

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee

(Remotely via Teams)

Members Present:

30 July 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.K.Hunt

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.L.Taylor

Councillors: C.J.Jones, H.N.James, S.Pursey and S.Rahaman

Officers In Attendance: L.Beynon, C.Davies, T.Davies and M. Thomas

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.Wingrave and L.Jones

1. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Cabinet Board items:

NPT Bee Friendly Scheme

Members were presented with a report in relation to Neath Port Talbot's Bee Friendly Scheme.

Officers stated that this scheme proposed a change in management and mowing regime of Council owned verges, in order to encourage wildflower grasslands to develop; which will also align with the requirements detailed in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, the Council's Biodiversity Duty Plan and Neath Port Talbot's Nature Recovery Action Plan.

The recent All Member Seminar that was held to discuss this topic, was noted to be very useful and allowed Members to provide their input; Officers took on board a lot of the comments and suggestions that were made.

The Committee stressed the importance of maintaining amenity use of green spaces, especially in the urban areas; it was important to obtain buy-in from the community and have robust community

engagement. It was mentioned that in some areas, half of the green spaces were owned and managed by Tai Tarian and the other half were owned and managed by the Council; there needed to be co-ordination between the two parties to ensure there was an appropriate mix between preserving amenity spaces that were well used, and introducing the important biodiversity enhancements.

Members shared a good practice story from Tai Tarian, in which they engaged with neighbours in an area, in relation to changing a green space, and were able to make slight changes to their original plans to allow for community activities to take place on the green space, as well as having the necessary biodiversity additions; engagement with the public was very important as it provided an understanding of how spaces were being used by the community.

Officers confirmed that amenity spaces were vitally important in the community, and that it was also important to communicate awareness of this scheme to the public so that they had an understanding of why biodiversity enhancements were needed; the communication and branding for this scheme would be vital, and suggestions were made in relation to ways of promoting this to the public.

It was mentioned that members of the Biodiversity Team had sent letters to Councillors and had been meeting them individually in their Wards to discuss particular areas, as there were different specific needs across the variety of outdoor spaces.

Members were informed that the Council needed to ensure that its position and procedures were set in place, and then staff would be discussing this matter with various organisations to ensure that they were aligned and co-ordinated in the Council's approach. Officers added that safety would be the first priority in the work being carried out.

It was asked if the scheme was going to be extended to brown field areas and unused industrial land. Officers explained that the current focus was to look at the existing verges on Council owned land; the scheme would take some time to progress through the various areas, as Officers were keen for it to work effectively. However, it was confirmed that it could be possible to look into the brown field areas to bring back wildflower; Officers could discuss plans to explore these areas and identify if there were any existing seed banks, which could be re-seeded for it to grow into a wildflower meadow. It was added that the Council wanted to avoid introducing non-native species and seed mixes as there was a cost element to that, and wanted to

encourage native species to grow. Officers would liaise with the Local Nature Partnership Co-Ordinator to arrange a discussion with the interested Member about the brown field areas they were referring to; the area could then be included on the map, and if the area was Council owned land, a survey could be undertaken to gain an understanding of the area and what could be done to enhance the biodiversity.

In regards to public perception, it was noted that clear messages needed to be circulated as and when the plans developed, in order to explain to the public where the work was going to take place. Officers highlighted that they were working closely with colleagues in the Communications and Digital Services Team to ensure the right messages were being posted on social media; these messages will include before and after photographs, as these will clearly show what difference the work will make.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

Consideration of Neath Port Talbot Replacement Local Development Plan

The Committee received a report to consider Neath Port Talbot's Replacement Local Development Plan 2021-2036, Consultation Draft Delivery Agreement and Consultation Draft Integrated Sustainability Appraisal; the start of the proposed consultation was 16 August 2021, which will end six weeks later on 27 September 2021.

Members were informed that the Council's current Local Development Plan (LDP) had been adopted for 15 years (from 2011-2026) and every four years the Council had to renew this plan; Officers had put out a review report and were preparing a replacement LDP, therefore when the new plan was adopted it would supersede the current LDP.

Due to the outbreak of the pandemic, it was highlighted that there had been some delays in the proceedings. Officers had re-started work on the Draft Delivery Agreement which set out the following:

- The timetable – the plan had to be produced within 3.5 years, which wasn't a significant amount of time to develop this comprehensive plan;
- The community involvement scheme – this included who the Council would be contacting, when they will be contacted and how they would be contacted;

- The resources that Neath Port Talbot Council will commit to preparing the plan;
- The budget for producing the plan within the timeframe.

The Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (ISA), was noted to be a iterative process in the form of a report; any policies or strategies etc., that were formed as the plan was being prepared, needed to be sent through the ISA to be assessed. It was mentioned that this assessment will determine whether the various policies etc. were fit to meet the sustainability requirements of the overall plan; if they were determined not to be suitable, Officers will be required to amend them.

Reference was made to community involvement and how this was key in the development of the LDP; in previous years, the Council had sent out leaflets to residents, however this did not successfully encourage them to engage with the LDP. Members expressed the importance of reaching all constituents as it was a very significant consultation exercise. A suggestion was made in regards to improving public engagement; that a letter drop be carried out on a similar footing to the way in which the residents received their council tax letter, as this was the type of information that the majority of the public would be interested to open and read, and was also a lower cost way to get more people to engage. Officers noted the comments raised for future correspondence; the Team were always looking for new ideas, and if Members had any further suggestions, they were encouraged to contact the Team. It was agreed, that subject to approval, the suggestion would be included into the report before the commencement of the consultation.

A discussion took place in relation to social media representations. It was asked if the Communications Team could help with this and directly respond to comments on social media pages, to try and get residents to respond to the consultation in the correct way; this would help to ensure that useful comments weren't lost, and that residents were informed of the correct process of submitting comments. Officers confirmed that there was legislation in place in relation to submitting comments, either through a form or on the consultation portal; comments/suggestions made on social media could not be accepted. It was noted that monitoring comments on social media would require resource and this could not be confirmed. Officers highlighted that they had to consider ways to engage with all groups of people, including those who did not use the internet. It was

mentioned that the use of jargon would be reduced in order to ensure the public had a clear understanding of what the Council was trying to achieve; Officers were working with a local firm to re-brand the LDP and introduce videos that streamlined the process and were engaging. It was suggested that Members could be involved in the social media representation to point the public in the right direction.

In relation to the stakeholder meetings, the circulated report detailed that the meetings would be held virtually; Members asked if there was flexibility to hold meetings in person, if restrictions allowed, as it would display the importance and significance of what the Council was doing. Officers confirmed that if the Government guidance changes then they would be able to hold meetings face to face; it was agreed that Officers would ensure this was made clear in the circulated report.

It was asked if it was possible to lobby Welsh Government in relation to developing flood land areas, as there was a considerable amount of land included in this category. Officers stated that flooding was going to be a large constraint in developing this work; a Welsh Government Technical Advice Note (TAN) on flooding was currently being written, and was due out next month for Officers to consider. It was noted that Welsh Government were working with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to develop new flood maps, in which there may be new flood areas included; this would affect how the LDP is shaped, however it was good timing in terms of the stage the Team were at in developing the plan.

Members were informed that there were accessibility regulations in place, which meant that everything had to be accessible on the website and the other materials used to communicate to the public; the messages needed to be understandable, clear and concise. It was mentioned that the public would be interested in certain aspects and stages of the LDP, rather than the whole process; these specific points of interest in the process needed to be managed carefully and Officers needed to ensure that the right messages were put out to the public.

Viability was noted to be a key component of the LDP; when developers submitted land, it was essential that they demonstrate how that site would be developed, taking into consideration all of the Council's Section 106 requirements. Officers stated that when land was submitted, the landowners / developers of the site must make sure that Section 106 requirements were taken into account when

purchasing the land to make sure that the facilities were also provided and in place for the community; including green infrastructure, active travel etc., to make it a place where people want to live.

The Committee went through the LDP timetable, in particular the timeframe around the publication of the candidate site register and the community feedback on candidate sites. It was confirmed that the publication of the candidate site register will be in June 2022, after the election period; Officers will be reviewing the community feedback, however will not be responding to them as this would take a considerable amount of time. It was added that the comments will be taken into consideration when the candidate sites were assessed.

Officers highlighted that they would be happy to facilitate any All Member Seminars in relation to various aspects of the LDP, should Members request this.

A formal amendment to the recommendation contained within the circulated report was proposed and seconded, which changed recommendation number 1 to the following:

The RLDP consultation draft delivery agreement as set out in appendix 2 be agreed for the purpose of the consultation, subject to the inclusion of the feedback from members in the R&SD scrutiny committee in relation to community involvement.

It was determined that the Committee were in support of the amendment to be considered by Cabinet Board.

2. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

Members noted the Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Forward Work Programme for 2021/22.

CHAIRPERSON