

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE  
REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 8TH  
SEPTEMBER, 2020**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

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PRESENT: Councillors G. A. Davies  
M. Day  
H. McCarthy  
J. Millard  
J. C. Morgan  
J. P. Morgan  
L. Parsons  
K. Rowson  
B. Willis

WITH: Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services  
Team Manager Development Plans  
Team Leader Thriving Communities  
Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities  
Business & Regeneration Manager  
Skills Development Manager – Aspire  
Residential Development Officer  
Marketing Projects Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p><b>No. 2</b></p>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from the Chief Officer Commercial.</p>	
<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p><b>No. 4</b></p>	<p><b><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></b></p> <p>It was agreed that future meetings of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee be held at 10.00 a.m.</p>	
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>To receive the minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2020.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 6</b></p>	<p><b><u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>To receive the minutes of the special Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2020.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 7</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET - 5TH MARCH 2020</u></b></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><i><u>Forward Work Programme (Energy Prospectus)</u></i></p> <p>A Member requested that a copy of the Energy Prospectus be circulated to all Members.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.</p>	

No. 8

**PROPOSED SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2020-21**

The proposed Scrutiny Forward Work Programme for 2020/21 was submitted for consideration.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the Town Centre Task & Finish Group, the Team Leader Regeneration Opportunities undertook to provide a briefing note to the Committee in relation to Town Centres and Welsh Government Transforming Towns Revenue.

A Member stressed the importance of flexibility within the Forward Work Programme to address issues as required.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted.

No. 9

**CARDIFF CAPITAL REGION AND WELSH GOVERNMENT ASPIRE ROLL OUT**

Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.

The Skills Development Manager Aspire presented the report which sought endorsement of the Committee for submission of a proposal to Cardiff Capital Region to roll out the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme, and to become the host Authority.

The report also sought endorsement for submission of a proposal to Welsh Government to merge the Aspire Blaenau Gwent and Aspire Merthyr Tydfil programmes from September 2021, aiming to retain funding for both LA's to work with the education sectors, aiming to facilitate apprenticeships within the manufacturing sector. Both proposals would work in parallel with each other under the same management structure, which would be cost effective for both funders.

The Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding section 6.2 of the report, the Officer confirmed that the expected outcome for over 300 apprentices would be across the Cardiff Capital Region, i.e. 10 Local Authorities.

A Member asked what opportunities were available for people when their apprenticeships came to an end.

The Officer explained that the Welsh Government programme was for 16+. Aspire engaged with many businesses and LA's across the region to identify skills gaps, and the statistics for Blaenau Gwent showed that most of our apprentices progressed into full-time employment. Apprenticeships commenced at Level 3, with opportunity to progress to HNC Level 4 or Degree Level 5. The main aim of the apprenticeship programme was meaningful employment at the end, and to successfully gain this via a learning pathway and training routes.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorsed the submission of two proposals, one to City Deal and the other to Welsh Government by the end of Summer 2020. Approval to provide a strategic context and clear focus to support a partnership and collaborative approach to implementing specific actions and associated Employment and Skills delivery (Option 1).

**No. 10**     **INTEGRATED RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT PILOT**

Consideration was given to report of the Services Manager Business & Regeneration.

The Business and Regeneration Manager presented the report which sought Members views on the scope of the Integrated Responsive Transport Pilot project, and approval for the project to progress in Blaenau Gwent.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. He said the project would pilot a new way of delivering bus services in Blaenau Gwent, working closely with the existing

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commercial service providers and plugging gaps within these services. The project would also work with Job Centre Plus to improve access to employment for those without access to a car. However, during times in the day when the demand for the IRT service was lower, the buses may be available for journeys for shopping trips or other community provision. There was also scope for the project to support provision for school transport where this was needed, as this would help support the viability of the project long term.

He confirmed that 2 buses would be procured as part of the project and would initially operate in the Ebbw Fach and Ebbw Fawr valleys. This pilot route was supported by transport data. As a result of Covid-19, what were once deemed commercially viable routes for operators were increasingly seen as 'un-commercial'. The precise timings and coverage of the service was still being determined in consultation with commercial and other operators.

A Member asked how the routes and areas for the pilot would be decided. He said the last bus in Brynithel was 5 p.m. which made travel for work very difficult, and he asked that this area be considered as part of the pilot.

In response the Officer confirmed that data relating to transport routes and demand was currently being examined. Challenges have been identified in the Ebbw Fach and Ebbw Fawr valleys, but there may be scope to adapt the pilot to other areas where demand was identified, in accordance with existing timetables and resources from existing operators; and also looking to make routes as flexible as possible for people travelling for work.

A Member said he welcomed the report and hoped the pilot proved a success.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding provision of a bus service to the new hospital at Llanfrechfa, the Officer said this was the intention. Work was being undertaken to gain a clear understanding of existing commercial routes in the short and

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medium term in order to shape the pilot project into that service directly or linking with another provider.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Council progress with the pilot project and introduce an Integrated Responsive Transport pilot to Blaenau Gwent (Option 1).

No. 11

**REPLACEMENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - REVISED DELIVERY AGREEMENT**

Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services.

The Team Manager Development Plans presented the report which sought approval for a Revised Delivery Agreement for preparing the replacement Local Development Plan, and a Covid-19 Assessment of the Plan's evidence base, strategies and policies.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. She said notification was received from Welsh Government on the 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 regarding the implications of COVID-19 on the preparation of LDPs, and stated that it was important not to progress plans that could be in conflict with legal requirements set out in the Community Involvement Scheme in their Delivery Agreements. Following discussions with WG, they confirmed that we should not proceed with the planned 2<sup>nd</sup> call for candidate sites.

The Officer said while work on the Plan has proceeded in terms of building up the evidence base and considering comments received at Preferred Strategy Stage, the loss of one Member of the team to COVID-19 related redeployment, and limits placed on site visits, certain work streams had been delayed.

Further correspondence from Welsh Government was received on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 reflecting on the impact of COVID on the community and the exacerbation of social, economic and environmental

inequalities. The Minister advised that our approach going forward must focus on addressing longstanding inequalities by taking a values based approach to recovery which promoted social economic and environmental justice, and the Minister identified the planning system as being central to shaping a better future for Wales and it was essential that all levels of Government ensure that plans, policies and procedures improve the wellbeing of our people and resilience of our environment.

The Minister also advised that LDPs currently undergoing review should undertake an assessment of the evidence, strategy and policies in terms of sensitivity to the consequences of the pandemic. A robust conclusion should be reached on the need for new evidence an any consequential changes to strategy and policy before progressing plan preparation. The Assessment was to be submitted to WG with requests to extend the Delivery Agreement.

A Member commended the Officer on the work undertaken, and agreed that extra time was needed to focus on the impact of COVID-19. He then referred to section 5.7 of Appendix 2 which referred to plans to close the Civic Centre and replace the site with housing, and asked when this decision had been taken.

In response the Officer explained that this proposal was already in the current Plan. The Civic Centre site formed part of the Northern Corridor and was one of our strategic sites identified for housing.

The Member then requested a Member Briefing Session on how the LDP linked in with the Regional Development Plan.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and supported the Revised Delivery Agreement and Covid-19 Assessment Report as outlined (Option 1).

No. 12

**STRATEGIC HOUSING; CCRCD VIABILITY GAP FUNDING**

Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Thriving Communities.

The Team Manager presented the report which outlined the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD) Viability Gap Fund opportunity, and identification of potential development sites. The report also sought Committee support to progress business case(s) and associated work in order to determine Viability Gap Funding and support an application to CCRCD.

The Officer spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. She said based on the eligibility criteria, the housing delivery group had considered known development sites and undertaken a broad assessment to identify those sites that, in principle, meet the fund requirements, and these were outlined in Appendix 2. The Ashvale Site was currently identified as the site most aligned to the criteria and in a position to progress.

She said utilising the available revenue fund would assist in providing a dedicated resource to support the project delivery team in satisfying the Viability Gap Fund requirements within the restricted timescales. To access funding, match funding would need to be identified and a meeting with the Resources Section had been arranged.

Members welcomed the report.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and supported Option 1, namely to:

- i. Note the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD) Viability Gap Fund opportunity; including the current position within Blaenau Gwent in respect of identifying potential development sites; and
- ii. Endorse and recommend Executive approval of continued exploration of the identified sites in order to determine the viability gap; and where appropriate progress business case(s) and associated work to support an application submission to CCRCD Viability Gap Fund.



No. 13

**LLANHILLETH PIT HEAD BATHS STUDY**

Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Business and Regeneration.

The Service Manager Business and Regeneration presented the report which provided a summary of the current position in relation to the options report, and sought approval on a proposed way forward.

The Officer spoke to the report and outlined the history of the site. He confirmed that the Council had recently commissioned an independent report (Appendix 1), funded by Welsh Government, to identify a future use for the site. The report assessed a number of options and identified that residential development was the most realistic and deliverable option taking into account potential sources of funding available, and the fact that this was a candidate site in the new LDP.

The Officer said if this approach was agreed, Officers would proceed with wider consultation with local residents and Members, and begin discussions with RSLs to identify potential development partners and other preparatory work to establish costs. The outcome of this work would allow a detailed business case to be developed and presented for consideration.

A discussion ensued when a Member said he welcomed the report, and asked who would be responsible for taking it forward.

The Officer confirmed that he would be the Lead Officer moving forward, working closely with other Officers across the Council.

A Member expressed concern regarding money being spent on

the building, and felt that more robust discussions should be held with the owner in the first instance.

Another Member concurred with the comments raised.

In response a Member said this had been ongoing for many years, and he welcomed the report, but asked that local Members be involved at every stage. In terms of the residential option, he pointed out that this had previously been explored with an RSL but proved cost prohibitive and was unpopular with constituents.

The Officer said the residential option was identified as the preferred option for potential funding opportunities. He said the site was challenging, and he was aware that it was an issue for local residents and Members. The approach outlined in the report would attempt to identify a viable use for the site, but would require a level of public sector intervention.

A Member said discussions should take place with the owner before anything was progressed.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services said this issue needed to be resolved. He understood the concerns of some Members but assured that all the issues raised would form part of the next stage and inform the future business case.

A further discussion ensued.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted, and supported the preferred Option 2 for the site to be redeveloped for residential use as outlined in the options report, and to develop a business case for the site for future consideration.