

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Lower Wye Area Committee held
at Chepstow Leisure Centre - Chepstow on Wednesday, 17th July, 2019 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Dovey (Chair)
County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: L.Brown, R.J.W. Greenland and P. Murphy

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Rachel Lewis	Planning Policy Manager
Jill Edge	Senior Planning Policy Officer
Judith Langdon	Communities and Partnership Development Lead
Ryan Coleman	Community Focused School Business Manager

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

A. Braund	
J. Anderson	
S. Squires	
N. Vincent	
Councillor P. Farley	St. Arvans Community Council
I. Mothersole	Tintern Old Rectory
S. Cooke	Wye Valley Hotel, Tintern
P. Morse	The Sloop Inn
D. Wilson	
Councillor A. Ashman	Tintern Community Council
J. Jones	
S. Dovey	

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor P.Pavia, Mr. G. Sumner and Councillor M. Brady

1. Election of Chair

County Councillor D. Dovey was elected as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

County Councillor A. Webb was appointed as Vice Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Public Open Forum

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- Councillor G. Down asked a question arising from Welsh Government suggestions for the A466 and Newhouse roundabout and the promise of work in early 2019, enquiring what had been decided and when the work is to be done.

The Head of Operations explained that Welsh Government officers are attending a meeting on Friday and will be asked to provide an update. The Officer also reported that he had recently attended a "Transition Chepstow" event that raised some suggestions for works for High Beech roundabout. He agreed to check details and to circulate an update.

- A Member commented that there had been an accident at the end of January 2019 on the A48 at the bottom of the hill at Pwllmeyric resulting in the destruction of a bus shelter and other street furniture. An update was provided that orders have been placed for a replacement bus shelter, a lighting standard and dog bin. Progress will be checked. The Member complained that there had been no response to an e mail asking for an update as residents are complaining.

5. Heddlu Gwent Police: Turnover of Staff in Chepstow

Unfortunately no officer was available to attend the meeting.

6. Community Focussed Schools - Chepstow School/Cluster Work: Ryan Coleman and Jude Langdon

Ryan Coleman, Community Focussed Schools Business Manager provided an overview of his role; the purpose of which is to improve outcomes for pupils of schools in the Chepstow area through more community engagement from both within and outside school. Such engagement is achieved through establishing long term links with businesses to provide supportive relationships and through the participation of volunteers to support the school and its curriculum. The role sits within the Partnership and Communities Team.

In the search for inspirational learning for children, a parents' skills audit has been carried out. The social capital collected (e.g. career information and experience, inspirational stories and travel) will be shared across schools in the Chepstow cluster. A reasonable response was received to the skills audit and schools are committed to the project.

A Member was pleased that there has been communication with the Palmer Centre Management to encourage interaction between schools and the dementia friendly café. It was added that there are also opportunities for children to visit care homes. A lunch club has been set up in a school to combat social isolation and to provide the opportunity for older children to volunteer and hopefully create active citizens in the future.

Members were told of the opportunities for businesses to use children's IT skills children e.g. to develop apps that could be shared for mutual benefit. Businesses can also offer mentoring which fits well into the new curriculum. Schools welcome this approach.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that villages outside town are part of the Chepstow cluster of schools and are able to participate through staff and governors.

It was also confirmed that the arts are included as there are rich resources available if individuals agree to participate.

7. Replacement LDP Growth Option: Rachel Lewis, Planning Policy Manager

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The Committee were given a presentation by the Planning Policy Officer on growth and spatial options. An easy read guide was circulated and following the presentation, comments and questions were invited.

- There is an aging demography that will create future pressures.
- Only modest growth in the South of the county was supported despite the close proximity to M4.
- It was noted that no growth/building was suggested in the north of the county yet Abergavenny, with the Heads of the Valley improvements, was well connected for Swansea and North Cardiff, and Monmouth for access to the Midlands. The M4 corridor is equally accessible from Raglan and Usk via the A449. It was accepted that councillors will be supporting their own areas and the debate on a preferred option will be difficult. Once a preferred option is decided, further consultation will be undertaken.
- There are issues travelling to Bristol from Chepstow resulting in queues in the mornings. The removal of bridge tolls has resulted in less car sharing impacting on air quality, congestion and parking.
- If there is further growth, there is the danger of creating a single built up area linked to Cardiff which is in conflict with the rural profile of the area.
- There were strong arguments for the creation of good job opportunities before housing. Development for young people was also a priority.
- The Officer explained that the Local Development Plan has been successful on affordable housing; every site has to be able to prove it delivers on all conditions including the affordable housing elements.
- It was commented that there are infrastructure issues because of unplanned building all over the county which has created complex issues.
- It was explained that options only are being presented at this stage based on existing strategy. Opinions are being sought from stakeholders. There is a focus on linking homes and future jobs to tie into the economic strategy of marketing Monmouthshire as a base for business (e.g. Hi-tech industries) to help sustain communities.

8. Thoughts invited on the Chepstow Community Hub, Library and Community Learning Courses

This matter was deferred.

9. Update on changes at Chepstow Hospital: Melanie Laidler, ABUHB

No representative of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board was present. This item was deferred.

10. Roads and Traffic:: Roger Hoggins, Head of Operations

10.1. Transition Chepstow: Report on High Beech Roundabout

The Head of Operations agreed to send an update to Committee Members.

10.2. Briefing Note on Chepstow Area Road Study

A briefing note was included with the agenda. The Head of Operations explained the Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WeITAG) processes.

The cost of Stage 2 will be in the region of £950,000 – £1.3 m. In an unusual step, bids for the work will be sought to provide clarification on likely costs. More information to Members will follow.

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It was noted that a change since this matter was last discussed is that the M4 Relief scheme is not proceeding.

A Member asked why work couldn't be done on High Beech as a pinch point at the present time. It was speculated that more information could be expected soon unconnected to the Chepstow WelTag study.

A Member suggested that some businesses are not getting the same messages and information. It was requested that Community Councils distribute information provided to them

10.3. Update on A466 Closure

The Head of Operations provided an update that the timescale initially provided had been exceeded. It was hoped that the road would be re-opened on 19th July but the latest forecast is 2nd August. If there is any change likely, information will be provided by e mail to Members and Community Councils.

Discussions are ongoing with engineers, consultant engineers and the contractor to clarify the latest position. The contractor is working every day and have considered the feasibility of double shifts but the availability of specialist crews is difficult to arrange. An alternative proposal is to reduce the number of bore holes to facilitate netting. There has, however, been incidence of collapses of fissures and drill breakages due to the nature of the rock. These issues are being resolved.

The overall aim remains to complete and leave the site as soon as possible. The negative impact on residents and business is fully appreciated.

Residents and Business Owner questions and comments:

- It was questioned why the 45° solution had been used on the second part of the closure but not on the existing section. Frustration was expressed that this matter has been going on for 3 years with the consequent bad effect on businesses (The Rectory)
- The Wye Valley Hotel described the effect of the works on business, questioned plans for the second closures and why the works couldn't be completed in February when business is quiet. It was responded that the second phase is scheduled for January (the officer agreed to check the timings).
- It was commented that the Welsh translations of signage are confusing drivers but explained that this is a legal requirement. The quantity and quality of signs was questioned.
- County Councillor Webb, on behalf of the authority apologised to residents and businesses for the situation referring to the reliance on contractors adding that it was not feasible to stop work and temporarily move the equipment unfortunately.
- A member of the public raised a question about the survey and was unsurprised to see limestone shatters, was concerned that the work was two weeks late starting and that netting and equipment wasn't in place ready. Assurance was sought that the remedial action will be safe and permanent. The Officer explained that the delayed permits were due to the ecology of the area and confirmed that the surveys consultant engineers understood from the outset that there were risks. Unfortunately there had been greater problems than expected. Referring to the unexpected severity of fractured limestone, it was confirmed that the engineers were suitably experienced for the work but the scenario encountered was worse than experienced anywhere else previously.
- A member of the public reiterated the inconvenience to residents and businesses adding the frustration caused by the St Arvans diversions. It was queried what steps would be taken to compensate businesses that can prove loss of money. Regarding the survey, it was confirmed that the information gathered was as good as it could be at that time.

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The Officer apologised for the length of the works commenting that the second scheme should be easier. It was clarified that business rates are governed by Welsh Government and the authority just collects them. Information was provided that there is a compensation scheme to apply for rate rebates that requires evidence of loss of business. It was agreed that the local Member will provide details of how and where to apply. The Cabinet Member will also investigate if there is an opportunity for all businesses to apply at the same time.

- It was complained that the authority should not be investing out of county. It was confirmed that there was no budget connection to this scheme and clarified that investment in property is via prudential borrowing that contributes to revenue services thus relieving the burden on council tax

The Officer was thanked for his input to the meeting.

10.4. Wye Valley Villages: To consider speed options

Concerns were raised about road safety and speeding in the Wye Valley villages. In response it was explained that the authority is looking at designs to manage road safety in Devauden in particular. Llanishen has speed indicator devices and work has been carried out in Trellech. Tintern was highlighted as requiring safer pedestrian facilities.

It was explained that there is a possibility for all villages to bid to for Welsh Government funding for schemes e.g. 20mph to improve village environments, and also funding related to Active Travel.

It was suggested that maintenance of footpaths and gullies was an issue and the use of online services to log issues was recommended.

The importance of tourism and e.g. tourists being able to safely walk beside roads was emphasised.

A member of the public supported a central bid for funding and also a holistic approach to traffic issues. He added that speed limits need to be enforced, commenting that the Police are not visible on roads. He promoted the use of signs to welcome safe drivers.

11. To note the record of the previous meeting

The notes of the last meeting were approved as a true record.

12. Items for the next Agenda

Committee Members were encouraged to submit items for future meetings.

13. Date of next meeting: 16th October 2019

The meeting ended at 12.55 pm