

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, RUTHIN AND BY VIDEO CONFERENCE on Thursday, 30 June 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Brian Blakeley, Karen Edwards, Jon Harland, Delyth Jones, Michelle Walker, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair)

Observers – Councillors Joan Butterfield, Andrea Tomlin, Emrys Wynne and Martyn Hogg

ALSO PRESENT

Strategic Planning and Housing Officer (AL); Senior Planning Officer (LG); Public Protection, Regeneration & Economic Development Manager (GR); Head of Finance and Property Service (SG), Joint Acting Head of Business Improvement Management (NK); Business Support Manager (PB); Senior Revenues Officer (LG); Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE); Zoom and Webcast host (SJ); and Committee Administrator (SLW).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors James Elson, Alan James and Merfyn Parry

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Nominations were sought for the office of Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2022/23 year.

Councillor Brian Blakeley nominated Councillor Karen Edwards for the position of Committee Vice-Chair. Councillor Delyth Jones seconded Councillor Blakeley's nomination.

No other nominations were received and by a unanimous vote the Committee:

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Karen Edwards as its Vice-Chair for the 2022/23 municipal year.

Councillor Karen Edwards thanked everyone for their confidence in her to be Vice-Chair of Communities Scrutiny Committee.

4 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 March 2022 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2022 be received and approved as a correct and true record of proceedings.

No matters were raised in relation to the contents of the minutes

6 RHYL REGENERATION PROGRAMME

At this juncture, the Chair informed the Committee that the Leader, Councillor Jason McLellan and the Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services were both unable to attend the meeting, due to a prior arranged engagement.

The Joint Acting Head of Business Improvement (BIM), Nicola Kneale, introduced the Rhyl Regeneration Programme and Governance Report (previously circulated) to outline the work undertaken through the Rhyl Regeneration Programme.

Rhyl Regeneration had been a Council (and Welsh Government (WG)) priority for many years due to the level of deprivation in the town. The top 2 most deprived wards in Wales were located in West Rhyl, together with in and around the Town Centre.

A considerable amount of investment had taken place in the regeneration of Rhyl, supported by significant grant funding.

The current phase of regeneration activity built on the foundations laid over previous years with the focus on the regeneration of the Town Centre.

The Rhyl Regeneration Executive Group had been re-established in July 2020 as the Rhyl Regeneration Programme Board. The Programme Board was responsible for overseeing the Council's contribution to the delivery of the Town Centre Vision along with managing any Council led regeneration projects in the town.

Taking the lead from the Town Centre Vision, the focus of the Programme Board was divided into 5 main work streams:-

- Retail and Commercial
- Environment
- Queens Buildings
- Residential
- Highways and Access.

The Joint Acting Head of Business Improvement (BIM), supported the Rhyl Community Development Board and was also a member of the Rhyl Regeneration Programme Board. The Boards Chairs worked closely with the Leader of the Council and it ensured good communication between the two Boards, and the Council with work continuing towards the same goals.

The Public Protection, Regeneration & Economic Development Manager (PPR&EDM), Gareth Roberts, introduced the governance arrangements which support the work.

The Rhyl vision had been through a lengthy consultation process. Up to recently the main source of funding had been from the Welsh Government (WG) but applications had recently been submitted to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund.

The PPR&EDM summarised the list of projects contained in Appendix 2. The main projects were as follows -

Item 1 - Queens Building had been the largest project. The original building had been demolished, but the construction of a new building had been delayed due to nesting seagulls. The development included the construction of a food and market hall, flexible events space and association external public realm. The main contractors had been appointed and were to set up the compound adjacent to the site.

Item 13 – Gateway 1 & 2. The council acquired 131 and 123-129 High Street to create a green space / public realm. 123-125 High Street had recently been demolished as the building had been in an extremely dangerous condition. The road needed to be closed for the demolition to take place. Designs for the site were currently being developed.

Item 11 – Public Realm Strategy. This was part of the Levelling Up Fund and linked in to Item 9 – Reconnect the top of Rhyl High Street and the Beach.

There was still a large amount of work to be undertaken regarding shop fronts and the Enforcement Team were involved.

During discussions, the following points were raised –

- The former Woolworth's building at the top of the High Street was mentioned as an eyesore site. Officers confirmed the owner of the property had been contacted and he was keen for work to be done. There had also been issues with the glazing in the windows which had been a danger to pedestrians and the owner was tackling that issue.
- Issue with cars parking on the pedestrian only part of the High Street as the barrier was no longer working. It was confirmed that a temporary barrier would be put back in place and a consultant had been contacted for a more permanent solution. Parking Enforcement officers were also increasing patrols in the area.
- It was confirmed that the Levelling Up Fund bid by Denbighshire was a strong bid but the Council was waiting to hear whether it had been

successful or not. If that bid was unsuccessful WG would be approached as it was a key partner in the regeneration programme for Rhyl and other sources of funding would be explored.

- Some of the points put forward were not appropriate for discussion at the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting and members were advised to raise them at a meeting of the Rhyl Member Area Group.
- The PPR&EDM undertook to circulate more detailed information on the different types of rental properties that would be developed as part of the programme, including Intermediate Rental Apartments.
- It was suggested that the item be reviewed annually but if any member of Scrutiny wished to scrutinise any area of the regeneration plan they could put the proposal form forward for consideration prior to the 12-month period.
- It was confirmed that there was a monthly update to Cabinet as part of the regular Finance report which detailed spending on Major Schemes report. All members were welcome to attend that meeting to monitor the major schemes for the regeneration of Rhyl.

Councillor Brian Blakeley proposed the agreement of the report including an annual review be presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee, seconded by Councillor Michelle Walker. The Committee:

RESOLVED subject to the above:

- (i) to receive and agree the report; and
- (ii) request that a further monitoring report be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.

7 SECOND HOMES AND SHORT-TERM HOLIDAY LETS

At this juncture, the Chair informed the Committee that the Lead Member, Councillor Win Mullen-James was unable to attend the meeting due to illness.

The Strategic Planning and Housing Manager, Angela Loftus, introduced the Planning Requirements in Relation to Second Homes and Short-Term Holiday Lets Report (previously circulated), to provide information on the current planning requirements and controls available in relation to second homes and short term holiday lets.

The report was confined to consideration of the use of market properties for second homes or short term holiday lets. A second home was defined for council tax purposes, as a dwelling which was not a person's sole or main home and was substantially furnished. A short term holiday let was generally considered to be where a property was let for the purposes of a holiday only; the guest would have a main home elsewhere and the let was for less than 3 months.

The Welsh Government had been reviewing the situation regarding second homes and short term holiday lets, addressing the impact on Wales' communities. The Welsh Government approach was to focus on:-

- Support – addressing affordability and availability of housing;

- Regulatory framework and system – covering planning law and the introduction of a statutory registration scheme for holiday accommodation; and
- A fairer contribution – using national and local taxation systems to ensure second home owners make a fair and effective contribution to the communities in which they buy.

There was to be a pilot area in Wales, to be decided over the summer, where the new measures would be trialled and evaluated before being considered for wider rollout.

Other supporting actions, including the work on a registration scheme for all holiday accommodation and a consultation on changes to local taxes to manage the impact of second homes and self-catered accommodation, were also to commence over the summer.

A Welsh Language Community Housing Plan, to protect the particular interests of Welsh language communities, would be published for consultation in the autumn.

Last year, Wales became the only country in the UK to give local authorities the power to charge 100% council tax increase on second homes. The Welsh Government (WG) introduced this in 2017 and it was approved by Council at DCC in 2018.

The WG had undertaken a consultation exercise, which had closed in February 2022, on 'Planning legislation and policy for second homes and short-term holiday lets'. Whilst the results of the consultation were yet to be fully published, the three-pronged approach outlined in the WG's press release formed part of the Government's response to the findings of that consultation exercise.

During discussions the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised that some holiday homes were left empty during the winter months and this was frustrating as so many local people and families were looking for homes.
- It was confirmed that Council Tax was an unhypothecated tax and therefore could not legally be earmarked/ring-fenced for specific purposes. Currently, Council Tax for second homes in Denbighshire was charged at 150% but after April 2023 the local authority would be permitted to take a decision on whether to increase to 300%.
- The decision as to whether a property was a second home or a holiday-let property and whether it was liable for National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) or Council Tax was determined by the Valuation Office and not the local authority. Owners of properties that may qualify for registration as NNDR properties would have to apply to the Valuation Office for a determination, otherwise they would be liable to pay Council Tax. The introduction of a licensing scheme for these types of properties may help reduce the number of properties that registered as NNDR properties and subsequently benefited from the Small Business Rate Relief provision which meant that they would not be paying any taxes despite the fact that people who stayed at the accommodation were able to access local services.

- It was agreed there needed to be a fair process as tourism was extremely important to the area but there was a need for local housing.

Councillor Brian Blakeley proposed the report, seconded by Karen Edwards.

Members unanimously:

RESOLVED: *subject to the above observations -*

(i) to receive the report; and

(ii) to request that an update report be presented to the Committee when the full results of the Welsh Government consultation were published.

At this juncture, the Chair thanked the officers for all their good work.

8 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator introduced the report (previously circulated) seeking members review of the Committee's work programme and providing an update on relevant issues.

Discussion focussed on the following:–

- The Scrutiny Coordinator informed members that this agenda item was a standard item on the agenda for every meeting.
- Appendix 1 was the forward work programme for the next meeting which would take place on 8 September. There were 2 substantial items on the forward work programme.
- Two items from this meeting has been added to a future meeting – Rhyl Regeneration Programme and Second Homes & short-term holiday lets.
- Prior to Covid, it had been usual practice to hold a pre-meeting. This could now be held virtually a few days prior to the meeting if Committee members were in agreement. It was agreed to discuss further at the next Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs meeting.
- There was a process in place contained in Appendix 2 which included a form for completion if members wished for an item to be considered for presentation at Scrutiny Committee. The form would be submitted to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs group for consideration at which they would go through the test which was on the reverse of the form, and a decision would then be made whether the item was suitable for Scrutiny and which Committee would be asked to consider it.
- Appendix 3 was the Cabinet Forward Work Programme for information.
- Appendix 4 was an update on recommendations from the last meeting.

There would usually be a further standard item on the agenda which was feedback from members who serve as Committee representatives on various boards or groups. This item would be reinstated once the allocation of members to those groups has taken place.

All members present agreed to the items listed on the forward work programme.

At the conclusion of the discussion Members:

RESOLVED *subject to the above additions to receive and confirm the Committee's forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.*

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 11.50 A.M.