



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CABINET BOARD

11 March 2022

Report of the Director of Environment and Regeneration
Nicola Pearce

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: *All Wards*

Environment Service Report

Purpose of Report

- 1 To advise Members of the extensive work programme which is being delivered during the Pandemic by the Environment and Regeneration Directorate. This work not only relates to the responsive work undertaken to manage the spread of the Covid-19 virus, but also the extensive business as usual activities which have been delivered despite the pandemic.

Executive Summary

- 2 In early 2020, the Covid-19 virus which was first identified in the Far East started spreading, resulting in the start of the pandemic which still grips the world. In March 2020, it was clearly evident that the spread of the Covid-19 virus was having a serious impact upon the health and wellbeing of UK citizens resulting in the UK Government,

together with devolved nations, taking unprecedented action and locking down the country.

- 3 Many measures were put in place at the time to mitigate the impacts of the virus and protect the public. A large number of those responsibilities were placed upon local authorities, who have continued to perform well throughout the duration of the pandemic. This report gives a very brief summary of the work undertaken in response to covid-19 but primarily concentrates on the work undertaken by the Environment and Regeneration Directorate during the pandemic.

Background

- 4 When Covid-19 case numbers started escalating within the UK a number of additional support measures were required to be put in place. The Environment and Regeneration Directorate led on many of these and include the following non exhaustive list: The design, commissioning and supervision of the construction of the Llandarcy Field hospital and its subsequent decommissioning; the establishment of a highly successful Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) service which has operated with partners at a local and regional level and was recently commended nationally as the team who has provided the most mutual aid to others when they were experiencing high case numbers; the creation of a Covid Enforcement team which has worked closely with our TTP, Environmental Health and Licencing teams respectively to ensure appropriate control measures are in place across a range of commercial and licensed premises; alongside the establishment and operation of a food distribution hub which supported those who were shielding from the virus; the implementation of health and safety measures, including for a limited time, the provision of town centre rangers to enable the public to safely access town centre facilities; and the distribution of grant money together with general support and advice to businesses who were struggling during the pandemic.
- 5 In addition to these emergency response measures, which resulted in the re-deployment of a large number of staff away from their substantive posts, the Environment and Regeneration Directorate has continued to deliver significant projects. This report gives a very brief summary of the work which has been undertaken across the Directorate.

Cross Cutting Work

- 6 Prior to the Pandemic, the Environment and Regeneration Directorate prepared and published the council's Decarbonisation and Renewable Energy (DARE) Strategy. Whilst authored by this Directorate it is a corporate document and the objectives of the strategy should be owned corporately. In order to achieve the very ambitious 'Net Zero Carbon' Government targets, our behaviour and the way we manage and utilise our assets must change. We are currently in the process of revising the action plan which is appended to this strategy to identify the new work streams which we need to pursue in order to achieve those targets. We are also undertaking a gap analysis to identify how we can deliver net zero carbon by 2030, which is a huge task. Whilst these work streams will be far reaching, we have already started to plan the roll out of low emission vehicles within our fleet together with the installation of charging infrastructure at council buildings. Whilst the majority of this infrastructure will be co-located with our fleet at the Quays/SRC, infrastructure on a smaller scale is also going to be rolled out at the two civic centres and at Tregellis Court.
- 7 Officers within the Directorate are also leading on two decarbonisation and renewable energy projects proposed under the city deal portfolio. Both projects will help us achieve these decarbonisation objectives and are of national importance. There will be more detail on these projects within this report.
- 8 Officers across the Directorate have also been instrumental to the emergency response and associated recovery work following the underground mine blow out and associated flooding which took place in Skewen in January 2021. Significant numbers of people were evacuated as a consequence of that emergency, with staff from this Directorate assisting our partners within the emergency services in that evacuation effort. Since that date, officers have undertaken clean-up work of the highway network and public realm; provided health protection advice to affected residents; supported Coal Authority workers by installing temporary drainage to enable the clean-up operation to commence; assisted residents in removing damaged goods from their properties; removed damaged trees; facilitated the provision of temporary traffic management to ensure that the highway diversion is as safe as possible for highway users; and they also continue to support the Coal Authority in designing and delivering a permanent mine water drainage system. The Coal

Authority have indicated on multiple occasions that our staff are some of the best that they have ever dealt with who have gone out of their way to support them to deliver the best outcomes for the affected community. This glowing feedback is an excellent reflection of the efforts of all staff involved in the Skewen emergency.

- 9 Whilst we are delivering services and responding to emergencies it must be noted that the Directorate are carrying more risks than ever before. A combination of the loss of skilled and experienced staff, Brexit and the pandemic has increased the risks associated with delivering our capital projects. As a consequence, a senior management projects team has been established within the Directorate together with a milestone spreadsheet which identifies all of the major schemes we are currently delivering and their progress to date. This multidisciplinary approach and the sharing of progress on key projects helps us to manage the risk to a greater extent.
- 10 In addition to the above we are also looking to invest additional resources in key areas within the Directorate where staff shortages have been most felt. All of these re-structures will help us to rebuild resilience and maximise the likelihood of securing external funding.

Planning and Public Protection

- 11 Work has continued on the collection and analysis of evidence required to support the review of the Local Development Plan. The Directorate has submitted its Delivery Agreement to the Welsh Government which outlines our intended community involvement and the key timescales associated with the review process.
- 12 Officers have also engaged with their colleagues across the region to identify the scope of and issues to be considered within the region's first Strategic Development Plan (SDP). This plan will cover the South West Wales region and will identify our strategic land use needs including transport, energy and potentially regional employment land.
- 13 The Active Travel officer has undertaken a comprehensive consultation on the Active Travel Network Maps. Incentives were used as part of this consultation to encourage public participation and engagement. These maps will inform future Active Travel funding bids which will enable us to prioritise routes for investment and in turn maximise the number of people using active travel as opposed to private vehicular transport.

- 14 Work has commenced to recruit and train a team of ecologists funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to reclaim areas of lost peatland and maximise both the biodiversity benefits as well as those associated with carbon capture and retention. This will be one of the largest such initiatives in the UK and is being supported by a number of partners. It will also contribute towards the Net Zero Carbon agenda.
- 15 A number of national initiatives have continued to be delivered by the Trading Standards service to protect our communities. These include Rogue Trader events, call blocker advice, Real Deal Markets, Buy with confidence, child safety week, scams awareness and many more.
- 16 Despite redeploying many of our Environmental Health Officers to the Regional TTP team, the limited number of staff that remain within the service have continued to deliver many services including the food hygiene service by prioritising the inspection of high risk premises and responding to enforcement complaints. They have also continued to respond to complaints on air quality, noise, contaminated land, rogue landlords, health and safety, empty properties and other housing related issues which includes the re-establishment of a Private rented Landlords Forum. Work has also continued to address the health and safety of residents within Cyfng Rd, Ystalyfera who have been affected by a landslide to the rear which has affected the stability of their properties. There will be more detail on this later in the report.
- 17 Officers within the Development Management Service have continued to determine planning applications as efficiently as restrictions allow and as a consequence support the construction industry and our council's ambitious regeneration aspirations throughout the duration of the pandemic. They have also worked with colleagues in the wider Directorate together with colleagues in Welsh Government and Powys to enable the delivery of the Global Centre of Rail Excellence (GCRE). This project is a multimillion pound scheme which seeks to transform a former open cast mine and associated rail head and washery into a facility which will test electrical rail stock. This facility, at this scale, will be the first of its kind in the UK which is currently reliant on testing facilities within mainland Europe. This scheme will therefore contribute towards the decarbonisation of the rail industry, create well paid jobs for our citizens and will also link into our wider decarbonisation agenda as

currently illustrated within our DARE strategy and our City Deal Projects. Outline planning permission was granted for the scheme on the 27th July 2021 and work has already commenced on the preparing the Reserved Matters submission.

- 18 After an initial delay while funders and a new project delivery company were secured, the Afan Valley Adventure Resort has secured a resolution of approval from our Planning Committee subject to the signing of a S106 agreement. We have been engaging with that company to ensure that the Afan valley and the wider county borough, benefits from the opportunities which can flow from this multi million pound investment. It is anticipated that the S106 will be signed shortly after which the permission will be issued. Work will then commence on the detailed design of the scheme.
- 19 Officers are currently experiencing a lot of interest from renewable energy companies wishing to construct major on shore wind farm schemes. Whilst these are considered to be Developments of National Significance (DNS), which are considered by the Planning Inspectorate (PINs), the council are still required to give advice to proposed developers, in addition to preparing a Local Impact Report (LIR) which is required to be submitted to PINs. One such scheme is that currently proposed close to Bryn and above Margam. This scheme proposes turbines approximately 250m in height, which would make them the largest on-shore turbines in the UK. There are only two buildings in the UK which would exceed their height and they are the Shard which stands at 310 metres in height while another London building at 22 Bishopsgate rises to a height of 278 metres. As you would expect, there has been a lot of public opposition to this development from communities within Neath Port Talbot and within the neighbouring council of Bridgend.
- 20 Officers continue to work with developers to secure the recommencement of work at Coed Darcy. This sustainable urban village was initially planned to accommodate up to 4000 residential homes however geological issues and infrastructure costs have resulted in a revision of their scheme which is anticipated to be smaller than originally intended. Nevertheless it will still deliver a significant number of new build homes which are needed to address our growing population and associated housing need.
- 21 Officers are also in early discussion with developers seeking to pursue a number of large scale development opportunities in and

around the Harbourside area in Port Talbot. If these schemes come in they will potentially put Port Talbot on the map as a hub of activity relating to the decarbonisation and renewable energy sector. They will also result in the availability of more well paid fulfilling jobs. Given the scale of the number of quite complex jobs coming in together with the number of existing vacancies within the planning service there is a clear need to employ additional staff. A recruitment campaign is currently being pursued to maximise our ability to secure experienced, skilled staff.

- 22 Despite being short of staff and struggling to continue to operate in the field, our Building Control team have continued to work with developers and builders to ensure that new developments are delivered in compliance with all approved building regulations. This has been particularly difficult given the health and safety implications associated with Covid-19 and the need to ensure that all staff are trained to level 5 in the emerging new legislative regime. This has required a major commitment from our team who have had to juggle major projects whilst committing time to studying.

Property and Regeneration

- 23 As the Pandemic was taking hold our colleagues within the Tourism team were about to launch a new Destination Brand/ Marketing strategy for Neath Port Talbot. Due to concerns about mass gatherings at our tourist destinations and the need to ensure social distancing is maintained, this launch was initially delayed until the Autumn. We have now launched with the intention of encouraging sustainable tourism within NPT.
- 24 In addition to the destination branding for tourism, our Business team have been developing their own campaign to place NPT front and centre of inward investment decisions. This campaign will be supported by the regional Economic Development Strategy and the associated local Economic Development Plan, both of which are currently being drafted but nearing completion.
- 25 The Tourism team secured a major grant award for investment within the Afan Forest Park. This involves the construction of a new purpose built children's play area together with a major refurbishment of the toilet facilities and installation of EV charging infrastructure. Such investment will improve the tourism facilities currently available for visitors to the Afan Valley.

- 26 We have a number of tourist destinations within and on the borders of the county borough, with one such destination being our Waterfall Country. Whilst there are a number of beautiful waterfalls across Neath Port Talbot, large volumes of people continue to flock to the Pontneddfechan falls. Whilst it's wonderful that our local assets are appreciated, this does have undesirable consequences to traffic flows. Residents and visitors have for some time experienced traffic congestion within the area from increased visitor pressures with many visitors parking on the pavements and causing a danger to pedestrians. In order to combat this, our tourism team, in partnership with Brecon Beacons National Park and Powys County Council, have secured a bespoke Park and Ride facility, whereby visitors safely park within an existing car park in Glynneath and catch a free bus to the water fall area. This facility was trialled this year and early feedback suggests that there were insufficient users to run this service on a cost recovery basis in future years.
- 27 Investment and improvements to our tourism facilities has not been restricted to our valley communities. Two new facilities have been funded, designed and delivered in the run up to the summer along Aberavon coastline. The outdoor gym officially opened on the 21st June while the new Aquasplash facility was opened on the 5th July, both have been well received by the public.
- 28 Turning to the City Deal, our Directorate have been leading on the regional project entitled 'Homes as Power Stations'. The scheme has secured an investment of £15m to enable the construction of 3300 new homes where renewable energy technology is embedded into the fabric of the building, with 7000 existing properties being retrofitted with renewable energy devices to drive down the cost and carbon footprint of domestic energy. Whilst this investment is limited, it is projected to lever in £490m from the private and public sector resulting in an overall investment across the region of £505m. In addition to this, the project will develop a knowledge sharing platform and will secure the development of a supply chain to support the delivery of low carbon homes at scale within the region. A very detailed Business case has been prepared and has been independently assessed via a WG gateway review panel. The proposal has also been scrutinised by UK Govt and WG officials and has been presented to the Under Secretary of State for Wales, David T C Davies. Following this very thorough process we received confirmation on the 13th July 2021 that both the UK and Welsh

Government had approved our business case and we could move the project forward. Since approval was secured we have appointed a project manager who will drive the project forward.

- 29 Another City deal which is focused on Neath Port Talbot, is our Supporting Innovation and Low Carbon Growth programme which comprises of 7 separate but linked projects. All of the projects are aimed at developing the RD&I around renewable energy and decarbonisation ensuring that NPT is the focus for business growth in this sector. We have progressed at risk with the development of the Technology Centre which is an energy positive building accommodating both office and laboratory floor space for businesses involved in renewable energy and low carbon technology. We are also about to commence pre-engagement events with operators/potential occupiers of our Advanced Manufacturing Facility which will be based on the concept of the AMRC facilities which have been successful in Coventry and Ellesmere Port. This project has undergone the same level of scrutiny as the HaPS project and we secured confirmation of funding of £47.5m y both Governments on the 20th August 2021. This investment is projected to lever in a further £51m of private and public sector investment, which will comprise of £11m of direct leverage and £40m of research funding. The overall investment from this project is therefore projected to be £98.5m. As was the case with the HaPS project a presentation was delivered to the Under Secretary of State for Wales and he also undertook a fact finding visit on the 8th July 2021 which was supported by a number of staff within the Directorate.
- 30 Since the UK withdrew from the EU, the UK Government has given reassurance that the EU funds which we previously benefitted from would be replaced with improved funding opportunities. The replacement fund is known as the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and the precursor to this are the Levelling up and Community Renewal Funds (CRF). These funds were first referred to within the Spending Review in March 2021 with detailed, deliverable and economically positive bids needing to be submitted within a very tight timescale. These bids also involved stakeholder engagement and required endorsement by the constituent MPs. The responsibility for publicising and managing the CRF rested primarily with the Strategic funding team with support by others across the council. Others within the service area were also able to submit detailed bids to this revenue fund. The tight timescales associated with managing this process were taxing, especially given that it was operating simultaneous to

the Levelling Up Fund. As part of the latter funding opportunity, officers within the strategic Funding team compiled a programme of projects for the two parliamentary constituencies within NPT. These projects when combined totalled a bid of £11,189,062 with a private sector investment of £5,748,311. Unfortunately and despite the best efforts of the officers involved in compiling the detailed bids, we were unsuccessful in securing a successful outcome from the levelling up fund. Officers are currently focusing on shortlisting project ideas for the second round of Levelling Up Funds which we anticipate will be launched in the Spring of 2022. Despite this disappointment we were successful in securing 6 out of our 7 bids to the Community Renewal Fund and officers are currently progressing with the delivery of these projects. The total value of those bids amounts to £2,365,073

- 31 In terms of other regeneration schemes, work continues to be delivered on the Plaza development in Port Talbot with an anticipated completion date of January 2022. This will deliver a mixed used development comprising offices, community space and health and wellbeing facilities. In Neath, work is also underway to deliver the refurbished listed building at 8 Wind Street which will deliver employability and shared working space. It is anticipated to be available for occupation in August 2021. The major redevelopment of the site adjacent to Wilko is under construction and will deliver a mix of retail, community and leisure uses which will in turn encourage families into the town centre which should increase footfall within the town centre. This scheme is due for completion in June 2022. We are also working with partners to deliver the re-development of our site to the rear of the Boots loading/delivery yard which again will deliver a mix of retail and residential properties.
- 32 The service is not only responsible for delivering regeneration projects but is also supporting colleagues across the council to deliver their objectives including the 21st Century Strategic Schools Improvement Programme. To this end, our architects have recently completed the construction of a state of the art replacement secondary school at Cefn Saeson. They are also facilitating the provision of child care units at a variety of locations across the county borough including Waunceirch, Blaendulais, Rhos and Cwmafan. Improvements to a large number of other existing schools are also being planned/undertaken. Such works range from WC refurbishments up to the provision of additional teaching blocks. Work is not restricted to educational facilities and encompasses other council

owned assets including Margam Orangery and Hillside. The architects within the service are involved in these developments from inception to completion and are held in high regard by the construction industry as well as internal colleagues.

- 33 Whilst these projects are under construction, preliminary work relating to land assembly and scheme design has commenced for the delivery of the Neath transport hub. The timetable associated with this work is reliant upon land assembly negotiations. Whilst these are the more significant projects being delivered within NPT, there are also a variety of other grant schemes being delivered across the county borough, to support businesses and to improve the quality of business premises.
- 34 Turning finally to regional work, officers have been working with colleagues across the region and Welsh Government to assist the latter in developing a Regional Economic Framework, and from this, develop a Regional Economic Development Strategy. This will identify the region's strengths and associated themes for economic growth. Officers within NPT are also developing the Local Economic Development Plan which will dovetail with the aforementioned regional plans and will set out our vision to improve the economic opportunities for our communities. Officers have also been working across the region, with support from the Welsh Government Energy Service to deliver a Regional Energy Strategy. This will be reported to Cabinet shortly and will enable us to develop a Local Energy Action Plan which will in time complement our evolving DARE Strategy

Streetcare

- 35 The teams within Streetcare have continued to operate and deliver services throughout the pandemic albeit in a slightly different way to minimise risk to staff. Such measures include the temporary removal of three in a cab and the introduction of a booking system for our Household waste and recycling centres both of which will need to be reviewed having regard to the national relaxation of covid-19 restrictions. Whilst our focus remains on protecting staff, the continued restrictions impact upon the service in terms of its affordability and the reduced availability of drivers for the wider service. An alternative service delivery method is therefore needed. Discussions have therefore commenced with the Trade Unions.

- 36 In terms of the main developments in waste, work is ongoing to remodel the Transfer Station to make it a safer environment for staff and to improve the speed of offloading refuse and recycling from our freighters. As part of this remodelling programme, as approved by Members a feasibility study is also being undertaken for the relocation of the waste fleet to the transfer station and the use of renewable energy generation on site to fuel our fleet going forward. The study including any cost implications will be reported for consideration shortly. All works are expected to contribute towards a reduction in costs in the long term, in addition to contributing towards our Net Zero ambitions. The Transfer Station has operated throughout the duration of the pandemic and has been the subject of an extensive management of change exercise. In addition to this, unlike some authorities, our waste teams have continued to collect refuse and recycling throughout the pandemic facilitated by new safer ways of working. Furthermore, our household waste recycling centres introduced a new booking system to enable their continued use whilst keeping both staff and the public safe. This avoided long queues of cars waiting to enter the facilities and ensured that we did not experience traffic congestion around our sites. This was not necessarily the same in other authorities, where long queues have been experienced leading to frustration and anger from those wishing to enter the sites.
- 37 A new Waste Strategy is required and various work strands have been progressed to inform this process including a residual waste analysis and a recycling participation survey. A new policy/procedure for Trade waste and the waste service for flats with a view to improving levels of recycling was stalled at the beginning of the pandemic given that many commercial properties were prevented from operating or operating at a reduced rate. Since restrictions have slowly lifted we have started to roll out these new policies/procedures with a view to continually improving our rates of recycling and potential income generation whilst also reducing our costs. This is already bearing fruit with recently published recycling performance data confirming that NPT is one of 13 local authorities who improved their recycling figures in 2020/21. We are now placed 7th in the performance table and secured a recycling figure of 65.4% exceeding the target of 64%. This is a considerable achievement given that we were one of 4 authorities in Wales who did not meet the recycling targets the previous year. We cannot however rest on our laurels given the need to pursue continuous improvement if we are to achieve the next target of 70% by 2024/25

- 38 We continue to invest in our Directorate assets including the Gnoll country park which is a popular destination and has huge potential to improve visitor experiences. We are currently redesigning and improving the Gnoll website but we are also in the process of installing low emission vehicle charging infrastructure as well as improving the quality of the food and drink offer by undertaking improvements to the café as well as securing a mobile unit to enable the operation of two food and drink concessions during peak periods within the park. This should reduce customer queues and therefore improve the visitor experience but will also improve potential income generation.
- 39 We have a number of reservoirs within our country parks and the risks associated with managing these reservoirs is regularly monitored. As a consequence of that monitoring, works are now required to be undertaken at the Moss House reservoir. This work is currently being designed.
- 40 Members will be aware that we have been implementing a phased replacement of our street lighting to utilise more energy efficient LED bulbs which will in the long run reduce energy costs as well as reducing carbon emissions. This significant programme of works is approaching completion.
- 41 Members will be aware that some areas of the county borough have suffered from flooding on a regular basis for a number of years. Our drainage teams together with partner organisations, including the police and fire authorities, have quickly responded to flooding incidents to try and minimise damage and protect lives. Ideally we want to be in a position whereby improvements to infrastructure are undertaken to avoid or reduce these incidents from occurring. Our drainage officers have therefore been working hard to secure limited funding from Welsh Government to implement improvements to our ageing infrastructure in targeted areas with the aim of avoiding or reducing the frequency of such events. Improvements to the infrastructure are also being carried out in Ystalyfera and Skewen to reduce the likelihood of a flooding event in those areas given the number of events which have occurred. In addition to the direct work we undertake, we have also been working with NRW to secure improvements within the Canalside area of Neath, and a package of measures are being implemented to improve the safety of those residents. Unfortunately the impacts of climate change and the age

of our infrastructure suggests that we will continue to experience flash floods, but the efforts of the staff will minimise this impact where possible. With this in mind the team are currently revising the council's flood risk strategy to reflect current issues.

- 42 In addition to all of the above, the building services teams continue to undertake essential maintenance within our building assets including our schools, to ensure that they continue to operate safely, whilst other streetcare teams continue to enforce against those who illegally tip waste, clean streets, deliver pest control services, replace bus shelters, undertake improvements where practical to children's playgrounds, clear trees affected by Ash Dieback and replace with healthy trees, and undertake highway works to ensure that our roads are safe for pedestrians and vehicular users.

Transportation and Engineering

- 43 Officers within the service have been working with colleagues across the region together with Transport for Wales (TfW) and their appointed consultants to inform the potential route, and implementation plan associated with the South West Wales and Swansea Bay Metro. This scheme aims to improve connectivity and the frequency of services across the region in line with the objective of delivering more sustainable transport solutions. A report will be presented to Cabinet Board in September seeking authorisation to procure studies into the associated improvements in rail, bus, active travel, transport modelling and visioning and concept.
- 44 In order to deliver our Supporting Innovation and Low Carbon growth proposal within the harbourside area, officers within Transportation and Engineering have been working hard behind the scenes to design the remediation and essential infrastructure required to accommodate the proposed SWITCH facility (South Wales Industrial Transition from Carbon Hub) and the Advanced Manufacturing and Production Facility. That scheme has been designed and is currently under construction using a local contractor. These pre-works are essential in order to deliver our wider ambitions for this area which are to deliver important projects which will support our decarbonisation agenda and create high value employment opportunities.

45 The authority is statutorily obliged to prepare an Active Travel Network Map. This map is currently being reviewed by colleagues in Planning with assistance from officers in Transportation. The map highlights the location of existing routes which meet the design criteria of the Active Travel Act together with potential future routes which need investment and improvement. In terms of the latter, the service has been submitting grant applications on an annual basis to secure funding to undertake such improvements. These bids need to demonstrate value for money and as such the decisions from Welsh Government have been heavily influenced towards the authorities where there are large centres of population who can benefit from these routes. With this in mind large urban councils including Cardiff, Newport and Swansea have benefitted from the majority of the funding. Despite this, we have secured funding to deliver the following schemes:

- Blaengwrach to Glynneath route is currently under construction with completion due in April 2022.
- Tonna safe road crossing is currently under construction on site undertaking works to improve the safety of cyclist, pedestrians and drivers in Tonna. This work is due for completion in April 2022.
- Completion of a safe walking route between Dwr y Felin School and Weinceirch Primary school. This work is due for completion in April 2022.
- A number of other schemes are currently subject to consultation/promotion and include a route between Neath Port Talbot hospital and Baglan railway station.

46 Other larger scale highway infrastructure projects are also being implemented, including safety measures on the A4109 Intervally Road, pier strengthening to the Afan Valley river bridge, and the instalment of safety cameras at the traffic signals on Fabian Way and Afan Way.

47 Whilst a lot of schemes are currently under construction, officers are also coordinating the design and securing the funding for other major infrastructure improvements. These include the following:

- The White bridge in Cymmer has been on the council's risk register for some time and is critical to maintain vehicular access to Abercregan and Glyncorwg. Funding has been secured to design a replacement road bridge and agreement has been reached to undertake joint consultation with the Local Health Board who have a health centre in the path of the replacement bridge. The health centre is no longer fit for modern health and wellbeing purposes and an alternative location is being scoped. The detailed design of the bridge is due for completion in April 2022 with construction estimated to take 18 months.
- Work is underway to secure funding for the Neath Integrated Transport Hub. This will facilitate the relocation of the bus station from Victoria Gardens to the area immediately in front of the Neath railway station. Taxi facilities and cycle parking/charging facilities will also be integrated into the scheme as well as providing improved public realm.
- Neath Junction Improvements – The junction between Cimla Road, Victoria Gardens, Greenway Road and Eastland Road has been a bottleneck to traffic for many years. Not only is congestion problematic, but the vehicle emissions from idling traffic at this junction also causes an increase in nitrogen dioxide levels to the point that the council has been very close to having to declare an Air Quality Management Area. In addition to the aforementioned, the bottleneck also impacts upon the highway capacity of the surrounding network and as a consequence sterilises large areas of potential development land within the Cimla area. Given the shortage of appropriate development land, the infrastructure improvements in this area are essential. As a consequence, officers have prepared draft plans proposing a roundabout solution at the junction which should address all three areas of concern. This proposal has already been presented to CDG and has secured authorisation from the Streetscene and Engineering Cabinet Board to progress with land negotiations and submit a funding application. The funding submission is due in January 2022, but in the meantime, officers will be negotiating the purchase of land to enable its delivery.

48 Despite the restrictions of the pandemic the Road Safety school team moved their training online and when restrictions were lifted Summer 2020 were able to deliver the following:

- Kerbcraft – Child Pedestrian Training for 5- 7 years olds to 737 pupils
- Cycling – Cycle Training was delivered to children and young people during the school holidays as an alternative to accessing pupils via schools trained 81 pupils.
- Education delivered to 3-11 year olds via MS Teams – 4186 pupils
- Over 100 Secondary School Pupils had Road Safety Delivery over MS Teams.
- Young Drivers – 11 newly qualified young drivers trained in between restrictions.
- We cascaded information to the public and schools via Social Media as a way of keeping the public safe and informed.
- We utilised the schools HWB system, to directly deliver worksheets and information to pupils, parents / carers and teachers.

- 49 As a consequence of Storm Dennis, the significant fall of rain resulted in a landslide of an old coal tip within the Tylorstown area of Rhondda Cynon Taff. The dangers associated with former coal tips was amplified as a consequence of this incident and Welsh Government requested support from the Coal Authority who in turn established the Coal Tip Safety Taskforce. The role of that taskforce is to map all the coal tips throughout the country and rate their associated risk with 'A' being the lowest risk and 'D' being the highest. Officers within the Transportation and Engineering service had already started to map and inspect coal tips on council land and had rated them accordingly. Work had also commenced in the delivery of appropriate mitigation measures in relation to the high risk tips. As a result of this early work, the taskforce were able to utilise our existing database and build upon that for the benefit of other areas throughout the country. We have continued to support the taskforce throughout the process and fortunately most tips are within the 'A' risk band, with 6 in the 'B' band, 7 in the 'C' band and 3 in the 'D' band. We are currently securing funding to mitigate the dangers associated with the higher risk tips and early indications suggest that this funding from Welsh Government will be forthcoming but approval remains outstanding.
- 50 In February 2017 and again in August of that year, two landslides occurred to the rear of Cyfyng Road in Ystalyfera. Officers within Transport and Engineering were called out to inspect the landslides and assess the potential dangers to residents within neighbouring

properties. As a consequence of those inspections, specialist Geotechnical consultants were commissioned to advise the council on the complex geology within this area. In response to the advice received, officers within Environmental Health served Emergency Prohibition Orders on the owner/occupiers of those properties to secure their health and safety. Most complied but the council did have to defend its position at 2 packed public meetings as well as in a Property and Land Tribunal when the owners of three of those properties appealed the notices. The council successfully defended its position in the tribunal and all but one couple vacated the property. Officers within Environmental Health are still trying to remove these residents from their property given that there is a sheer unstable drop within about 3m of their back door. Advice has also been secured that works to stabilise this embankment are not deliverable nor affordable. In order to maintain their safety, officers continue to pursue legal processes to remove these residents and thus allow officers within Transport and Engineering to implement a phased demolition of the terrace. The pandemic has delayed this process but we continue to work hard to protect the health and safety of the affected community.

- 51 A short distance further south of the Pantteg area lies the area of Godrergraig. This area has been the subject of geological movement for many years with large areas of housing having been demolished by the former Lliw Valley as a consequence. Following ground modelling undertaken by the council's specialist geotechnical consultants, a report was commissioned to establish the potential risk associated with a quarry spoil tip which was located on land elevated above a primary school, 'Godrergraig Primary School'. This modelling identified that the tip was marginally stable resulting in a medium risk of material slipping from the tip and engulfing the rear yard/playground of the school. The material was unlikely to extend beyond that point as the building would effectively act as a barrier to the onward movement of material. Despite this it was considered that the risk to those in the playground was considered too high and a decision was made to temporarily close the building and relocate the children to a temporary alternative. Our engineers have continued to work with the consultants to confirm that the risk to surrounding residential areas was either low or very low and residents were advised accordingly. Monitoring work has continued at this location and further recorded movement in the tip has resulted in an increase in the risk from marginally stable to actively unstable. Work continues in this area to identify what options could be pursued at this location together with their associated costs. The preliminary findings have

been the subject of a virtual public meeting with a further meeting proposed early in 2022.

- 52 The above report should give a general flavour of the work which has been delivered during the pandemic and continues to be delivered by our hardworking team of dedicated staff. This report does not outline all of the work carried out by the Directorate as that is so diverse it would be difficult to give all officers the credit they deserve. The Directorate does however produce A-Z documents for each Head of Service and their associated teams which outlines all of the services we deliver and who to contact to access those services. There are made available to Cllrs following their election, to enable them to familiarise themselves with our diverse Directorate.

Recommendation: For Information

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