

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk. NP15 1GA on Thursday, 19th October, 2017 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor P.Pavia (Chairman)
County Councillor D. Blakebrough (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: J.Becker, A.Davies, M.Feakins, R.Roden, B. Strong and A. Watts

Also in attendance County Councillors: A. Easson and V. Smith

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Ian Saunders	Head of Tourism, Leisure and Culture
Nicola Edwards	Strategic Food and Tourism Manager
Matthew Lewis	Countryside Manager
Mark Hand	Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping
Philip Thomas	Development Services Manager
Rachel Lewis	Planning Policy Manager
Craig O'Connor	Development Management Area Manager
Robert O'Dwyer	Head of Property Services and Facilities Management
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Richard Williams	Democratic Services Officer

GUEST:

Mr. P. Cole - Consultant on the Destination Management Plan

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor D. Dovey

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no members of the public present.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Economy and Development Select Committee dated 7th September 2017 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

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4. 2016 Destination Performance and Destination Management Plan Review

Context:

To scrutinise Monmouthshire Tourism Performance for 2016 against the objectives and outcomes set out in the Council's Improvement Plan and to scrutinise the revised Destination Management Plan 2017-2020. The Select Committee received a presentation outlining details of the Plan.

Key issues:

The report card for Tourism provides a line of sight between Tourism activities and the outcomes and priorities which the council is committed to.

The Select Committee is provided with the baseline information to assess where the Authority is and what progress is being made to demonstrate whether anyone is 'better off' as a result of the work being undertaken.

The purpose of the Destination Management Plan is to establish a clear framework for public, private and voluntary sector partnership working to address the identified priorities and deliver year round sustainable tourism growth to maximize the economic, social and environmental benefits of tourism across all parts of Monmouthshire.

Monmouthshire's previous Destination Management Plan (DMP) came to an end on 31st December 2015. This Plan has been reviewed and a revised Destination Management Plan for the period 2017 - 2020 has been developed in consultation with stakeholders. The draft plan has recently undergone further consultation and been updated to reflect feedback received.

Member Scrutiny:

- In response to a question regarding whether the Authority is on the right track with regard to tourism, it was noted that through the extensive consultation that was undertaken in the development of the plan and looking to the future on what the opportunities identified and what the growth markets were, the consultation responses received were positive about what was being achieved and what the Authority was aiming to achieve in the future.
- With regard to future tourism performance, there is a lot of uncertainty regarding Brexit. In the short term favourable exchange rates have made the UK more attractive to overseas visitors but future tourism performance will depend on the actual Brexit terms agreed and the perception amongst potential overseas visitors of the quality of the welcome they will receive.
- Airbnb is changing the environment with a lot of bed stock that is not within the regulatory process or the tax process. This leads to questions as to how the Authority will afford to develop or maintain infrastructure in the future.

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- There could be a tourism tax imposed via Welsh Government in the future which could have create a negative impact on tourism. Until details are known this will remain an uncertainty.
- The Authority has been working with its partners on the Living Levels partnership scheme. The stage two application is with Heritage Lottery Funding. If successful, this will lead into a three and a half year programme providing a consistent approach to destination development across the levels.
- The likely extension of the England coast path will meet across the Severn Estuary at Chepstow.
- Working with the Wye Valley AONB Partnership, the Authority has made a joint proposal to Welsh Government to undertake a pilot for the Wye Valley to review countryside access.
- The Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) will aim to work collaboratively and with local businesses.
- The approach taken by the Authority to walking has been very good in the development and promotion of routes with the use of partnership working. This model could be used to improve other leisure activities, for example, cycling.
- The promotion of Monmouthshire's heritage has also been good.
- In response to a question raised regarding the 2016 performance, it was noted that the 2015 performance had been exceptional. Growth in 2015 exceeded the rest of the Country and the region. The 2016 performance was due to the County's bed stock. If the bed spaces had not been lost, the performance would have been as good as the rest of the region. 70% of the benefit comes from 20% of the staying visitors. This identifies how valuable each of the bed spaces are. The Authority needs to be at a point where it has new service bed spaces opening and is not losing the equivalent amount from B&Bs. Currently, the Authority is losing service bed spaces quicker that than new bed spaces can be provided.
- In response to a question raised regarding investment in staff at Monmouthshire's Tourist Information Centre's (TICs) it was noted that the report referred to 2016. In 2016, the TIC budget had been reduced by nearly 60% and that had led to continued uncertainty, particularly in Chepstow, about how long the TICs would remain in operation. This was an unsatisfactory situation. However, the TICs continued via deficit funding which had led to the inability to provided contracted hours for staff. However, this year the situation is different in that there has been recovery within the budget and the TICs will be open for the year. As a part of the recovery programme, officers have been looking to improve the product and explore other ways of funding and developing the service. Therefore, the aim is to bring staff back onto contracted hours and this is being investigated.

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- In response to a question raised regarding a proposed cycleway in Caerwent, it was noted that this matter has been ongoing for some time, partly due to the agencies that the Authority is dealing with. There is uncertainty regarding what the liabilities will be, particularly in relation to the motorway bridge. However, progress regarding this matter is anticipated in due course.
- The Usk railway path is being developed in sections. Considerable progress is being made with regard to the land between Coleg Gwent and the Usk Island site. The Authority is close to obtaining an agreement with partners.
- Sustrans has obtained grant funding to develop community routes across Wales. The routes in Monmouthshire are being looked at and connections into Torfaen around the Mamhilad site.
- It was identified at the Strategic Cycling Group that there was a need for a cycling strategy to be established for Monmouthshire with a view to providing a delivery plan.
- The Velothon Steering Group will be meeting shortly which will be the first meeting in which the 2018 event will be discussed. Run for Wales has been asked to provide details on the return on investment of the 2017 Velothon.
- There is encouragement through Active Travel for cyclists to report incidents with regard to the quality of the roads in Monmouthshire, with a view to developing the product in a coordinated way.
- In consultation with Welsh Government, it had been identified that there was a need establish a closer relationship between the walking and cycling agenda from Highways and the walking and cycling recreation agenda.
- The internal tourism market is not included in the figures identified because these tourists have to be travelling from outside of the local Authority area and they need to have been spending a minimum of three hours in the County to be counted in the figures. However, it was noted that this type of tourism forms an important part of the local economy.
- Rural Development Programme (RDP) funding has been secured to appoint a coach tourism officer who will be working with coach operators with a view to creating opportunities within the destination and encourage businesses to develop offers that are attractive to that market place.
- The strategy is for more people to visit Monmouthshire with a view to them returning at a later date with the intention of staying for a longer period. Therefore, more bed spaces are required to have the capacity within the County to host visitors.

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- In terms of cycling within Monmouthshire, The Authority has a product that is mostly based on event cycling rather than family cycling. Routes such as country lanes are not conducive to providing safe family cycling.
- The Wye Valley Forest of Dean Tourism Association currently runs an apprenticeship scheme where the apprentice spends time working in different businesses within the area with a view to gaining different skills.
- The kiosks were installed with RDP funding as a pilot at a time when the percentage of the population owning a smart phone was much lower. The software has not been updated. This will be reviewed as part of the visitor information review. If the conclusion is that the kiosks are no longer useful, then they will be removed.
- In terms of the spend from overseas visitors, this data is collected at a Wales wide level.
- The Brecon Beacons and the Wye Valley are strong destination brands. Nestled between the two, Monmouthshire has the opportunity to capitalise on both of these better known brands. Cadw is also a strong (heritage) brand which brings visitors into Monmouthshire.

Committee's Conclusion

- Tourism within Monmouthshire is on the right path. However, there are some areas that require further work. Some uncertainties beyond the County exist, such as Brexit and a potential tourism tax.
- A better connection is required between some of the Authority's objectives, aspirations and delivery.
- There needs to be a strong professional basis in terms of delivery.
- Tourist Information Centres and the Alternative Delivery Model were discussed.
- Internal synergies were discussed in terms of departments working collaboratively and setting priorities.

We resolved to endorse Monmouthshire's Destination Management Plan 2017-2020 prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

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5. Monmouthshire Local Development Plan Adoption of Sustainable Tourism Accommodation Supplementary Planning Guidance

Context:

To scrutinise the results of the recent consultation exercise regarding the Draft Sustainable Tourism Accommodation Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) produced to provide further details of policies contained within the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan (LDP) and to consider whether to endorse the SPG, with a view to it being formally adopted as SPG in connection with the Monmouthshire LDP.

Key issues:

The Economy and Development Select Committee was informed of the preparation of Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on Sustainable Tourism Accommodation to provide clarification on the interpretation of the policies of the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan (LDP) on 9th February 2017.

Planning Committee subsequently endorsed the Draft Sustainable Tourism Accommodation SPG on 7th March 2017, with a view to issuing it for consultation purposes. The Cabinet Member for Innovation, Enterprise and Leisure took the decision to issue the SPG for consultation on 26th April 2017.

The consultation took place for a period of six weeks between Thursday 1st June 2017 and Thursday 13th July 2017. A notice was placed in the Monmouthshire Free Press on 31st May 2017 and 427 individual notifications were sent in a joint consultation with the Rural Conversions to Residential or Tourism Use SPG to the following:

- Specific (including Town and Community Councils), General and other consultees, as identified in the LDP Community Involvement Scheme.
- Those considered to have an interest in the SPG topic, including relevant pre-planning applicants / applicants and specific tourism contacts.
- Residents who were on the LDP consultation data base and had specifically requested to be notified of the SPGs.
- Agents / developers who work in the Council area.

Copies of the draft SPG and representation forms were made available at the Council's Community Hubs / libraries and on the Council's website for the duration of the consultation period. The consultation was also publicised via the Twitter Account @MCCPlanning.

A total of seven replies were received. Generally, no significant objections were received and only minor amendments to the SPG documents have been necessary.

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Member Scrutiny:

- The SPG looks at sustainable types of tourism, specifically around glamping. The next LDP will revisit how these policies are written to ensure that the definition is as clear as possible which will be helpful for businesses.
- Hadnock Road Hotel – This is a Ministerial decision to refuse permission with regard to the boutique hotel and spa application. In response to a question about options available to the Council or developer now, it was explained that the only option available is to consider judicial review. However, the decision is based on established national planning policy so officer advice is that there are no grounds for a challenge.

Committee's Conclusion

We resolved to endorse the Draft Sustainable Tourism Accommodation SPG (subject to the recommended amendments as set out in Appendix 1 of the report), with a view to it being formally adopted as SPG in connection with the Monmouthshire LDP and to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Enterprise, accordingly.

6. Monmouthshire Planning Service Annual Performance Report (APR)

Context:

To undertake scrutiny in respect of the performance of the Council's Planning Service for the period 2016-17. The Select Committee received a presentation outlining details of the annual performance report.

Key issues:

The planning service's work links directly with Monmouthshire County Council's objective of delivering sustainable, resilient communities. The service is directly involved with wider corporate projects such as 21st Century Schools, rationalising the Authority's estates portfolio and forms an enabling tool to help address some of the challenges and issues identified by Future Monmouthshire.

Key areas of work for the Planning Service include:

- Providing pre-application advice to customers.
- Determining planning applications in accordance with adopted policy and material planning considerations, taking into account stakeholder comments and corporate objectives.

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- Securing financial contributions from developers to offset the infrastructure demands of new development and meet the need for affordable housing.
- Safeguarding the County's 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB, the Brecon Beacons National Park and the European designated Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation.
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable.
- Raising awareness of the statutory role and importance of the land use planning framework, building on the high levels of engagement underpinning the LDP process.
- Preparing supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to assist with the implementation and interpretation of LDP policy.
- Implementing the Council's LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with internal and external partners to foster the co-creation and growth of enterprise, community and environmental well-being. This will include involvement with the Whole Place work and Local Well-being Plan.
- Monitoring and evaluating Plan policies and the process of Plan preparation.
- Joint working with South East Wales Authorities with the ambition of preparing a Strategic Development Plan.

Customer service feedback:

Between 2010 and 2012 the Council's Planning Service underwent a Systems Thinking review. This review sought to strip the function back to first principles:

- what is important to our customers, and how can waste (actions or procedures that do not add value to the outcome) be eliminated. This evidence-based review has been fully implemented, although part of the Systems Thinking approach requires services to be kept under review and closely monitored.

This review identified that the following issues are important to customers:

- Customers value pre-application advice and advice during the consideration of the application.
- They want officers to be accessible and for there to be open and honest communication.
- They want consistency of pre-application advice and in validation of applications.

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- They want the Planning Committee to follow the officer's recommendation and value being able to have a dialogue with Members prior to determination.
- They don't want too many conditions being attached to decisions, and when conditions are imposed they should be relevant and easy to discharge.
- They value being able to submit an application online and to search for applications and information online.
- Third parties value being listened to during the application process.

The service operates with these priorities as guiding principles, shaping behaviour and procedures. The service is committed to having an outcome focus rather than chasing arbitrary performance targets that are not a priority to customers.

Member Scrutiny:

- Planning Aid Wales has agreed to provide training during this financial year, as a bench mark pilot for Wales. Shortly after the local elections in May 2017, Planning Aid Wales had provided training for Planning Committee Members.
- With regard to the 10% of planning applications that are not approved during the designated time, the department does try to learn from these applications with a view to establishing areas that could be improved upon to create a leaner process.
- The Planning Department works with applicants to ensure that all information asked for has been received before the application is determined. This might create a short delay in the process, on occasions, but generally, applicants would rather go through this process to ensure all information is available for determination of the application.
- Some of the applications that fall within the 10% result in extensions of time being discussed with applicants. Officers have set a target of reaching a minimum of 95% on achieving an agreed time limit to determine applications. Applicants want to obtain planning permission as quickly as possible but ultimately, they want their application to be approved.
- 96% of planning applications are approved.
- There has been a 40% increase in demand for enforcement cases. The Planning Department has launched an app on MyApp.
- Further work is being undertaken to improve the process from the pre-application advice stage through to the application stage. 98% of pre-applications received were approved.

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- The rurality of Monmouthshire is a challenge but site visits are clustered and there are area teams in place.
- Monmouthshire County Council's Planning Department does not receive any funding from Welsh Government. The Department receives income from planning application fees and pre-application advice.
- In April 2017, the Planning Department had introduced a fast track householder service. Monmouthshire County Council is one of the first authorities in Wales to bring in this service. The standard time for a planning department to consider a planning application for householders is eight weeks. The fast track householder service will guarantee that the department will consider an application within four weeks, for an additional cost. To date, seven applications have been received via this process and all applications have been successful and been completed within the four week period.
- Another service being offered by the Planning department is a pre-completion certificate whereby, if a customer is buying a property they can ask the department if all of the conditions have been discharged and whether the dwelling has been built in accordance with the approved plans, allowing the customer to purchase the property with confidence. A post completion service is also being provided. Monmouthshire County Council is the only authority in Wales, and possibly in the UK, to bring in these services.
- The Planning Department has a committed workforce. However, there is a need to address the pressures that are being placed on staff by creating a more balanced working environment. There has been some changes to the departmental management team providing more line management for teams, which was welcomed by staff.
- A fast track pre-application service will be introduced in due course in which the process will be undertaken in half the time if the applicant pays double the fee. If the process is not delivered within the timescale then the additional funding will be returned to the applicant. Capacity in supporting departments is essential to deliver this service.
- A Planning Performance agreement is being discussed whereby, an applicant of a major scheme could agree to pay an extra amount of money for matters to be agreed within agreed timescales. This will require an amount of resource to achieve this. This issue has been put to one side for the time being while various other projects are completed, but is being considered for the future.
- Concern was expressed that such premium services might negatively affect those applicants that are unable to afford the premium services. In response, it was noted that these matters would be closely monitored.

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Committee's Conclusion

- The importance of training was identified, particularly for town and Community councils.
- The Planning Department is providing a good bespoke service for customers.
- The rurality of Monmouthshire is a challenge for the department with the funding formula not addressing rurality.
- Resources are an issue with the Department operating with limited resources. The Select Committee will monitor this issue.

We resolved to endorse the Annual Performance Report for submission to Welsh Government by 31st October 2017.

7. List of actions arising from the previous meeting

We noted the list of actions arising from the previous meeting. In doing so, the Scrutiny Manager informed the Select Committee that a letter had been sent to the Cabinet Member with a view to consideration being given to the establishment of a Procurement Development and Efficiency Team to investigate the Council's procurement mechanisms with a view to establishing savings in the coming years.

An invitation had also been extended to the Cabinet Member inviting him to attend a future meeting of the Select Committee to discuss this matter.

In light of this information, it was proposed that the Select Committee establishes a series of workshops to discuss Procurement and Partnership Working in which interested Members of the Council could join.

We resolved that the Head of Property Services and Facilities Management liaises with the Chair of the Select Committee and the Scrutiny Manager with a view to establishing a series of workshops to discuss Procurement and Partnership Working.

8. Economy and Development Select Committee Forward Work Programme

We resolved to receive and note the Economy and Development Select Committee Forward Work Programme.

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9. Council and Cabinet Business Forward Plan

We resolved to receive and note the Council and Cabinet Business Forward Plan.

10. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Economy and Development Select Committee will be a special meeting and will be held on Thursday 26th October 2017 at 2.00pm.

The next ordinary meeting of the Economy and Development Select Committee will be held on Thursday 30th November 2017 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 1.45 pm.