

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 2ND
DECEMBER, 2020**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HILL (CHAIR)

Councillors G. A. Davies (Vice-Chair)
M. Cook
P. Edwards
K. Hayden
W. Hodgins
H. McCarthy
J. C. Morgan
J. P. Morgan
L. Parsons
K. Rowson
B. Willis

WITH: Managing Director
Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services
Head of Regeneration & Development
Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities
Service Manager Business & Regeneration
Service Manager Development & Estates
Business Innovation Manager
Destination Management Officer
Marketing Projects Officer
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer/Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u>	

	It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were reported for Councillors G.L. Davies, D. Wilkshire, M. Cross.</p> <p>Councillor S. Healy also submitted apologies due to technical issues.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>Councillor L. Parsons declared an interest in Item No. 7 Destination Management Plan.</p> <p>Councillor W. Hodgins declared at interest in Item No. 8_Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Performance Review 2020/21 Quarter 1</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The minutes of the special Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 21st October, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET - 21ST OCTOBER 2020</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 21st October, 2020 was submitted.</p> <p><i><u>Forward Work Programme</u></i></p> <p>A Member said the report on the Business Improvement District had been requested as a matter of urgency, and expressed concern that the report would not be received until the New Year. He said a date when the report could be expected should have been provided.</p> <p>In response the Business Innovation Manager said the current priority was dealing with economic stimulus packages, however,</p>	

he confirmed that the report would be included in the Forward Work Programme and undertook to discuss with the BID's legal entity as to when an update on the business plan could be expected.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Action Sheet be noted.

No. 6 **TRANSPORT STRATEGY AND REVIEW TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

The report of the Service Manager Business & Regeneration was submitted consideration.

The Service Manager Business & Regeneration presented the report which sought endorsement and nominations to form a 'Transport Strategy and Review' Task and Finish Group.

He said transport needed to evolve to meet new challenges and adapt to changing demands, and in order to address these issues, a Strategy and Review was currently being procured to identify a programme of work that would provide a strategic vision and plan for transport within Blaenau Gwent. Given the breadth of issues which need to be looked at as part of the Review and Strategy, there was a clear need for Member representation to support the work and oversee its development and implementation via a Task and Finish Group.

A Member asked what arrangements had been put in place to provide public transport to the new Grange Hospital.

The Officer said in terms of transport available there was already an existing transport route to the Grange and working closely with colleagues in Health Board to identify a specific need and demand. Those discussions ongoing to make sure adequate provision to allow people to access the hospital.

The Member said this needed to be monitored, and said the public transport system had been decimated as a result of the pandemic.

The Officer said the pandemic had had a significant impact on the commercial viability of a number of routes. Part of the IRT pilot project was to identify and plug those gaps in services, in particular looking at areas that are particularly isolated and linking those areas into the network both in terms of bus and rail.

Councillor J.C. Morgan said he would like to sit on the Task and Finish, and said it was important for all areas of the Borough to be represented. In relation to comments regarding transport to the new Grange Hospital, he said this should be considered as part of the work of the IRT, and should also be an area for consideration by the Task and Finish Group.

In response the Officer said the IRT was a flexible service, and we need to be mindful that it was a pilot project, the idea of which was to act as a service where there were gaps and to link them into the core provision. He said it would evolve as a project, but it was important that dialogue continued with existing operators.

The Member said he understood it was a pilot project, but it was also an opportunity to ensure adequate service provision to the new Grange Hospital and also Nevill Hall, as these Hospitals were very important to Blaenau Gwent, and should be included as part of the work of the Task and Finish Group.

A Member referred to the proposed frequency of meetings of the Group, and said quarterly meetings was not sufficient. He also said the public should be informed that a Group had been established to look at public transport as this was a major concern within the community.

The Officer said he would be guided by Members as to the frequency of meetings.

A Member referred to section 2.3 of the report and asked whether there would be any support available for taxis in the move towards the use of ultra low emission vehicles, like the WG Emergency Bus

Scheme. He also asked why the Council had set aside £25k to undertake this work when it was a Welsh Government initiative.

In relation to taxis, the Officer confirmed that they were a key part of the development of a strategic and integrated transport service. There were support programmes available through Welsh Government and he confirmed that the Business Innovation Manager and his Team was working with taxis to support, and continued to lobby WG for support for that sector.

In terms of funding as this was a County Borough wide study it was not eligible for funding through the Local Transport Fund. He said the £25k allocated was an existing budget, and whilst the Regional Transport Policy was being developed there was a need for the Local Authority to look at what was needed in the area, to allow linkage on a more regional level.

The Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities confirmed work was being done to support taxis in the short term, but also the Capital Region had received funding to look at longer term support, particularly in the transition to low emission vehicles.

A Member said the Council should also maximise its opportunities through the South Wales Metro. He said Blaenau Gwent was on the edge of the capital city region, but expressed concern regarding the links along the Valleys to the Industrial Estates, and said this should also be included within the scope of the work of the Task and Finish Group.

The Service Manager Business & Regeneration confirmed that the South Wales Metro was included in the bullets points at section 2.6 of the report, and said the purpose of the strategy was to look at various elements and bring those together in a cohesive document. He confirmed that the works along the A465 would form part of the work of the Task and Finish Group and input from local Members would ensure coverage across the Borough. He also pointed out that as part of the IRT, the Council was working closely with BID on the provision of services to the Rassau

Industrial Estate to allow people to travel there.

A Member referred to the recent announcement from WG that the M4 relief road scheme was not going ahead, and the implications of that decision, and asked whether the proposals for the Ebbw Fawr Railway was still ongoing.

The Officer confirmed that a series of packages had been included within the WG Burns Commission to address issues arising from the M4 project not being progressed. In terms of the Abertillery link, he confirmed that the Council was working closely with Transport for Wales to take that forward, and was currently in the process of commissioning work to identify the works needed to realise that as a key project.

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services said this was a key piece of work in identifying the needs and priorities for transport within the County Borough, and also in terms of regional needs.

A discussion ensued regarding membership of the Task and Finish Group.

It was proposed that membership of the Task and Finish Group be extended beyond the proposed 5 Members.

The proposal was agreed by the Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and a Task and Finish Group be established and the following Members be nominated to sit on the Group (Option 1):

Councillors J. Hill, G.A. Davies, M. Cook, H. McCarthy, P. Edwards, J.C. Morgan, W. Hodgins and J.P. Morgan

No. 7

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Consideration was given to report of the Destination Management Officer.

Councillor L. Parsons declared an interest in this matter.

The Destination Management Officer presented the report which provided a summary of the Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan, which was a strategic document setting out the priorities for tourism development in Blaenau Gwent over the period 2020-2025, and which complemented the new Visit Wales Tourism Action Plan over the same period. The aim of the Plan was to ensure that people, businesses and organisations work together in a coordinated way to deliver agreed targets and priorities for investment.

The Plan identified six cross cutting themes and five main themes and priority areas, and these were highlighted at section 2.3 of the report. The Plan and associated Action Plan have taken account of national, strategic and local trends and priorities, and has been developed by the Destination Partnership which included representatives from the private, public and third sectors.

A Member said there seemed to be a lack of information leaflets promoting Blaenau Gwent available in other tourist areas, and asked whether there were plans to address this moving forward, and also more information for the local community.

The Officer said there were a number of leaflets available, however, due to the Covid pandemic establishments were reluctant to stock them. However, some postal deliveries of leaflets had been undertaken, and information on local walks etc. was available on the Blaenau Gwent website. The Officer confirmed that an electronic version of the Blaenau Gwent Destination Guide was currently in the process of being upgraded, and once completed would be circulated. She undertook to e.mail a copy of last year's Guide to Members for information.

A Member commended the work of the Team, but felt that the Communications Section could be more proactive in promoting the

work of the Team.

In response the Officer said most of the communications for the Team was done through Southern Wales, and hopefully in due course when restrictions are lifted, promotion of tourism within Blaenau Gwent would continue.

A Member said he was disappointed with a number of areas within the report, namely:

- The reference to 'good transport links', in light of the fact that the Scrutiny Committee had agreed to develop a Task and Finish Group to look at transport provision within the Borough.
- Page 38 'expanded locations and installed public counters', he enquired as to the location of the counters.
- Reference to local events, he questioned why the Remembrance Parade was included as this was an annual event, but other key events that regularly took place had been omitted.
- P.39 where it referred to a new Ebbw Vale Business Group, and said he was not aware of this Group.
- Accommodation within the Borough and whether they were subject to regular checks.
- The condition of the Cholera Cemetery at Cefn Golau, and lack of signage and information.
- Whether the proposed information boards on walkways had been installed.

The Officer responded was follows:

- Extra counters had been installed on walking routes and managed and maintained by the Countryside Section.
- Transport provision – the dualling of the Heads of the Valleys road, the X4 Bus Service and development of the train network were considered beneficial to bringing visitors to Blaenau Gwent.
- The Ebbw Vale Town Centre Group - at the time of the

report being prepared, the Officer was working with the Group on a number of ideas, but the Group had since disbanded.

- Accommodation establishments were graded by Visit Wales and all proprietors were encouraged to register with them, and those serving food were checked by Environmental Health.
- The events section referred to the posters that were prepared by the Team, and whilst the Remembrance Events were not considered a tourist attraction the Officer had a duty to provide information to the local community as well as visitors.
- The Cholera Cemetery was the last remaining in Wales and was a listed structure. There were brown signs directing to the site, and information provided. Security fencing was in place, and also links to Tredegar Museum.
- The provision of information boards on walkways was not under the remit of the Team, but the Officer confirmed that some had been installed on the Ebbw Fawr Trail and Parc Bryn Bach this year.

In relation to the Member's concern regarding public counters, the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities explained that this was part of the work of the Town Centre Task & Finish Group. The previous footfall counters in our Town Centres were unreliable in terms of data, but also a number of shops had closed since they had been installed. However, a new contract had been procured to look at alternative locations for the counters, and discussions were ongoing with the Company and the Council's Streetlighting Section to consider installation on streetlighting columns.

Another Member referred to the Action Plan, particularly culture and heritage, and referred to the Blue Plaque initiative that was developed a number of years previous to commemorate influential figures from Blaenau Gwent. He said the project was successful at the time, and suggested that the Committee consider reinstating this initiative.

In response the Destination Management Officer agreed that it was successful, and the concept of the project was in some ways being taken forward by the Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum. The Officer said she would be happy to liaise with the Forum on this matter, however, funding was crucial and the necessary applications to secure funding would need to be progressed.

The Member also referred to the report of the Audit of Commemoration Task and Finish Group which was published on the 26th November, 2020, and asked whether a report on the appropriateness of street names could be considered.

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services confirmed that a review had been undertaken a report would be submitted in due course.

Another Member also expressed concern with the report and felt it needed to be fluid to take advantage of opportunities that may arise. He said the report lacked attention in a number of areas, e.g. the fact that Blaenau Gwent was a gateway to the Brecon Beacons; greater reference to the steel industry in Ebbw Vale; links to the Chartist movement; and the NHS project and the links to the Tredegar Medical Aid Society.

He also referred to the Action Plan and pointed out that the lead for the majority of the activities was the Council. He said the Team lacked the resources necessary, and felt that greater emphasis should be placed on partner organisations, and he referred to the NHS Project as an excellent example of working with partners, particularly Coalfields Regeneration and Cymru Creation, and expressed concern that they had been omitted from the report.

In response the Officer said the Action Plan did state other stakeholders, but undertook to include Coalfields Regeneration and other partners. In relation to the NHS Project, she confirmed that feedback on the report was available in Bedwellty House some time ago, and 10 The Circle was one of the elements featured. The Officer had supplied reports and imagery to

Coalfields Regeneration for use in their interpretation planning and development, and the report would be submitted to Scrutiny in due course as part of the Forward Work Programme.

In response to a further question from a Member regarding the provision of a dedicated Blaenau Gwent tourism website, the Officer explained that it was Council policy to not have external free standing websites. All information relating to tourism was available on the Blaenau Gwent website.

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services said listening Members comments, he suggested that the report be reconsidered to provide clarity in terms of the Council's work and that of partners, and also make a strategic link in the areas raised by Members.

The Committee AGREED that the report be **DEFERRED**.

No. 8 **CARDIFF CAPITAL REGION CITY DEAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2020/21 QUARTER 1**

Consideration was given to report of the Managing Director and Head of Regeneration.

The Head of Regeneration presented the report which provided the performance information of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD) during 2020/21 Quarter 1. The report summarised and highlighted key programmes of work the Council was engaged in and was of interest to Blaenau Gwent, and these were highlighted at section 2.2 of the report. The Officer then went through the report and highlighted progress made against some of the key projects.

A Member referred to page 59 of the report, namely the proposed 51% reduction in domestic heating and power, and asked how this would be achieved and whether the costs would fall to the homeowner and Registered Social Landlords.

The Officer said she did not have the details on this, however, she

was aware that work had been undertaken on the Welsh Quality Housing Standards over the last 10 years, and RSL's had been tasked with reducing domestic heat and power. Welsh Government was pushing this agenda, and she confirmed that discussions would take place with partners in terms of resulting issues and funding. She also reported that sustainability funding had recently been secured for some of the Council's industrial properties.

The Member expressed concern that many of the houses within Blaenau Gwent were old and that the cost of the measures required to be taken would likely fall to the homeowner. In relation to new housing he asked whether the provision of energy saving initiatives like solar panels etc. could become a planning requirement.

The Officer said the current housing standards for new builds ensured significantly reduced heat loss. Reducing power emissions would be more difficult in the future, however, there were new building regulations emerging requiring sustainable energy in developments.

In response to a further question regarding the proposed availability of land for tree planting, the Officer said she was unaware of any regional proposals, however, work was being done locally with RSL's and the Environment Section.

The Service Manager Development & Estates explained that developers were encouraged to incorporate sustainable homes during pre-application enquiries, and the main issue emerging is that this would be captured by buildings regulations which would provide a far better framework to push this agenda.

In relation to tree planting, the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities referred to the Welsh Government Plant Cymru initiative launched a number of years ago, and said she would be happy to revisit any funding opportunities via this scheme.

A Member referred to the Metro Plus and said he felt that without the link to Newport, the proposed 4 trains per hour into Blaenau Gwent from Cardiff would be excessive, and said the Council should be actively pushing the link to Newport. He also said there should be links to the Heads of the Valleys, particularly industrial estates, and questioned how the Abertillery link would bring economic benefits with 2 trains to Ebbw Vale and 2 to Abertillery.

The Member also referred to the Housing Catalyst Fund, and a previous report highlighting a number of sites, and expressed disappointment that none of those sites had met the criteria for funding, and questioned the viability of these sites being delivered in the future without this funding.

The Member expressed concern that the Sirhowy River had not been included in the proposals for hydro power; and that there was no mention of 5G connectivity in the report.

In relation to the Member's comments regarding the train links, the Officer said in terms of what we want internally within Blaenau Gwent, more in depth discussions were needed to push this through strategically. However, as far as our work with Transport for Wales was concerned, the work on the lines had likely gone as far as could be expected. In relation to the Newport link, the Officer confirmed that this was still being pursued and Transport for Wales was considering options as to how this could be delivered.

In relation to the Housing Catalyst Fund, the Officer explained that this particular site met the criteria and the timescales for submission of funding. However, she confirmed that alternative funding was being explored for the other sites referred to by the Member.

The Officer explained that the hydro power project was in conjunction with Natural Resources Wales, and the 5G project was stopped due to the fact that only 5 LA's had expressed an interest.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the Western Gateway, and the Officer said it was important to the Council to take any opportunity available through the Western Gateway, but to also formulate its own opportunities through the HoV and connections to the Midlands, and work was being done in terms of business engagement. She said she was pleased that Welsh Government had put out its Manufacturing Plan for consultation as this was key for the Valleys.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and considered the overall progress and made comments on progress before the report goes to Council (Option 2).

No. 9

ENERGY PROSPECTUS ANNUAL REVIEW

Consideration was given to report of the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities.

Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities presented the report which provided an update on the Energy Prospectus and the activities carried out since its approval in 2019. An annual review report which contained highlights for each of the Projects identified within the Energy Prospectus was attached at Appendix 1, and the Officer went through the report and highlighted points contained therein.

A Member referred to the District Energy Network and asked whether there was any potential for this within domestic dwellings.

The Team Manager said the cost of connection on The Works site was difficult, however, there was potential for future projects to link into domestic dwellings and all those aspects were included within the Smart Living Programme.

The Member also referred to the low emission fleet, and a timeframe when the smaller electric powered Council vehicles could be expected.

In response the Officer said she was not aware on the exact timescales, but the Team was quite keen to get this progressed, and she understood that proposals were coming forward quite quickly.

A Member commended the report, particularly news of the hydro power project.

Another Member also referred to the District Energy Network and enquired as to the heat loss at the General Offices.

The Officer said there was work that could be undertaken to understand the level of heat loss in the building, however, the measures that could be taken to reduce heat loss was restricted as it was a listed building.

The Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services explained that the General Offices was refurbished to the lowest energy loss standards for a listed building, so in terms of the fabric of the building there was little else that could be done. He said at the time he was disappointed that CADW refused permission to allow the windows and doors to be changed, but as far as energy and heat loss the building was quite efficient.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Scrutiny Committee:

- Continue to support, promote and develop projects within the Energy Prospectus, and to ensure that the document be updated to reflect any additional projects that have emerged; and
- To also continue to identify future projects that would also meet the vision and objectives of the Council with respect to energy and decarbonisation (Option 2).

No. 10

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 6TH JANUARY 2021

The Forward Work Programme for the meeting scheduled to be held on 6th January, 2021 was submitted.

The Chair reported that the Chair's update of the Joint CCCRD Scrutiny Committee would be deferred.

The following additional reports were requested by Members:

A breakdown of money spent on consultancy fees across the Portfolio during the last 2 years.

Tech Valley progress update.

A Member proposed that the report on the Turkish glass factory visit be an agenda item instead of an information pack item.

A brief discussion ensued and upon a vote being taken it was agreed that the report on the Turkish glass factory visit would remain as an Information Pack item.

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