

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Monday, 26th July, 2021 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor P. Jordan (Chairman)
County Councillor R. Roden (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: G. Howard, B. Strong, A. Easson, R. Edwards, L. Brown, P. Clarke, C. Edwards, P. Murphy, M. Powell, J. Pratt and J. Treharne

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Mark Hand, Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood
Daniel Fordham, Project Manager
Jane Lee, project Manager, Regeneration and Placemaking
Paul Keeble, Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management)
Matthew Lewis (Countryside), Interim Performance, Evaluation and Programme Development Lead for MonLife
Carl Touhig, Head of Neighbourhood Services

APOLOGIES: Councillors D. Evans and M. Feakins

1. Declarations of Interest

The committee agreed to record any declarations of interest as and when appropriate in discussing the reports.

2. Town Centre Regeneration: To review the re-opening towns adjustments made in response to the covid-19 pandemic and to consider future regeneration and placed based approaches

The Senior Officer introduced the topic by explaining that following the covid 19 pandemic, there is a need to consider future regeneration of town centres and placed based approaches, whilst maintaining some of the adjustments made in response to the covid-19 pandemic. He explained that we have the opportunity to conduct a review after approximately a year of having instigated changes in town centres to consider what has worked well and how best to support businesses. There may be grant funding streams to be explored and discussions needing to be held with businesses on new projects. The officer led members through a presentation/series of slides in which he explained some of the adventurous steps taken to support social distancing in each of the towns. The report also provided a detailed account of the engagement that took place with businesses and the council's response to changes announced by Welsh Government with very short notice. The various initiatives to restrict traffic, widen footpaths, install planting and barriers to support social distancing and banners to encourage the 'shop local' campaign were discussed in detail. The officer confirmed that whilst there are things we could do differently if we had to do this again, overall, the measures implemented were very successful. The chair thanked the officer for the

comprehensive explanation of the measures taken in the different towns and invited members to ask questions.

Member Challenge:

- In the report, you have referred to projects that may be subject to grants, who decided which would go ahead and how are the finances of those scrutinised?

This would be a decision delegated to the Chief Officer, but we would engage with scrutiny members on the progress annually. One of the key factors for us to consider is the deliverability of the projects within specific timescales.

- I can recall the closure of Cross Street in Abergavenny many years ago, which left the area quite deserted so my concern is relating to how we can encourage people when the weather isn't favourable.

Electric heating and canopies for the outdoor seating is something we would need to consider and the maintenance of this. Feedback has suggested people would use these outdoor spaces if they are dry and warm. Also, there's the ongoing maintenance of the planters and the town council has been very helpful in terms of maintaining these and watering.

- Are the shelters on Cross Street permanent or temporary and please can you ensure ward members are involved in discussions in addition to town and community councils so that we are briefed when asked.

Yes, we can improve our engagement with members on this and will do so from hereon. The shelters are temporary and no decision has been made on those at the moment, but we will be engaging on it and so far feedback has been overwhelmingly positive in relation to Cross Street and also Frogmore Street.

- You have done a fantastic job over a long period of time and I want to acknowledge that. I'm curious as to how you analyse the requirements for each town. Is there a model for this?

No, we have had to implement different approaches due to the typography and physical nature of the places.

- It would be helpful if we had some data on car parking usage and the number of cyclist so that we can inform our decisions. There is a general feeling that there are insufficient car parking spaces until we have viable alternatives in place.

Yes, we could certainly look to evidence this in future. In terms of the access to car parks, it has been difficult because some of the pathways to parking are quite narrow and wouldn't support social distancing. We have projects on a reserve list that we can consider, mainly due to the timescale for completion, linking to my earlier point about deliverability.

- In terms of the resurfacing of Maryport Street Carpark in Usk, please could you confirm when the works will take place. The Town Council would like to discuss some of the highways proposals for Usk with you, such as the yellow lines and Speedwatch.

I can confirm our operations team will be beginning the works to resurface Maryport Street car park mid-September and the lines on Castle Street will be done at approximately the same time. In terms of speeding and Speedwatch, we are monitoring this at the moment to inform our plans going forward. Speedwatch is delivered by Go Safe and I know that Lorry Watch has had many volunteers.

- In relation to Chepstow, the report refers to the need for a zebra crossing at the bottom of the town and I wanted to ask about the timescales for this.

We are in discussions with the traffic engineers this week but I would think it would be October before we could look at changing the arrangement at the bottom of the town.

- I was quite happy with the one-way system in Usk, but as the traffic crosses the bridge, motorists are speeding as they pass through Llanbadoc and it is dangerous for residents. The community council are asking for speeding indicator signs there and I want to check this is on your radar.

Yes it is, we have had difficulty in obtaining these during the pandemic due to supply issues, but to reassure you, we are progressing this.

The Chair asked the officer to make any closing comments. The Senior Officer advised that it has been difficult to collate the positive feedback received, whereas negative is played out on social media, however there did appear to be overwhelming support for the changes that have been made. There has been a significant amount of work to be undertaken, with major impacts on residents and we are grateful for everyone's input and look forward to exciting opportunities going forward.

Chair's Conclusion:

We note your phrase about 'slow and traditional approaches' needing to be expedited during this time. I want to thank officers for all their hard work during unprecedented times. We recognised that a major positive factor has been the engagement with town and community councils and we therefore hope to continue this journey, effectively engaging with them to revitalise the towns.

Thank you for your input this morning.

3. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as 16th September 2021

The meeting ended at 3.05 pm.