

PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 26 May 2016 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Raymond Bartley, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones (Chair), Meirick Davies, Martyn Holland, Pat Jones and Pete Prendergast

Ward Member – Councillor Joan Butterfield

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Communities (NS), Corporate Director: Economic and Community Ambition (RM), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

Peter James, Regeneration Manager, Welsh Government
Graham Worthington, Chief Executive, Clwyd Alyn/Pennaf Housing, and
Phil Danson (Business Development Director, North Wales Housing.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dewi Owens, Arwel Roberts, Bill Tasker and the Leader.

At this juncture, it was agreed to vary the order of the Agenda in order to accommodate the speakers for Item 6 – West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project.

2 WEST RHYL HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Councillor Joan Butterfield declared a personal interest in this item as she was a Member of the Community Housing Trust.

The Chair, Councillor Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones welcomed the three guest speakers to the meeting, namely:

- Peter James – Regeneration Manager, Welsh Government
- Graham Worthington – Chief Executive, Clwyd Alyn / Pennaf Housing, and
- Phil Danson – Business Development Director, North Wales Housing

At this point, the Corporate Director: Economy & Public Realm, tendered the Leader's apologies for not being able to attend the meeting, in his role as Lead Member for the Economy due to a prior engagement.

The Corporate Director: Economy & Public Realm introduced the report to provide an update on progress with delivery of one element of the Rhyl Regeneration programme – the West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project (WRHIP).

The objective of the project would be to attract more economically active people to live in the western area of the town, to support the economy and the community to thrive. The scheme was initiated to change people's perception of the area and of Rhyl in general.

The project was a multi-agency partnership involving the Welsh Government (WG), Housing Associations, the Council and private sector partners.

A presentation was delivered by Peter James, Regeneration Manager (WG) which outlined the following:

- The history and background of the project
- The various stages in planning the different levels and types of intervention required
- Illustrated the intervention area, project budget and timescales for the project
- Individual projects which had been completed, currently underway or proposed for each of the 6 zones
- Issues which had come to light during the project – including the success stories, complex matters, how they had been surmounted and lessons learnt during the project's delivery, and
- Future issues / next steps.

Peter James (WG) explained why the WG had decided that intervention had been required in Rhyl. It had been to attempt to reverse the continued decline of the area as the area suffered from poor housing conditions which, in itself, had been a major stumbling block for economic regeneration. There had been a large demographic imbalance, as a large section of the local population were single males, and both of those factors had led to a circle of non-investment in the area.

A housing needs analysis had been carried out which identified a shortage of family orientated housing in the area and an imbalance in the area's housing tenure. A large number of properties in the area were privately owned but in very poor condition and, therefore, negotiating their purchase had been an extremely complex and time consuming process. A total of 120 properties had been purchased, the majority via Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs). The CPO process had been instigated in 2013 and had probably been the most complex urban regeneration project in Wales which involved residential properties. On completion of the WRHIP approximately £27million would have been invested in west Rhyl comprising of WG, County Council, other public bodies, and private sector money.

Peter James (WG) then went on and:-

- Advised that the biggest risk initially had been the resettlement of the residents from the properties which had been compulsory purchased. However, all residents had been successfully resettled without any negative comments being received
- Advised that the project was approximately 6-7 months behind schedule but, due to the complex nature of the project and the poor condition of some of the properties, which had been made the subject of CPOs, the slippage was understandable and manageable

- Detailed the timeframe, planned outcomes and progress of work related to each of the 7 zones
- Informed Members that zones 3 and 5 had now been incorporated into one zone in a bid to attract interest from the business sector with a view to developing a mixture of business / leisure and residential developments
- Outlined the different types and tenure of housing that were to be built or refurbished in the area
- Gave an overview of the efforts underway to establish a community ethos in the area with the development of tenants' associations/co-operatives responsible for running and managing the properties and a community store run by residents for residents
- Detailed the types of courses being run for the purpose of preparing residents to carry out the above duties and furnishing them with the necessary skills to undertake the work
- Emphasised that regular communication with residents was key to the regeneration project's success as residents had been living on a "building site" for a considerable amount of time
- Explained that whilst the ultimate aim of the project would be to attract private sector partners into the area to invest and run their businesses from the area, the public sector's role had been to lay the foundations and instil pride and ambition back into the area and community to try and entice private sector interest and investment
- Advised that the initial timeframe and costings for the project had largely been based on assumptions as none of the partners had the power to inspect the properties' condition before the CPOs were served. It had been only when the CPOs were granted and the Council took possession of the properties that the true severity of their conditions came to light. Lessons had been learnt throughout the project and evidence of good outcomes for residents and the town of Rhyl were beginning to be displayed
- Explained that for the first time in years, interest was being shown in buying and letting family properties in the area; and
- Confirmed that all partners would continue to focus on neighbourhood initiatives in the area with a view to creating a sense of pride and community amongst residents.

Responding to Members' questions, the representatives:

- Advised that there had been misrepresentations made and incorrect reporting of facts with respect to allegations that housing in the west end of Rhyl had been advertised in prisons. None of the housing associations or other public bodies had advertised housing in prisons
- Confirmed that Pennaf Housing were working closely with the community in a bid to reduce and eliminate anti-social behaviour (ASB). It had appointed two ASB officers and took allegations of anti-social behaviour, including fly-tipping, very seriously
- Advised that the Housing Associations were heavily involved with community events etc., at which residents' social and community responsibility roles were emphasised and championed
- Advised that persons who suffered domestic abuse would have the possibility open to them of potentially moving to secure accommodation

provided by agencies with whom the RSLs worked, or to access abuse support groups

- Emphasised that ASB was not confined to social housing areas, it occurred across the county. Latest figures indicated that in Denbighshire ASB had been down 50% on the previous year, with crime rates down by 30%
- Pennaf reassured Members that they were not redirecting their efforts from the remainder of the WRHIP to the properties on Edward Henry Street. Work had commenced there following receipt of a joint pilot study with the WG which had indicated that one property required urgent attention. Pennaf were confident that the Council would support them in this work
- Confirmed that the Community Land Trust properties should be completed by September 2016. The delivery of the houses had been hampered by inclement weather conditions and a shortage of bricklayers
- Confirmed that Rhyl College was aware of the shortage in the bricklaying trade. Taster days had been held in schools in a bid to attract pupils to train for a trade. Property developers were also working with the College with a view to addressing the shortage
- Contracts for the WRHIP specifically stipulated that appointed contractors were required to employ apprentices with a view to developing a skills base in the local community and economy. The Project would also be subject to a Community Benefit Audit by the WG to evaluate the extent of the Project's benefits for the community and economy as a whole
- Advised that they were eager to see whether having an appropriate mix of tenure, as well as tenants involved with the management of their properties, nurtured a sense of pride in the area
- Advised that of all the properties acquired as part of the WRHIP only approximately 12 of the landlords lived out of the area. There were three major property portfolio holders in Rhyl all of whom were based in Birmingham
- Outlined their Housing Allocations Policies. For the rented sector they were based on the prospective tenant's housing needs and the family's vulnerability level. Work was continuing between the Council and the RSLs to bring forward a Common Allocations Policy (CAP) for social housing. Compatibility of IT systems had been a problem and the Council's Head of Service was currently exploring measures to surmount these problems and progress the matter
- Explained that affordability formed part of the assessment for shared ownership properties
- Advised that with respect to Zone 4, 14-24 John Street, a local developer had been interested but, unfortunately, he could not draw down sufficient financial resources to develop it in line with the partners' specification. Nevertheless, another small local developer was now interested in developing the site and the Council and the other partners were working with the Company to bring the project to fruition. The intention was still for this site to be a mixed site, as per the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). If, at any time, anyone wanted to change these proposals, an application to amend the SPG would need to be submitted to the Planning Department, and presented to the Planning Committee for approval to vary or change
- Confirmed interest had been shown by developers in Zone 3, now that Zone 5 had been incorporated into it. Whilst it had been acknowledged that the

progress with this Zone had been slower than anticipated, partners were more confident now that it would eventually be developed in line with their plans

- Confirmed that the chimney stacks shown in the illustrated photographs of the proposed residential properties were for cosmetic purposes only
- Advised that of the 120 families that had moved out of the properties in the west Rhyl area to enable the Project to be undertaken, 119 of them had remained in Rhyl and 1, at their own request, had moved out of the area
- Confirmed that the CPO purchase prices had been determined without being able to access the properties to undertake structural surveys, and
- Confirmed that the rent levels for the new properties had been set at the intermediate rent level – mid-way between Council/RSL rent levels and private rent levels. The rent level would not reduce in future, however, it was anticipated that in the medium to long-term a number of the tenants would buy their properties.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chair thanked all representatives for attending and answering Members' questions. The Chair and the Committee were of the view that the WRHIP when completed would fit in well with the new vision for Rhyl and felt re-assured that the Project would be delivered in its entirety in due course.

RESOLVED that subject to the above observations, to receive the report and presentation on the progress to date with delivering the West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project and proposed future developments to deliver the Project in its entirety.

3 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, nominations were requested for the office of Vice-Chair of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Martyn Holland nominated Councillor Raymond Bartley, seconded by Councillor Pat Jones.

RESOLVED that Councillor Raymond Bartley be appointed Vice-Chair of Partnerships Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing year.

4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Joan Butterfield declared a personal interest in West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project.

5 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent items.

6 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of a Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 14 April, 2016 were submitted.

Matters arising:-

Page 7 – Item 6 – Single Point of Access (SPoA).

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, offered thanks to the staff who made Members welcome during the visit on 14 April, 2016 which had been extremely informative.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, which requested the Committee to review and agree its Forward Work Programme and provided an update on relevant issues, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

A copy of the “Member’s proposal form” template had been included at Appendix 2, Cabinet’s Forward Work Programme had been included as Appendix 3, and a table summarising recent Committee resolutions and advising on progress with their implementation had been attached at Appendix 4.

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme for future meetings.

At a recent meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group, it had been agreed that a report on the North Wales Safeguarding Boards be included on the Committee’s agenda for its next meeting on 7 July and that a report on the Denbighshire Well-being Plan be presented to the Committee at the October 2016 meeting.

The Corporate Director: Communities gave members a brief overview of the Regional Safeguarding Boards’ work.

Committee representation on Service Challenge Groups were discussed and updated.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Work Programme set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

Councillors Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones and Meirick Lloyd Davies gave feedback regarding the Highways & Environmental Services Service Challenge meeting which they had recently attended.

At this juncture, Councillor Raymond Bartley wished to inform Members that Dolwen Residential Care Home would be celebrating its 50th Anniversary the following week.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 a.m.