

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in COUNCIL CHAMBER, RUSSELL HOUSE, RHYL on Thursday, 13 September 2012 at 10.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors James Davies, Carys Guy-Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Chair), Win Mullen-James, Bob Murray, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams
Councillor Hugh Evans attended as an observer

ALSO PRESENT

R Maxwell (Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition) and H Williams (Corporate Director: Communities and Learning) Rhyl Going Forward Programme Manager (TB) Scrutiny Coordinator (RE) and Administrative Officer (CIW).

The Chair and Members of the Committee expressed their congratulations to Councillor J.M. Davies following his recent marriage and welcomed the Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition to her first meeting of the Committee.

Prior to the meeting Committee members had participated in a visit to the key sites linked to the Rhyl Going Forward Programme.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rhys Hughes

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No personal or prejudicial interests were declared.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items were raised which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

4 MINUTES

The Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 16th July, 2012 were submitted.

***RESOLVED** – that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

5 WEST RHYL REGENERATION WORKSTREAM

A copy of a report by the Rhyl Going Forward Programme Manager (RGFPM), which provided an update on the progress in implementing the West Rhyl

Regeneration Workstream of the Rhyl Going Forward Regeneration Strategy, the financial implications and the progress or prospects in terms of benefits realisation, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

In order to deliver effectively, the work of the Rhyl Going Forward Regeneration Strategy had been organised into workstreams:-

- West Rhyl Regeneration Area
- Tourism & the Coastal Strip
- Retail & the Town Centre

The West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project (WRHIP) was a continuation of the ongoing work in West Rhyl under the North Wales Coast Strategic Regeneration Area (NWCRA). The aims and benefits of the Project were outlined in the report as were the responsibilities of the WRHIP Board for the delivery of the project. The RGFPM explained that addressing the long-standing issues in the area would help to create a more positive impression of the town overall and thereby have more far-reaching regeneration benefits. By creating a more balanced community the project would reduce deprivation in the area, which had been one of the key outcomes of the priority. It would also boost private sector confidence in Rhyl and stimulate further private sector investment and confidence by creating new jobs, business opportunities and boost tourism.

Reference was made by the Chair of the need to acknowledge and address the weaknesses identified by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) in its Annual Improvement Report on the Council, published in January 2012, which noted gaps in the Council's mechanisms and support for the Programme.

The RGFPM referred members to the report and associated appendices which detailed how the project would directly impact on the proposed new Corporate Priorities, its estimated costs and funding streams, the risks identified with respect to its delivery, and the communication and consultation undertaken with the community in the area. It was emphasised that the funding had been allocated specifically for the WRHIP project and could not be utilised outside Rhyl or on alternative projects. Reference was made to Block 1, the Urban Park, which entailed the transformation of the area into a green area. Concern had been expressed that the post-project delivery could have financial implications with regard to the maintenance of the green space, and this issue would need to be addressed with the developers as the possible options and responsibilities would be a key element in the design and planning process. Members were informed that draft supplementary planning guidance had been produced which outlined the future development of the area.

In response to a question the RGFPM explained that an agreement had been reached, solely with Clwyd Alyn Housing Association, that in order to address timescales people currently residing within the project area would be afforded a level of prioritisation in respect of their housing list.

Councillor J.M. Davies highlighted the importance of the need to change the perception of Rhyl throughout the United Kingdom, and the significance of obtaining

a major attraction in the town to attract and entice visitors to Rhyl. The RGFPM confirmed that work had been undertaken jointly with the Head of Communication, Marketing and Leisure to address this issue by encouraging private sector investment in the town and a significant degree of success had already been achieved with a high level of outside interest already being shown in the town. He explained that Denbighshire had been working with its strategic partner Alliance Leisure to try and map out appropriate events and facility provision for the present and future. These included the possible redevelopment and replacement of the Sun Centre. Councillor W. Mullen-James referred to the success of recent events held in Rhyl and the positive feedback received from those who had attended.

During the ensuing discussion the following issues were highlighted:-

- the importance of marketing Rhyl across the UK and to an international audience;
- the importance of the connectivity of the projects with one another, with the wider economic regeneration agenda for the County, and that of the North Wales area in general – the need to ensure that projects and initiatives complemented and supported each other;
- the need to create and attract skilled, well-paid, sustainable employment opportunities to the Rhyl area; and
- the need to distinguish and clarify the overall aims and end gain in the delivery of the projects for Rhyl and be clear on the future sustainable vision for the town and surrounding area

The Committee:

RESOLVED – that, subject to the above observations to receive the report and note Members comments.

6 RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRE WORKSTREAM

A copy of a report by the Rhyl Going Forward Programme Manager, which provided an update on the Retail and the Town Centre Workstream of the Rhyl Going Forward Regeneration Strategy, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The report outlined progress in terms implementing the Retail and the Town Centre Workstream of the Strategy, its financial implications, and the progress or prospects in terms of benefits realisation. Progress of the workstream had been monitored by the RGF Neighbourhoods and Places Programme Board. Particular reference was made to the following key projects and their significance:

- Bus Station refurbishment.
- Appointment of a Town Centre Manager.
- Bee and Station Office development.
- Costigans.
- Rhyl Market.
- Other projects and activities.

It was explained that the town centre workstream had been the one of the least well defined in terms of direction of travel and overall strategy. The need to develop a clear vision for the town centre was stressed and a possible approach to the strategy for Rhyl Town Centre was outlined in the report. Reference was made to the fact that this workstream would support the delivery of the proposed new Corporate Priority of Developing the Local Economy and Our Communities, as the main aim of the workstream was to increase footfall in the town centre and create more business opportunities and jobs in the tourism sector.

Members were informed that a number of service areas were involved in the plans, varying by the nature of the project. Key service areas which had a regular input and engagement in the regeneration plans included Leisure Services, Public Realm, Property Services and Planning. It was emphasised that to have a successful town centre a number of issues and risks would need to be recognised and addressed, and these had been outlined in the report.

Members stressed the need to enhance the current employment market in the area and ensure that the development of the projects included employment prospects for local residents within the community. The RGFPM referred to the proposed development of the Honey Club site which was anticipated to provide between 30 and 40 jobs in the area. He informed the Committee that Denbighshire had been working with the developer, and would also continue to work with their partner organisation Rhyl City Strategy who provided training to develop the skills required to meet the employment requirements of investors. Reference was made to the new retail development in Prestatyn and the establishment of a retail skills academy in conjunction with Job Centre Plus. Prospective local employees there would be trained to acquire the essential skills and qualifications in readiness for possible future employment. Members agreed with the view expressed that the impact of the redevelopment of Rhyl and Prestatyn should fit and complement the regeneration plan for the rest of the County.

Reference was made to the possible detrimental effect on Rhyl of the relocation of the Marks and Spencer store to Prestatyn. Members agreed that it would be imperative to encourage key retailers to invest in Rhyl to enable the town to become a prime retail location and a major attraction for visitors from outside the area. It was also emphasised that any such development or investment would need to be sustainable to ensure long-term accomplishment of the aims for the area.

In response to a question, officers agreed that concerns raised regarding the negative impression created by Rhyl Railway Station being unmanned at various times, particularly during the evenings, could be conveyed to Network Rail.

Whilst the offer of reduced business rates to attract inward investment or encourage new business enterprises had merits, there was a general consensus of opinion that any offer of concessions or reduced business rates to encourage investment should be exercised throughout the County and not concentrated in one particular area. The RGFPM confirmed that there were development opportunities in respect of the Queen's Market site. However, although Denbighshire was a facilitator, the

site was in private ownership and in the current stagnant economic climate potential developers were nervous of investing. The Committee:

RESOLVED – *subject to the above observations to note the progress achieved to date.*

7 TOURISM AND COASTAL STRIP WORKSTREAM

A copy of a report by the Rhyl Going Forward Programme Manager, which provided an update on the implementation of the Tourism & Coastal Strip Workstream of the Rhyl Going Forward (RGF) Regeneration Strategy, its financial implications and the progress or prospects in terms of benefits realisation, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Coastal Strip from the Foryd Harbour to Splash Point had long been the focus for tourist related activity in Rhyl. The approach would be to build on Rhyl's reputation as a family resort and details of the future proposals and short-term focus were outlined for the Committee. Progress with the workstream was monitored by the RGF Neighbourhoods and Places Programme Board.

Reference was made in the report and associated appendices to the key projects which were part of this workstream. These being:

- Apollo Cinema refurbishment.
- Rhyl Coastal Defence Works.
- Foryd Harbour & Bridge – which included a pedestrian and cycle bridge, public square with quayside building and new quay walls.
- Honey Club Refurbishment.
- Ocean Plaza.
- Rhyl Sky Tower.
- Other projects and activities.
- Future Plans

This workstream would contribute to the proposed new Corporate Priority of Developing the Local Economy and Our Communities, the main aim of the programme being to increase visitor numbers, and create more business opportunities and jobs in the tourism sector. The Tourism workstream did not have a dedicated budget with funding being allocated to specific projects, in the main utilising external funding sources, and this was monitored on a project by project basis. Regular input and engagement into the regeneration plans were being received from Leisure Services, Public Realm, Property Services and Planning.

The Committee was informed that to create a stronger tourist economy and address the negative image of Rhyl a number of issues and risks, outlined in the report, would need to be recognised and addressed.

Reference was made to the report included as Appendix 4, which provided information on the current position and future of the Rhyl Sky Tower. The RGFPM provided a summary of the report and Members discussed the three main options for consideration which included:-

- Option 1 - Refurbish and reinstate as a ride.
- Option 2 - Dismantle and remove.
- Option 3 - Retain structure for a new use.

The tower structure was sound which provided an option to retain it. Option 3, to retain the structure for a new use, was the preferred Option recommended by the officers in the report, and it had been anticipated that this would form the basis of a report to Cabinet in October 2012. The Rhyl Member Area Group (MAG) had been requested to indicate which of the detailed options, or alternative options, they considered to be the most appropriate for the tower. Councillor W. Mullen-James conveyed the views expressed by the Rhyl MAG, at its meeting the previous evening, and explained that the MAG was in favour of Option 1.

The following matters were discussed regarding the future options for the tower:-

- The proposed financial implications for restoring the tower as a working ride could not be justified as it would be difficult to formulate a business case for this option
- Alternative uses for the tower should be explored and options sought to obtain sponsorship deals
- The views of the residents in Rhyl should be sought regarding the tower's future use.
- Consideration should be given to advertising for the supply of a privately operated big wheel ride, possibly sited near the Marine Lake, as sited at other tourist attractions and locations
- The need to examine the wider options regarding the future of the tower and how they would be encompassed in the RGF Plan.

The Leader highlighted the importance of providing clarification in terms of the approach, purpose and aims of the RGF Strategy, and also the role of the Programme Board and its remit in terms of specific responsibilities. He referred to the need to link each of the projects within the wider plan and identify the overall objectives in terms of aims and anticipated targets. It was also stressed that the branding of Rhyl would be important along with the need to instil confidence in order to encourage private sector investment in the Town.

The Chair outlined the need to have or attract a landmark hotel or similar establishment to Rhyl. He also emphasised the need to monitor and evaluate the development of the projects and ensure that the RGF Programme was cohesive with the wider regeneration programme for Denbighshire.

During the ensuing discussion, the Committee supported the view expressed by the Chair that the Committee receive quarterly monitoring reports in respect of the RGF Programme to evaluate the progress of the Programme. It was:

RESOLVED – that:-

(a) subject to the above observations, to receive the report and note the progress made with respect to the Tourism and Coastal Strip Workstream;

(b) a monitoring report in respect of the Rhyl Going Forward Programme be presented to the Committee to enable it to evaluate the progress achieved in delivering the Programme;

(c) Cabinet be requested to recommend that the Rhyl Going Forward Programme Board's terms of reference be expanded to include ensuring that every effort is made as part of the Programme to attract and create skilled and sustainable employment opportunities in the area;

(d) all projects connect, support and complement each other and the wider economic regeneration agenda for the County and the North Wales area as a whole; and

(e) that the overall aims and vision for Rhyl's sustainable future be clarified and communicated widely

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Coordinator which reviewed the draft Forward Work Programme for the Partnership Scrutiny Committee and provided an update on the relevant issues, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The Scrutiny Coordinator informed Members that responses to issues raised at the previous meeting had been included in the Information Brief circulated previously.

Members were informed that due to time constraints it had not been possible to include Hafan Deg Day Centre in the itinerary for the tour of key sites. However, Members could visit Hafan Deg by making arrangements with the officer in charge.

The Committee considered the draft Forward Work Programme for future meetings as detailed in Appendix 1. Having regard for the optimum number of agenda items to be transacted at a meeting, Members agreed that the following amendments be included in the FWP for the Committee:-

- The Committee agreed that a progress report on the Rhyl Going Forward Regeneration Workstreams should be submitted to the Committee on a quarterly basis.

- Performance Scrutiny Committee had requested that Communities Scrutiny Committee assume responsibility for scrutinising Denbighshire's draft new tenancy agreement and handbook, as Members felt that the item aligned itself to Communities Scrutiny Committee's remit. The Committee agreed that a consultation report be circulated seeking Members views and observations.

Bus Service Reductions Working Group - The Working Group established by Communities Scrutiny Committee had met on the 2nd August, 2012 and a copy of the notes of the meeting had been included as Appendix 4 to the report. The Working Group's findings and recommendations were due to be reported to Cabinet on the 25th September, 2012.

Appointment of Committee Representatives on Council Groups and Boards - Members agreed that Councillor W. Mullen-James be appointed as the Committee's representative to serve on the Corporate Equalities Group, with

Councillor H.O. Williams being appointed as the Committee's substitute representative the Group. In Councillor Mullen-James' absence Councillor Williams would attend the meeting scheduled for 8th October, 2012.

The Scrutiny Coordinator referred to Appendix 1 of the Information Brief which contained a statement on Joint Faith Based Education Provision. She also explained that sessions had been arranged on the 17th and 27th September, 2012 to provide information for Members pertaining to the Council's Modernising Education Programme. Reference was made to Appendix 2 of the Information Report, Planning and Public Protection Services, Major Infrastructure Projects: Communications Strategy (Draft Document). Members were requested to forward any views or comments regarding the draft strategy to the Planning Officer: Renewable Energy Schemes.

The Corporate Director: Customers explained that following a request at a previous meeting, a draft strategy had been developed to address the problem of dog fouling in the County. It was explained that a Workshop had been arranged for all Councillors and would be held on the 7th November, 2012.

Following further discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED – that:-

- (a) subject to the above amendments, to approve the Future Work Programme as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, and*
- (b) Councillor W. Mullen-James be appointed as the Committee's representative on the Corporate Equalities Group with Councillor H.O. Williams being appointed as the substitute representative*

9 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillor W. Mullen-James explained that she had been unable to attend the Conwy and Denbighshire Collaboration Programme Board meeting on the 12th September, 2012 due to her attendance at a Licensing Committee meeting.

Meeting ended at 11.45 a.m.