

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

**Meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk on Thursday,
10th October, 2019 at 10.00 am**

Councillors Present

County Councillor P.Pavia (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Blakebrough, J.Becker,
A.Davies, D. Dovey, R.Roden and A. Webb

Also in attendance County Councillor: A. Webb

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Matthew Lewis (Countryside), Interim Performance,
Evaluation and Programme Development Lead for
MonLife

Amy Longford, Heritage Manager
Rachael Rogers, Monmouthshire Museums
Manager
Rachel Lewis, Planning Policy Manager

APOLOGIES: County Councillors D. Evans, M.Feakins and B. Strong

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Planning Advice Note, Archaeology: Pre-decision scrutiny for the policy on identifying three new Archaeologically Sensitive Areas

Pre-decision scrutiny of policy on designating three new Archaeologically Sensitive Areas (ASA's)

The committee were presented with a policy which proposed extensions to the boundaries of existing Archaeologically Sensitive Areas (ASA's) in Abergavenny, Monmouth and Trellech and designated a new Archaeologically Sensitive Area in Tintern. Members heard that Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT) is the council's archaeological advisor and that the conservation of archaeological remains is a material consideration in determining a planning application. The 'Planning Advice Note' will outline how the Council would exercise its duty through its Development Management function.

Challenge:

- How do we support applicants currently? Will we signpost people to this advice?
Currently, GGAT provide advice to applicants on this. We will need to signpost via the usual social media channels and through architects and agents.
- Why did you feel the need to produce the guidance? What problems were you trying to address?
The need for guidance has arisen following experiences where constraints have been raised late in the planning process which has resulted in time and cost implications, where applicants would have benefited from knowing restrictions much earlier in the planning process. There has been an inconsistent approach

to protecting and managing archaeology with general confusion around the level of information needing to be provided at an early stage.

- Will this increase survey work for applicants?
Survey work will increase, but the Council will be able to give much clearer advice to applicants and will be able to make more informed decisions.
- Will this restrict development?
We do not anticipate that development will be restricted. The proposed extension to the Monmouth archaeological boundary is due to a high potential for medieval finds ~ given that most of Monmouth is a historic area, this isn't likely to further restrict development. In Trellech, there have been a number of finds and there is much to learn about the development of Trellech historically, however, there are no implications for development. Tintern was not a defined archaeological area and there are strong arguments why it should be. The boundary around the ASA in Tintern is large, but this is justified due to archaeological finds in the area.
- Who will be consulted on this?
Town and Community Councils, agents and architects will be consulted and we will ensure awareness via the website, Twitter and Facebook. All responses will be analysed and taken on board and reported back to this committee.
- We understand the need for balance, so that we protect areas but we do not hinder development. Are you confident you can provide clarity and transparency?
We feel that the guidance will assist applicants through consideration much earlier in the planning process.
- What process have you used to identify a new one area around Tintern?
GGAT analysed information and concluded there were more finds in this areas and the academic work in Trellech also identified the need for the extensions. If we find surveys are not suggesting a need for the extensions, we would review the boundaries.
- We understand how sites are identified, but if there are local areas that are not designated (for example, there are areas of Kingswood in Monmouth that have been associated with crucibles for forming gold), are there further areas that could be considered by GGAT?
We can certainly review further areas if there are archaeological finds.
- So if boundaries are identified by finds and there are chunks of Chepstow not included, is this suggesting there are no finds, or possibly that the information isn't necessarily current? Do you liaise with the curator at Fairfield Mabey? What about areas such as Brockweir and Redbrook that have known shipping history? Do you look at areas between the settlements?
It's a picture built up over time and we do need to continually review areas but it's our learning so far that has led to the designation of the boundaries to date. We do liaise with the curator at Fairfield Mabey to see if there is any information that can be fed to GGAT which could inform a review of whether to include Mabey Bridge. Regarding areas between settlements, we haven't had resources to investigate these and there's a limitation to how far we can designate, but we would still need to review this if further finds in these areas justified more archaeological importance.

Outcome and Chair's Conclusion:

- We have explored the rationale for bringing the guidance forward. We appreciate the balance between protecting and enhancing our historical environment whilst not hindering development or delaying planning processes. We also recognise the time and cost implication for applicants.
- We have scrutinised the reason for the various boundaries and the areas between major settlements and we recognise the resource constraints. We are reassured by the inclusion of Tintern in its own right and appreciate the work undertaken to this point.
- We would appreciate inclusion of our points raised and we fully support this policy. We would advise that you consult on this and report back to the committee with the consultation responses.

3. Museums Review: Scrutiny of progress on delivering the Museums Forward Plan following the previous review. Consideration of the remaining actions in the new context of MonLife, including linked issues / actions with attractions in respect of visitor experience; marketing; retail and events coordination.

Performance Report on delivering the Museums Forward Plan

A performance report was brought to the committee in order to scrutinise progress on delivery of the remaining actions outlined in the Museums Forward Plan, in the light of the establishment of MonLife. The 2017-22 forward plan was approved by Cabinet in December 2016 and was informed by a review undertaken by consultants Amion in June 2015. A detailed presentation attached as **Appendix A** to the minutes outlines the progress made to date on each of the recommendations made by Amion. The progress against the recommendations is also discussed in detail in the appendices of the performance report.

The forward direction proposed for the service is to undertake a comprehensive feasibility study to clarify the options, costs and phasing, together with the Heritage Strategy project to inform future funding opportunities. Discussions with funders have confirmed that the 'collection review process' will need completing to inform any future funding bid for the centralised store. Members heard that the costs of the feasibility study are not yet known and there will be a need to explore any sources of external funding.

Challenge:

- Why has it taken so long to address the recommendations since the completion of the review by Amion in 2015 and the report to Cabinet in 2016? Why are you reviewing this now?
Most of the core actions were addressed in 2017. This is an action outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan and the work on the Alternative Delivery Model did cause some delay. Now that MonLife is in place, it is timely that we move forward. The core action around buildings and centralised store was an enormous action and it was set in slightly different funding scene. There is a new strategic plan for heritage lottery funding, which has made the bidding more competitive, hence we've broken this recommendation down into specific projects. Now that museum sits within MonLife, it doesn't need to do these things on its own. Some of the delay is reflecting on the experience.

- What recommendations from Amion aren't being taken forward?
The recommendations from Amion suggested a closure of some museums and this wasn't taken forward as it was felt important to have a presence in all 3 towns. Amion also suggested that some displays could be via non museum locations in other towns, however, we explored practicalities of working with retailers to set up mini museums and we concluded that the 4 towns are very distinctive and that whilst the link is important, so is the local story. The final recommendation was to set up a separate development body which was superseded by MonLife.
- Caldicot, unlike the other towns has no set location to display its finds and whilst recognising that the castle is not the most suitable venue to display artefacts, there is still a missing opportunity to display Caldicot's collection and to tell the story of the Gwent Levels and the roman inhabitation and bring visitors into the area. Have you any thoughts on this?
We recognise this issue and because the environmental conditions at the castle, the Caldicot collection is in the store. We don't know the answer yet, but we recognise that we need to enable access to the Caldicot collection and would hope that the feasibility study will present choices to be considered. It is much easier to tell the story of Abergavenny and Chepstow because there are buildings there. The Heritage Lottery Fund project is exploring how you tell the story of an area where there isn't a visible building housing specific collections.
- It is commendable that the Council is keeping museums open when others council are closing them. We can see clear actions in the action plan, but as a scrutiny committee, we are interested in outcomes and outputs. What was the reason for the strategy and what are the problems we are trying to address? What is our goal, our intention? Is it to make generate income? What are the outcomes of completing these actions? I'm concerned about the clarity of your objectives. What is the added value?
These are very valid points. In order to secure a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, we had to be clear on our rationale. We visited other museums such as Derby, to see how they deliver outcomes, so our strategy and outcome framework is about building the 'case for future investment'. The grant application process requires us to be clear about our organisational strategy before bidding for substantial sums of money. We want to make progress with the visitor experience project at the same time, which is why we have separated this into specific projects. The Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015 has reinforced the need to carefully consider what we are doing and why. We recognise we need to add value and this is now an opportunity through MonLife to bring things together and for the sector as a whole to explore its purpose.
- We are trying to understand how the service contributes to economy and development and we appreciate this is more than a case of examining visitor footfall. Do you measure economic return?
We have seen an increase in visitor footfall, but there is an economic development toolkit which examines contribution to the economy and an estimation of return on investment to the local economy.
- What are the key parameters you use to measure success and failure with the public? There is an absence of numerical data such as visitor numbers in the plans, so it's hard for us to judge whether you are succeeding or not.

We haven't included our visitor figures in this report, this features in the MonLife report. The original forward plan had a lot of ambition, but little in terms of numerical measures, so we need to address that now. Visitor satisfaction is difficult to measure because we are aware that visitors may be looking to enjoy the experience in the wider sense (quiet space) than just learning about local history, but we certainly need to repeat our visitor survey. The Happy Museum Project has researched the role of museums in respect of overall wellbeing and how people feel after visiting museums, so as this is being looked at nationally, it will be interesting to draw comparisons.

- Do you make any savings?
We made substantial savings through the restructure in 2017, but the forward plan is not savings driven. We are looking to become more effective in the offer we provide and to work on the improvement actions.
- Do we have an effective working relationship with CADW? Do we have signage at CADW sites to signpost visitors to other attractions?
In Abergavenny, we work with them in terms of care of castle. In Chepstow, we have good local links with staff in the castle and the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) and this is something we have discussed with the TIC, because there is a substantial increase in visitor numbers to the castle versus the museum despite their proximity, so we are exploring how we can encourage people to make that second visit. CADW sites tend to interpret the architecture, rather than the life of the people and the story and the priority for CADW is to increase footfall to their sites, so it's a question of how we can encourage people via the TIC that there are 2 key places to visit. The signage is clear, but we could explore incentives to visit multiple attractions.
- Why did you select Wednesday as the potential closing day?
We looked at the quietest day across all sites and whether they should all be closed on the same day and this was felt to be overall the quietest day.
- MonLife is going through a transition period, with a more commercially minded mind-set. You have an important role to play in that as the history is so important to the identity of Monmouthshire. We have assets that we are not promoting properly and we need a strategy around that. The potential is significant and we need to think as a MonLife team rather than a museums service ~ we need an overall package or offer. Do you agree?
We are now in a much better position to look at marketing and branding across MonLife, learning, countryside, destination management and there are now so many synergies which we can only benefit from.
- What are your timescales?
We hope to appoint a project officer in new year, a review assistant in April 2020 and have the project completed in July 2021.
- Some of the visitor feedback for Chepstow Museum is that it's dry and archaic. Is the centralisation of staff and experience going to deliver anything innovative to deliver a full and engaging experience? Can you give us an idea of how this may work?
We are examining this. There is the tension of how to tell a local story in a quirky way but then to also link across other sites and some attractions have made the mistake of making stories too similar which leaves visitors feeling they have "visited one, visited them all", so it's a fine balance, we are not going to have the

money to do extensive work on the collection sites, but we hope to do some work around signage and core information you can expect to see.

- We recognise the nature of museums has changed and we don't have resources to deliver a hugely interactive exhibit, but are we being ambitious enough in doing something innovative in those spaces? We have community groups that want to be involved who have a lot of expertise and could help us make it more dynamic, which is a wasted opportunity if we don't embrace it.
We are a small team and we have got caught up in changing temporary exhibitions all the time, so we are trying to be realistic with resources and we know we need to do more imaginative things and the heritage work will enable us to think about the stories we are telling and the communities and different historical groups that we could use to inform them. We need to get off the treadmill and think about the exhibitions we have and how we can improve them. We are benefitting from bringing staff together to have a different perspective.
- You are running a department with sizeable deficit. The feasibility study will cost money, so do you have a ballpark fissure and timescales?
No. we don't. We may need external funding support to do it. We want to progress as soon as possible, within the next 12 months. We would need to bring a revised plan back to cabinet and may need to request funding.
- One area that has not been addressed is the use of academic institutions. Are these not being used because of a resource issue? Have you identified academic institutions?
It is a capacity issue. We have had some conversations with the Royal Navy in Portsmouth on the Nelson Collection and the Maritime Museum, so we know where these connections are, it's simply been an issue of capacity. We need a clearer understanding of what we want from it and what academic links would be right and the work around the stories we want to tell should guide us on this.
- You mention MonLife is developing a learning plan and you have 6 strategic aims, but have they been qualified and quantified in terms of how you will measure those? For example, in terms of action around skills-based workshops for adults, that's not been progressed in Abergavenny or Chepstow, what are the reasons?
The 6 strategic aims are being worked upon. We don't see the museums service pursuing learning on its own, it will be coordinated through MonLife.
- Chepstow TIC kiosk has undergone some improvements, but there's a sense of a lack of a retail concept. There's such an opportunity to do something significant and to make our offer attractive. Are you looking at a plan to cross-fertilise the activities between the kiosk and the museum to make it more profitable?
Yes, we are looking at the retail aspects via MonLife.
- Have you consulted the town councils to see if they want to invest as a partner?
We haven't talked to them about the forward plan specifically, but we will engage with them as part of the wider heritage piece.

Outcome and Chair's Conclusion:

- The Committee fully scrutinised the elements of the Amion review, the time taken from the publishing of the Amion report to the current progress of

actions. In order to develop museums and increase our overall tourism offer, we support the need to undertake the feasibility study. When the cost and scope of the feasibility study has been determined and you have clear recommendations to take forward, we request you return to the committee.

- It is vital that the committee is able to measure outcomes in terms of economic impact and added value for residents, so we request the MonLife performance reports and the Economic Development Toolkit be distributed.
- It is imperative to develop more innovative and engagement with volunteers and communities to improve the museums service and we recommend that you engage with town and community councils at the earliest opportunity to maximise any opportunities for joint working.
- It is recommended that the feasibility of a pedestrian crossing in front of Chepstow TIC be explored.

4. Economy and Development Select Committee Forward Work Programme

Economy and Development Work Programme

- Deferred items for today's meeting will be chased and programmed
- The Chair, Vice Chair and Scrutiny Manger will meet officers to discuss the scope of future scrutiny around the Investment Strategy.
- The scheduled LDP workshop on 14th October has been cancelled, however future programmed workshops will continue as planned.

5. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5th September 2019

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 5th September 2019 were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

6. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as 14th November 2019

The meeting ended at 12.19 pm

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