of developments undertaken and if they had been privately or publicly led.

The Executive Board Member confirmed they had been privately led and they were being assisted by the designation of the Town Centre as a Business Improvement District

The Forward Planning Manager advised that the scheme had taken some time to implement within Llanelli but that to date, 12 applications had been received under the Order's parameters with two schemes having commenced. One of the applications involved the conversion of an upper floor of a property for residential usage and as more of those applications came to fruition the greater the impact would be on the town centre and meeting the Order's aims of introducing a living environment into the centre coupled with a range and variety of activities.

It was noted that a monitoring report was being prepared on the Order's first year which would be presented to the Council and the Scrutiny Committee in due course

- In response to a question on the impact of the Covid pandemic on the economy, the Committee was advised that the LDO provided the authority with the ability to be more agile and responsive to changing circumstances and the same applied to developers. Whilst the impact from Covid may last for a significant period, the authority needed to be more flexible in its approach to regeneration as its understanding of changing circumstances evolved
- In response to a question on the potential impact of an LDO on historic buildings, it was confirmed it only applied to internal arrangements and the external facades would remain.
- It was confirmed that the initial period of the LDO's for Carmarthen and Ammanford Town Centres would be for 18 months to tie in with the time scale for the adoption of the Revised Local Development Plan. However, that period may be reduced, or extended, according to the Plan's progression to adoption in 2022

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received

5. REVISED CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2018 -2033 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED AND FOCUSED CHANGES

The Committee received a report presented by the Executive Board Member – Deputy Leader (with responsibility for Planning Services) on the preparation of a Revised (replacement) Local Development Plan for Carmarthenshire in accordance with the Council's resolution on the 10th January, 2018 . She advised that the current report detailed the responses received to the formal consultation process and sought to set out a series of proposed Focused Changes to recommendations received along with those that may have emerged as a result of changes in legislation, guidance, evidence or, in the interests of clarity and meaning.

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- In response to a question on the potential impacts of Covid on communities and the way of working, the Executive Board Member advised that the Plan preparation had continually monitored changes and the impacts they could

have for example, the potential level of migration into the county from people who perceived Carmarthenshire to be a safer place to live. The impact of increased homeworking would also require monitoring for example to assess if there was a need for external areas to be provided within developments to act as both a reprieve from the home environment and to promote outdoor exercise. The impact on access to doctors' surgeries and NHS support would also need to be assessed.

- With regard to the Plans' progression to adoption, that was scheduled for submission for independent examination in May 2021 with the examination in public to formally commence in July 2021 with the Pre-Hearing meeting. A request had also been made for the appointed Inspector to have an understanding of Carmarthenshire
- Reference was made to the status of land included within the current LDP and to whether they could be removed from the revised LDP if, for example, planning consent had been refused.

The Forward Planning Manager advised there was the potential for that situation to arise as the Plan's emphasis was on project deliverability. However, as every piece of land submitted for inclusion within the Revised Plan was accompanied with representations those would be submitted to the Inspector for consideration on its inclusion or, otherwise. The Plan would also be examined in public and the public/developers would have the opportunity of making representations to the Inspector.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received

6. PENDINE OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE

The Committee received an update report presented by the Executive Board Member with responsibility for Culture, Sport and Tourism (accompanied with a powerpoint presentation) on the key issues affecting the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre and suggested ways forward in delivering high quality outdoor education in Carmarthenshire.

It was noted that the current facility was ageing and its replacement required significant capital investment of circa £5m set against a challenging background of increasing competing demands on the Councils' capital programme. As a result of those factors, consideration was being given to alternative means of provision which could, for example, include downsizing the current facility, use of alternative buildings/facilities within the county and a mobile service provision. An Outdoor Education Forum had therefore been established, including representatives from leisure, education and schools, to identify future service delivery options

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- The Committee referred unanimously to the value of the existing facility at Pendine to the whole of the County and to the experience it provided for school children. It whole heartedly supported its continued operation and the need to identify capital, and other funding sources, to secure its provision for future generations

The Head of Leisure confirmed the future provision of the centre was challenging when set against ageing buildings, under-investment over the

years and demands on the Council's capital programme. However, he advised that revenue expenditure of £80k pa was spent on maintaining the facility together with an additional £160k pa operating subsidy. Having regard to the substantial rebuilding cost, there was a need for the authority to adopt a more flexible approach to the future of outdoor education provision while retaining some base provision at Pendine.

- In response to a question on the importance of leisure to the health of young children, the Head of Leisure confirmed the provision of outdoor leisure facilities by the Authority such as that at Pendine were extremely beneficial to young children's mental and physical wellbeing and the authority had spent significantly on its leisure portfolio in recent years. However, with the current situation at Pendine, and competing demands on the capital programme, consideration had to be afforded to alternative methods of service delivery which may be achievable with some form of capital investment.
- Reference was made to impact of Covid on the centre's operation and to the fact that at some time in the future outdoor leisure facilities, such as at the Pendine Centre, would re-open. Whilst the estimated £5m capital replacement costs were not insignificant, the view was expressed that the centre's benefit to children was immense. A question was therefore asked on whether the centre's running costs could be offset in part by introducing a commercial element when it was not in use by schools, for example, during school holidays, as occurred within the university sector. The Executive Board Member accepted the comments made but emphasised that the current economic backdrop required the authority to look forward on how the service could/should be provided in the future and had established a Forum to consider that provision.

The Head of Leisure confirmed the purpose of the Forum was to evaluate the future course of outdoor education provision within the county and the debate by the Committee that day was part of the consultation process to help inform the decision making process. He referenced the impact of Covid on the private outdoor leisure provision sector, which could result in a number of facilities not re-opening, and that it was hoped the authority could continue to provide such facilities either on site at Pendine or by alternative means.

- In response to a question on whether improvement works to the centre could be undertaken while it was currently closed, the Executive Board Member advised that unfortunately, as the Council's capital programme was fully committed, there was no funding available at the present time. However, having regard to the Committee's discussion, one potential option to be considered could be a 3/5 year rolling redevelopment programme, which could be considered by the Forum.
- The Head of Leisure in response to a question on external financing via grants etc advised that whilst there were no direct external grants available, there may be an opportunity for the authority to access alternative grant sources available to other council departments such as social services or education for example. However, any such application would need to be considered against competing demands within those services. The Committee was assured that all potential sources of external funding were explored as the opportunities arose.

- With regard to the potential commercial use of the centre outside of school terms, the Head of Leisure confirmed there was potential in that option given Pendine's excellent location on the coast and that could be further explored with the opening of the Pendine Attractor Project. Similarly, options existed within other areas for the provision of outdoor leisure facilities such as providing climbing towers within town centre environments. It's for those reasons the Authority was examining the current single based unit for outdoor education provision and to be more flexible in its future provision

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. PENDINE ATTRACTOR PROJECT

The Committee received a powerpoint presentation on the development of the £6.7m Pendine attractor Project that including proposed delivery timelines, future governance options, high level financial forecasts, key actions and future communications.

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- It was confirmed the provision by the Pendine Community Council for 10 overnight parking bays for motorhomes did not include parking for touring caravans;
- With Regard to a question on the estimated additional £3.3m pa the development could generate for the local community, the Committee was advised that estimate was based on Visit Wales visitor calculations and related to three elements. The first was in respect of the fact each day visitor spent an average £23 per person and it was estimated the attraction could generate an additional 40,000 day visitors when fully operational. Secondly, overnight bed stay visitors spent on average £93 and an additional 6,500 bed night stays had been estimated. Thirdly, day visitors staying longer in the area would spend an additional £3-£5 p.p. on refreshments etc. Additionally, there was the wider tourism impact with a multiplier of 1.5 to 1 for every pound spent being re-circulated within the community.
- In response to a question on the potential for linking the attractor centre with the facilities at the Outdoor Education Centre, the Head of Leisure confirmed that option was being explored especially with regard to the busy summer months;
- Reference was made to the proposed Joint Management Arrangement with the Pendine Community Council. It was confirmed any surplus income generated by the centre would be ring-fenced for the regeneration of Pendine. If that Agreement were to cease, any surplus would be split between the County Council and the Community Council pro rata set against the level of investment by each party.
- Reference was made to the future management arrangements for the Hostel and to whether it would be possible for it to be utilised for other purposes, for example, educational by teaching people how to operate catering establishments.

The Head of Leisure confirmed that alternative uses for the centre had been

examined for example providing accommodation for the Outdoor Education Centre but that could almost then become an educational provision, which was a statutory function. Other potential uses included respite provision for social care and tourism etc. However, one of the issues with the centre's operation related to what the Council, as a local authority could do itself, or as part of a JMA with the community council, and legal clarification was currently being sought on that aspect.

With regard to the hostels' future management arrangements, discussions were on-going on that either being in-house or via a third party and the council would be undertaking a marketing exercise to test the level of interest. If the Council were to operate the hostel itself, the potential existed for both increased revenue and risk. If the 3rd party option was pursued, any agreement would need to include financial considerations such as profit share or rental arrangements. The Council would retain ownership of the asset, as landlord, and the operator being the tenants would have maintenance and operational responsibilities. Both options had been subject to financial modelling and were viable.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next scheduled meeting to be held on the 2nd February 2021.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items for the committee meeting scheduled to be held on the 2nd February 2021 be agreed.

9. EXPLANATION FOR NON SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORTS

The Committee considered the explanation provided for the non-submission of a scrutiny report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the non-submission report be received.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

10.1. 16TH JANUARY, 2020

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 16th January, 2020 be signed as a correct record.

10.2. 13TH NOVEMBER, 2020

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 13th November, 2020 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE