



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

30th June 2021

Joint Report of the Head of Engineering and Transport
Mr D W Griffiths and the
Head Property and Regeneration
Mr S Brennan

Matter for Decision

Ward Affected: Cymmer

SWANSEA BAY UNIVERSITY HEALTH BOARD AND NEATH PORT
TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL JOINT WORKING PAPER
ON THE UPPER AFAN VALLEY

Purpose of Report:

There are currently two separate but linked issues that will impact on the residents in the Upper Afan Valley within the next 5 year period. As detailed below, there is an urgent need to address issues with the highway infrastructure whilst there is also an ongoing assessment of the facilities available to deliver appropriate healthcare within the area. Plans are included in Appendix A & B showing the strategic overview and location.

Executive Summary:

This paper will examine the links between the two pieces of work and assess the benefits for the residents of the Upper Afan Valley, Swansea Bay University Health Board (SBUHB) and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC) in delivering a coordinated, timely and cost effective approach to the two issues

The existing GP Practice in Cymmer is a SBUHB Managed Practice (Cymmer Health Centre) and although meeting operational standards, does not meet the standards and accommodation requirements of modern health care.

An estates solution for the Upper Afan Valley has been identified as a priority within the Primary Care Estates Strategy priority schemes 2019. This scheme development will require a full options and site locations appraisal and full business case submission to Welsh Government

The options will include a new build option, on a yet to be identified site in the Upper Afan Valley, or the adaptation of an existing facility in the area that is not currently used for the delivery of healthcare services.

In addition to SBUHB estates concerns at Cymmer, Neath Port CBC has identified constraints on the highway with three structures needing to be strengthened. Cymmer viaduct **shown in the photographs in Appendix C**, is a grade II listed structure that spans the River Afan. It provides the only suitable access to the communities of Abercregan and Glyncoirwg for heavy vehicles, buses and emergency vehicles. The viaduct is currently restricted to an 18 tonne weight limit with traffic controlled by traffic signals to restrict the road to one-way working. Ongoing deterioration of the viaduct means that without extensive maintenance it will have to be closed to heavy vehicular traffic preventing HGV's, emergency vehicles and public transport vehicles from serving the communities. Owing to the severity of the deterioration, the structure cannot be repaired.

Timeline

RELOCATION OF HEALTH CENTRE			
Activities	Indicative Timeline		Comments / Risks
	New build property	Refurbishment of alternative accommodation	
Framework option/location appraisal	1 Month	1 Month	Agree brief and technical solution. Unable to progress this without initial patient engagement to inform

			options appraisal and site search.
HB paper - approve way forward/fees	1 Month	1 Month	Risk/Design Fees (at risk) not approved
Appoint design team			
Estimated design & full planning application approval (if new build) or change of use planning permission (if refurb.)	7 Months	3 Months	
Tender	3 months	2 months	Procurement/timeline risk
Complete fully tendered business case	1 Month	1 Month	
Health Board endorse business case	1 Month (14 Months to get to endorsed business case)	1 Month (9 Months to get to endorsed business case)	
WGov submission / scrutiny / approval	2 Months	2 Months	Possibly reduce to 1 month?
Appoint contractor and enter into contract	1 Month	1 Month	
Estimated Works	9 Months	6 Months	Subject to complexity & Contractors programme
Commissioning	1 Month	1 Month	
HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT SCHEME			
Detailed design	10 months		
Planning approval	4 months		
Tender (Jan '23)	2 months		
Early Contractor Involvement	2 months		
Construction	18 months		Following relocation of health centre

An indicative programme for the two options can be seen in Appendix D.

Issues

The provision of primary care services within the Health Board Managed Practice has been subject to patient and political scrutiny, particularly from the population of Cymmer, dissatisfied with the transformation of GP services in line with the principles of the Primary Care Model for Wales in support of the vision in '*A Healthier Wales*'. An integral part of any changes to either service delivery or the moving of that service to new premises, is the interaction and opinion of the community which it serves. An engagement exercise will need to be undertaken to ensure full community involvement at the outset, prior to the framework option / location appraisal and will need to be linked to the wider engagement plan recently developed for the Health Board Managed Practice. The Community Health Council (CHC) has advised, following discussion at their Executive Committee that a 6-week engagement exercise should be undertaken to seek the views from the population on the potential for a relocation and their suggestions for a new site.

Capital investment will be required to progress with any proposed development of premises and this would need to be progressed as a fully tendered business case through Welsh Government. There is no current confirmed process for primary care estates development funding and indicative timelines for business case development and submission (excluding patient engagement) will take approximately 9 to 14 months' dependent on preferred option and approximately 9 to 14 months for development completion; however, this will again depend on options and complexity of scheme.

Longer term revenue impact will need to be considered should the Health Board be required to enter into a lease arrangement, depending on the outcome of the options / site appraisal. The current building is a Health Board clinic with minimum service fees. A new development / premises would mean committing to increased service changes and potential long term lease arrangements. External Advisers to the project are required in order to provide the appropriate expertise for the safeguarding of the long term investment to the NHS in Wales and NWSSP – Specialist Estates Advisors will be entrusted to support this scheme. Legal advice and independent quantity (monitoring) surveyors are required to be part of the professional team.

To maintain vehicular connectivity to the villages of Abercregan and Glyncoirwg, there are three structures which need to be strengthened. One of these structures, Cymmer viaduct has been restricted to one way working with an 18 tonne weight restriction imposed; however, the structural assessment has shown that the structure is only capable of carrying 3 tonne of traffic. The weight limit was imposed in 1999, since then the concrete has continued to deteriorate and the Council deems it at risk of structural collapse by leaving the 18 tonne restriction in place, especially as traffic surveys have shown that the bridge is being used illegally by heavier vehicles.

The adjacent carriageway is extremely steep with very tight hairpin bends making it difficult for buses or HGV's to safely navigate without grounding when negotiating the bend. Vehicles over 18 tonne do negotiate the hairpin bend but have extreme difficulty, needing to take the whole carriageway and reversing several times to get around the hairpin. This is extremely dangerous both for the HGV's and for other traffic using the road.

It is proposed that the carriageway adjacent to Cymmer Viaduct is improved to allow larger vehicles to negotiate this route maintaining access to these communities. Several options have been considered for the highway improvements with two options being shortlisted. Details of both options can be seen in Appendix E and F.

Capital investment for the design of the highway improvements has been granted by the Welsh Government through the Local Transport Fund during 2020/21 and 2021/22, further Capital funding will be required for the construction of the project.

A public consultation exercise will be required for the highway project and will need to align with the public engagement for the potential relocation of the health facility in Cymmer.

As a consequence of the above it is clearly evident that the provision of appropriate health care facilities and the retention of vehicular access infrastructure to communities within the Afan Valley will require patient engagement / consultation and Welsh Government funding. Consideration should therefore be given to the coordination of such activity which should improve efficiencies and therefore timely delivery, in addition to minimising the overall cost.

Benefits and Opportunities

1. The development of an estates solution within the Upper Afan Valley was agreed as a high priority for the following key drivers:
 - Condition, functionality and suitability of estate; existing premises within the Upper Afan Valley are three community clinics, which currently house, 2 GP Practices, a dental practice and community services. These buildings, designed as community clinics some 40 years ago, are no longer fit for purpose and need considerable investment.
 - The strategic drive is to provide as many services as close to patient's homes as possible. Car use is low within the valley area and there are very poor public transport and active travel links.
 - An aging population with more complex health needs; the communities in the Upper Afan Valley continue to be amongst the poorest and disadvantaged in Wales. The ill health of the population is also a significant issue. More than a third of people in the Upper Afan valley say that they have a limiting long-term illness, whilst life expectancy is amongst the shortest in the UK – at 74.8 years in Cymmer it is nearly 3 years less than the figure for Wales.
 - Long term sustainability of primary care services and the increasing need to work on a multi-agency basis. Providing the integrated space as an enabler and premises to attract new GPs to area, which in turn should help facilitate the exit strategy for the managed GP practice. There is evidence that poor GP premises is linked to recruitment and retention challenges and sustainability issues of a GP practice without the premises to maximise income and facilitate new ways of working.
2. The topography in Cymmer is challenging; Cymmer is situated on the side of a steep valley with Cymmer viaduct and the health centre being circa 25m higher than Avon Street, making travel to the health centre on foot or by car difficult.

3. Several options have been considered for the realignment of the carriageway. The two preferred options can be seen in Appendix E and F. Of the two options

- Option A avoids the existing health centre at Cymmer and has been costed at circa £5.76m
- Option B requires the land on which the existing health centre is located and is costed at circa £4.42m

The relocation of the health centre has the potential to realise a cost saving to the highway scheme of circa £1.34m and would provide a better road alignment.

4. The revised road alignment also removes the need to strengthen the two former railway bridges that presently need to be replaced.

Risks

For the Health Centre

1. To do nothing means:

- The Health Board will continue to manage the GP Practice long term which has a current impact on PCTS management time and GMS allocation above that of independent contractor status
- Future sustainability risk of Afan Valley Group Practice (Glyncorrwg / Blaengwynfi) which without adequate estates provision in the Upper Afan Valley provides little opportunity for succession planning for the single handed contractor.
- Requirement to invest in existing estate to ensure services continue to be provided safely.
- Minimum level of service provision will continue with no opportunity for service design, provision of care closer to home, including cluster services or provision of care out of hospital and therefore not aligned strategically or taking the opportunity to tackle health inequalities.

2. Capital investment via Welsh Government funding will need to be pursued however there is no current confirmed process for primary care estates funding.

3. Current indicative timelines will need to include patient engagement and potential public consultation. The outcomes of this will need to inform the final position. However as indicated above, this activity could be coordinated with the consultation associated with the highway works to avoid duplication and potential confusion.

For the Highway Improvements

4. To do nothing is not a viable option, Cymmer viaduct is deteriorating and will need to be closed to traffic in the short to medium term.
5. The adjacent road is very steep, narrow and winding with hairpin bends making it very difficult for large vehicles to negotiate. Due to the vertical and horizontal profile of the road, travel along this section is very dangerous especially for the large vehicles and oncoming traffic.
6. Topographical difficulties and the lack of space adjoining the highway constrains options for improvement and make construction whilst maintaining access to homes and businesses in the area difficult.
7. Capital investment via Welsh Government funding will need to be pursued through transport grants, this is a bidding process and the allocation of funding is not guaranteed.
8. Public consultation on the highway improvements will need to run alongside the public consultation for the relocation of the health centre.

Summary

The existing GP Practice in Cymmer does not meet the standards of accommodation of modern health care. An estates solution for the Upper Afan Valley has been identified as a priority within the Primary Care Estates Strategy priority schemes 2019.

Cymmer viaduct is presently weight restricted to 18 tonne vehicles, the structure is continuing to deteriorate and will need to be closed to vehicles in the short to medium term. The adjacent carriageways are not suitable for HGV's, some emergency vehicles and public service

vehicles and needs to be improved to maintain access to the adjoining communities of Abercregan and Glyncorrwg.

Conclusion

It is clear from the information currently available that the issues within the Upper Afan Valley require a coordinated approach that will maintain and improve public services for the local residents. It is also likely that this coordinated approach will deliver the most cost effective solution.

Joint delivery of the relocation of the health facility and highway improvements will result in:

- Improved health care facilities for the community
- Joint public engagement / consultation between the Health Board and the Council.
- An improved road alignment for the alternative route avoiding Cymmer viaduct.
- Cost savings to the highway scheme of circa £1.34 million by avoiding the need for substantial retaining walls and other civils work.
- Less disruption to the community as the relocation, and demolition of the health centre and the road improvements will take place concurrently.
- The opportunity to develop premises to deliver a multi-sector approach to integrated service delivery which supports the strategic priority of health, national strategic drivers and local wellbeing plans to support people in managing their physical, mental and social well-being.

Whilst further detailed feasibility work is necessary, the urgent nature of the highways works means that there is a very tight 'window of opportunity' to make a decision that will help to avoid major disruption to the Highways network whilst protecting key health services within the Afan Valley.

Recommendations

1. To support a coordinated approach between SBUHB and NTPCBC for a joint delivery of a potential relocation of the health facility and highway improvements.

2. To agree for a joint meeting to be arranged with Welsh Government officials to explore the potential for this approach and investment.
3. To agree the need to progress and align the engagement activities for both health and highways.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To support a coordinated approach between SBUHB and NTPCBC.

Implementation of Decision:

The decision is for immediate implementation with the agreement of the relevant scrutiny chairperson and therefore not subject to the 3 day call in period).

Appendices:

Appendix A and B - plans showing the strategic overview and location.

Appendix C - Cymmer viaduct is shown in the photographs.

Appendix D – is the indicative programme for the two options.

Appendix E - General arrangement of carriageway improvements with health centre retained.

Appendix F - General arrangement of carriageway improvements with health centre relocated.