

REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

8 December 2017

Chairperson: Councillor S.K.Hunt

Vice Chairperson: Councillor L.Jones

Councillors: D.Cawsey, S.Pursey, A.J.Richards, R.L.Taylor,
O.S.Davies and R.W.Wood

Officers In Attendance S.Brennan, C.Morris, Mrs. S.Griffiths, Miss.
T.Davies and J. Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors D.W.Davies and A.Wingrave

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

The following Members made Declarations of Interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Cllr. S.K. Hunt – The private report of the Head of Property and Regeneration on the land at Empire Avenue, Blaengwrach, Neath due to the Member's involvement on the planning committee that passed the planning application on the use of the land.

Cllr. S.Pursey – The private report of the Head of Property and Regeneration on the land at Empire Avenue, Blaengwrach, Neath due to the Member's involvement on the planning committee that passed the planning application on the use of the land.

2. **MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 27TH OCTOBER 2017**

Members noted the minutes.

3. **MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 19TH OCTOBER 2017**

Members noted the minutes.

4. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.**

Members noted the forward work programme.

5. **TASK AND FINISH REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR TOURISM - PROGRESS REPORT**

The former Chair of the Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Alun Llewelyn presented the progress report to the Committee on the task and finish review which looked at support for tourism in the county borough. Councillor Llewelyn reported that tourism had contributed £110m to the local economy, attracted 1,530,000 visitors and supported 1,583 jobs in Neath Port Talbot in 2015. Councillor Llewelyn reminded Members that Neath Port Talbot had several major attractions such as Margam Country Park, Afan Forest Park, Aberavon Seafront and Waterfall Country.

Councillor Llewelyn informed Members that Visit Wales, Neath Inspired, Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages, Neath and Tennant Canal Trust, and Tourism Swansea Bay Trade Association participated in the review by attending the task and finish meetings and contributing to discussions. Councillor Llewelyn added that a public online survey was set up and responses were received from local businesses and elected politicians.

Councillor Llewelyn reported that the review highlighted significant consequences following the dissolution of the tourism team. Councillor Llewelyn informed Members that although the Economic Development Department had now taken responsibility for the Destination Management Plan (DMP), funding provided by Visit Wales was prioritised for Councils with dedicated teams to take forward initiatives. Councillor Llewelyn added that funding secured by the authority for tourism had significantly reduced as a result.

Councillor Llewelyn stated that the review had found that other authorities had made significant progress with regard to tourism while Neath Port Talbot had fallen behind. Councillor Llewelyn continued by stating that the review had also found that the authority was not maximising the number of potential visitors to the area, and this was

impacting on local businesses. Councillor Llewelyn informed Members that there had been a reduction in the number of new businesses starting up in the tourism sector within the county borough, and that one of the functions of the former tourism team was to assist businesses in completing applications for funding and to provide advice on how to market their businesses. Councillor Llewelyn explained that the tourism industry in the county borough was not achieving its full potential, which reduced the opportunities to diversify the local economy further and create jobs.

Councillor Llewelyn reported that following the conclusion of the review the task and finish group made four recommendations. Councillor Llewelyn informed Members that recommendation one was to identify a dedicated resource to drive forward tourism, recommendation two was to ensure that the DMP was considered on a regular basis by the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee to monitor progress and the completion of actions, recommendation three was for an All Member Seminar to be arranged to highlight the findings from the review and to stress the importance of the tourism sector, and recommendation four was for a letter to be sent to St. Modwens to enquire what they believe their responsibility was with regard to the maintenance of Neath Canal and the importance of continued maintenance.

Officers commented that recent statistics for 2017 indicated that there had been a 3.9% drop in visitors to the borough, and only two local authorities in Wales had seen such a decrease. Officers added that it was a worrying trend. Gerwyn Evans from Visit Wales stated that the recent statistics for Neath Port Talbot were disappointing, particularly as the tourism industry in Wales was currently thriving. Gerwyn Evans stated that it was difficult for Visit Wales to work with local authorities with no resources dedicated to tourism. Gerwyn Evans added that neighbouring authorities such as Bridgend County Borough Council and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council had dedicated resources and were making good progress with partnership support from Visit Wales.

Gerwyn Evans informed Members that Visit Wales provides support to small businesses, but could not support all businesses without the assistance of the local authorities who provide a vital link. Gerwyn Evans stated that there had been some positive partnership working between Neath Port Talbot and Visit Wales recently since the Council had created a post dedicated to tourism with support from the Economic Development Department. Gerwyn Evans added that the authority had received a grant of £108k from Visit Wales for changing

rooms for the Afan Fforest site and Margam Park all weather car park. Gerwyn Evans acknowledged the good work that the Council had undertaken with the Valleys Task and Finish Group and the restoration of work on Neath Castle, and stated that there would be opportunities to regenerate Aberavon Seafront.

Members acknowledged the good work carried out by the Business Services Team based within in the Economic Development Department.

In relation to the first recommendation, Councillors queried where the money would come from to fund two tourism posts. Officers stated that it would be a matter for the Director of Finance to determine. Officers stated that it was unsustainable in the long term to continue with only one dedicated post. Councillor Llewelyn added that having a small dedicated team for tourism would attract more funding and grants as it did previously, and would contribute towards the cost of projects that the authority was currently funding out of its core budget. Councillor Llewelyn stated that it was potentially difficult to afford the cost of a small tourism team, but the Council could not afford to be without one. Councillor Llewelyn explained that the Council may need to speculate to accumulate, and that a small tourism team could potentially pay for itself eventually. Councillor Llewelyn reiterated that the review did not recommend re-instating the full original tourism team.

Councillor Llewelyn informed Members that the report was supported by the Committee in January and referred to Cabinet for decision. Councillor Llewelyn queried whether there had been any further developments. Cabinet Members acknowledged the importance of the tourism industry within the county borough, and informed the committee that discussions were ongoing.

Members queried the creation of a recent post to promote the Princess Royal Theatre and Margam Park. Members questioned whether a post working in isolation from the tourism team was a practical approach. Officers stated that an alternative approach would have been to pool all relevant resources into one central team; however the risk with pooling resources is that it is difficult to maintain focus on one or two priorities at a time. Officers informed Members that the current lead officer for tourism had 15 months left on their contract, and that there was a risk of losing valuable expertise if the contract was not renewed soon.

Following scrutiny it was agreed by the Committee that the progress made in implementing the recommendations in the review be noted.

6. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

6.1 Biodiversity Duty Plan

The Committee received information in relation to the Biodiversity Duty Plan as contained within the circulated report. Following scrutiny the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

6.2 Quarter 2 Performance Indicators 2017/18

Members received information in relation to the Quarter Two Performance Indicators for 2017/18 as contained within the circulated report. Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

7. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS**

RESOLVED: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

8. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

8.1 Proposed acquisition of the former Crown Foods, Carnaud Metal Box

The Committee received information in relation to the proposed acquisition of the former Crown Foods site as contained within the circulated report.

Officers reported that the purchase of the former Crown Foods was an investment opportunity where by the Council could offer floor space to companies (particularly those wishing to expand) which would result in the creation of jobs, and generate new potential income streams for the Council. Officers informed Members that the purchase of the premises would contribute towards the Valleys Task and Finish objectives as the jobs created would offer employment to citizens from the valleys who would not have far to travel.

Members queried whether there were any asbestos risks in the building, and if so, would the Council be responsible for removing it. Officers informed Members that the authority had worked closely with the previous owners of the premises before they ceased to trade, and they were very co-operative and compliant. Officers stated that the information available to date confirmed that the company had dealt with the asbestos in line with regulations. Officers added what would happen to the asbestos within the building would depend on the proposals of the prospective occupiers as they may wish to physically alter the existing building.

Members questioned whether there were any risks around residual chemicals or lead paint in the ground. Officers stated that there was contamination as would be expected in a building of this type and age, but from the information available it was a manageable risk.

Members questioned whether work had been carried out to protect the building from flood risk following severe flooding at the premises in 1977. Officers stated that there had been no flooding at the premises since 1987, and there was now a sump pump in the basement. Officers added that the culverts were cleared in 2001. Officers assured Members that work had been carried out to mitigate the risk of flooding.

Members queried whether the Council would be exposed to any financial risk in terms of renovation works required to the building to make it suitable for alternative use. Officers stated that they did not anticipate that the authority would bear the costs for any renovation works, these costs would be met by businesses renting the building.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

8.2 Neath Town Centre Redevelopment - Update

Members received information in relation to the Neath Town Centre Redevelopment as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried whether it was possible for the Council to stipulate in the contracts with the retailers that any branding or signage inside and outside the stores were required to be displayed in Welsh also. Officers informed Members that some retailers operated nationally and could be deterred by the requirement to incorporate the Welsh language into their branding and external signage although they would be encouraged to use bilingual signage.

Members queried whether the units would be constructed with the flexibility to convert a number of units into one if required in the future. Officers stated that the flexibility would be built in to allow the potential conversion of two of the units into one and a mezzanine option would also be included for one unit.

Following scrutiny, Members were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

8.3 Civic Maintenance

Members received information in relation to Civic Maintenance as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried whether there was a significant cost saving when the contract was originally outsourced. Officers stated that they were not involved at that time and did not have the relevant information to hand. Officers informed Members that in the past 10 years the Building Services Department had improved their operations particularly since integrating with technology. Officers stated that the Building Services Department were responsible for maintaining the schools and other Council buildings, and were often able to prolong the life of equipment that other companies would have replaced at a significant cost to the authority.

Members queried whether the Building Services Department were able to fulfil their contractual obligations with existing staff levels or would they need to employ additional staff. Officers

informed Members that existing staffing levels in addition to any TUPE staff would be adequate to deal with the additional workload.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

CHAIRPERSON