

REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

26 January 2018

Chairperson: Councillor S.K.Hunt

Vice Chairperson: Councillor L.Jones

Councillors: J.Evans, C.J.Jones, D.M.Peters, S.Pursey,
S.Rahaman, R.L.Taylor, O.S.Davies,
R.W.Wood and H.Jones

Officers In Attendance S.Brennan, C.Morris, M. Thomas and J. Davies

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

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

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

Cllr. Leanne Jones – The report of the Head of Planning and Public Protection on Environmental Health and Trading Standards Business Advice, because family members are employed in the Environmental Health and Trading Standards section.

Cllr. Saifur Rahaman - The report of the Head of Planning and Public Protection on Environmental Health and Trading Standards Business Advice, and the report of the Head of Property and Regeneration on Aberavon Seafront Regeneration Update, because family members run a catering business on the Aberavon Seafront.

Cllr. Rachel Taylor – The report of the Head of Property and Regeneration on the Property Performance Report, because she is a trustee of Taibach Library.

Cllr. Sean Pursey – The report of the Head of Property and Regeneration on the Property Performance Report, because he is a trustee of Taibach Library and a member of the Plaza Community Group.

2. **MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 8TH DECEMBER 2017**

Members noted the minutes from the previous meeting.

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

Members noted the scrutiny forward programme for 2017/18.

4. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

4.1 2 x Supplementary Planning Guidance

The Committee received information in relation to the 2 x Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) as contained within the circulated report.

Members raised concerns that the Compensation Scheme set out in the Biodiversity and Geodiversity SPG made the planning process potentially more bureaucratic and less democratic, limiting the input from local Members and communities. Officers informed Members that the purpose of the Local Development Plan (LDP) policy was to protect important habitats, species and sites of geological interest from the adverse impacts of developments. Officers explained that where harm was unavoidable, effective on-site mitigation measures would be required and only as a last resort, where mitigation was not possible, would off-site compensation be considered. Officers stated that given it was difficult for some developers to find additional land for off-site compensation and that many developers would rather pay the Council for compensation to be addressed, the scheme sought to set out the steps that the Council can take to provide a workable compensation service.

Members queried whether there was a comprehensive list of 'Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation' (SINCs) in the county borough. Officers stated that the process of identifying SINCs was ongoing. Officers added that the areas which were likely to generate interest from developers had already been looked at, but the more remote areas were still being assessed.

Members queried whether designated sites (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest) would remain protected under the SPGs. Officers stated that designated sites of European and national importance are already protected by legislation and national policy, whereas the LDP policy and SPGs related more to protecting sites of local interest.

Members queried the extent of the 'undeveloped coast' designation set out in the Landscape and Seascape SPG, as it appeared to include an area of the former BP site. Officers confirmed that this was a drafting error and that the LDP designation did not include land that was formerly part of the BP site. The error would be addressed prior to consultation. Members questioned if it was possible to extend the undeveloped coast designation. Officers stated that whilst it was not possible at this stage, all policies would be reconsidered when the review of the LDP commences in 2020.

Members referred to the 'green wedge' designations and queried whether they would still be subject to the same protection once the current LDP had expired. Officers stated that the relevance and extent of the green wedge designations would be considered in all future reviews of the LDP which would take place every four years.

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

4.2 Environmental Health and Trading Standards Business Advice

The Committee received information in relation to the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Business Advice as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried how much income would the charge for business advice be likely to generate. Officers stated that it was difficult to anticipate as it was unclear how demand for the service would be affected.

Members raised concerns that businesses may be reluctant to pay for advice which could result in a decline in food safety standards and an increase in court action against non-compliant businesses. Officers informed Members that general advice would still be available free of charge and a starter pack would be e-mailed to all new businesses on request. Officers assured Members that public safety was paramount and the process whereby Environmental Health Officers and Trading Standards Officers inspect businesses would not be affected. Officers explained that businesses would only be charged for bespoke advice and general advice would still be provided. Officers stated that the effects of charging for business advice was likely to have a minimal impact on food safety, because any decline in the demand for bespoke advice would enable resources to be used to inspect other food businesses.

Members commented that Neath Port Talbot had a low Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and questioned whether this has been taken into account as it could deter businesses from paying for advice. Officers stated that the GDP had not been considered, but the new approach would be monitored and reviewed. Officers explained that providing bespoke advice specific to a particular business was a non-statutory function and other Authorities were already offering this service for a fee.

Members raised concerns that if businesses did not seek advice from the Authority at an early stage due to the cost, then there was a risk to public safety in the interim until businesses received their first inspection. Officers stated that general advice would still be provided to businesses and it is the responsibility of businesses to comply with the standards applicable to their business. Officers added that the Environmental Health and Trading Standards department aimed to inspect new food businesses at an early stage.

Cabinet Members commented that businesses had to register with the Authority before they could become operational, which minimised the risk to public safety. Cabinet Members explained that the advice provided by the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Department was to help businesses improve their standards further. Cabinet Members stated that the advice currently offered had a cost element which was difficult to justify in the current financial climate. Cabinet Members added that neighbouring authorities had already introduced the charge.

Following scrutiny the majority of the Committee were supportive of the proposal to be considered at Cabinet Board.

4.3 Aberavon Seafront Regeneration - Update

The Committee received information in relation to the Aberavon Seafront Development Update.

Members acknowledged the improvements made to the Aberavon Seafront to date. Members queried whether it was possible to use the parcel of land indicated in the update as an additional area for car parking. Officers explained that the seafront already had sufficient parking facilities.

Members queried whether it was possible to explore the option of accommodating motor homes and caravans along the seafront, as other authorities were successfully generating income in this way. Officers stated that there were no plans to accommodate motor homes and caravans at this moment in time. Officers informed Members that motor homes and caravans would require significant space and this would cause parking issues on the seafront with the current road layout. Officers explained that staff would need to be employed to ensure that guests complied with onsite rules and conditions which would incur additional costs for the Authority.

Following scrutiny the Committee noted the Aberavon Seafront Development Update.

Item 4.4 – Property Performance Report

The Committee received information in relation to Property Performance Report.

Members queried whether Briton Ferry Library House and the units at Cwmgors Village Workshops were currently occupied or available to let. Officers stated that the cost of restoring Briton Ferry Library House to a functioning building was too high. Officers reported that a number of Registered Social Landlords had been contacted to discuss the possibility of taking over the building, but there was a lack of interest. Officers reported that all units at Glyncorrwg Workshops were currently occupied, and that occupation levels at Cwmgors Workshops were around 80%. Officers informed Members that the units in Cwmgors were old and basic, but were still functional.

Members enquired whether any of the workshop units in the county borough were at risk of falling into disrepair in the near future. Officers stated that the Authority should be able to maintain the units for the foreseeable future; however any mechanical and electrical failures would present significant issues. Officers informed Members that purchasing new units in the valleys areas would be the ideal scenario and there was a good business case for this as the units were at full capacity the majority of the time.

Members queried whether there were any plans to utilise the former Dyffryn Lower Comprehensive School. Officers stated that there were no plans at present.

Members queried if there were any updates regarding the possibility of a caravan site at Margam Park. Officers stated that discussions were still ongoing. Officers informed Members that an enquiry had been received from a developer who was interested in setting up a hotel near the Twyn Y Hydd site of Margam Park. Officers reported that the drainage work had already been undertaken to accommodate either development.

Following scrutiny the Committee noted the Property Performance Report.

CHAIRPERSON