Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Thursday, 10th October, 2024 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present	Officers in Attendance
County Councillor Jane Lucas (Chairman) County Councillor Lisa Dymock, (Vice Chairman) County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Tomos Davies, Jackie Strong, Tudor Thomas, Laura Wright, and John Crook	Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and Place Rachel Lewis, Planning Policy Manager Craig O'Connor, Head of Placemaking

APOLOGIES: None

Note: Minutes do not serve as a verbatim record of the meeting but provide a summary of the Committee's discussion. For the full discussion, please access the recording of the meeting:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=le1EoOVikQo&list=PLLmqn4nAaFJAaDA9m3C2P8ZdJsca-bkSU&index=18

1. **Declarations of Interest**

None.

2. **Public Open Forum**

The Chair advised that many submissions had been received and that it would not be possible to read them out at the meeting due to the significant number. She advised that written submissions received in sufficient time ahead of the meeting had been shared with the committee, Cabinet Member and officers, and that any submissions received since, would be forwarded to the Cabinet Member and officers for further consideration.

The Chair noted receipt of 15 written submissions objecting to site CS0270 in the plan, and a further two objecting to land at Mounton Road and land west of Usk, Penperlleni. Three members of the public spoke at the meeting about CS0270 raising a number of concerns:

- Sufficiency of infrastructure, how homes will be zero carbon when the developer has not committed to it until 2050, potential increases in

phosphate discharge which already exceed permissible levels, questioning whether sufficient funds will be available, asking why the 270 homes can't be added to Abergavenny, and suggesting it is too far from the town centre for walking or cycling whereas at Abergavenny the homes would be closer to the train station.

- Noting that CS0270 is a special site given its beauty and location, its importance to the greater horseshoe bats, its visibility from the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and proximity to a scheduled ancient monument, objecting to the loss of prime agricultural land – suggesting that CS0274 would therefore be a better alternative.

- Raising concerns about traffic emissions and air quality monitoring in Monmouth, suggesting that the current methodology is flawed and lacks sufficient data on real or projected emissions.

The Chair thanked the public for their input, through sending written submissions and by contributing to the meeting via the Public Open Forum.

3. RLDP Deposit Plan

Cabinet Member Paul Griffiths introduced the report, delivered a presentation, and answered the members' questions with Craig O'Connor. In his presentation of the report, Councillor Griffiths acknowledged the following:

- Demographic Trends: He highlighted the decline in school-age and working-age populations in Monmouthshire, contrasting with the growth in the over-65 population, emphasizing the need to reverse these trends to maintain sustainable communities.

- Housing and Affordability: He stressed the importance of increasing the supply of housing, particularly affordable housing, to retain young people in the county, highlighting that 50% of the population cannot afford to purchase homes on the open market, necessitating a high level of affordable housing in the plan.

- Plan Proposals: He outlined the plan to provide 2000 new homes over 15 years, with 50% being affordable, explaining that 660 of these would be social housing for rent, with 330 being low-cost home ownership options.

- Employment Land: He discussed the provision of 48 hectares of employment land to support job growth and address the lack of land for business expansion.

- Sustainability and Infrastructure: He emphasized that new homes will be within walking distance of existing settlements, will be net zero carbon, and will be supported by necessary infrastructure.

- Overall Vision: He explained that the plan aims to create younger, more sustainable communities by providing appropriate housing and job opportunities, whilst protecting the environment, and supporting existing town centres.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for presenting the report and proceeded to take questions and key points from the Committee, with answers being given by the Cabinet Member and officers.

Questions and key points raised by the Committee:

- A member asked whether in relation to candidate site CSO270, what the impact would be of the influx of residents arising from the rollover sites from the previous LDP of 280 homes, and how this would affect the number of vehicles on the roads.

They were advised that the_planning policy team have reviewed the sites and considered the impact on existing infrastructure and that the Dixton Road site was identified as the most appropriate and sustainable option.

- It was asked whether the 5.8-hectare candidate employment site is sufficient to provide enough employment opportunities for those living in the new homes, in order that Monmouth's residents fulfil the criterion of living sustainable lifestyles. The member raised their concerns about further exacerbation of road congestion.

They were advised that there is 4.5 hectares of employment land allocated at the Wonastow Rd site, and that this should create jobs within the area to balance the housing.

- A member asked how Monmouth qualifies as a sustainable development considering the severe lack of public transport links.

They were advised that Monmouth was allocated a site to keep the community sustainable and ensure a balanced demographic. They also confirmed that the strategic phosphate solution for Monmouth enables sustainable development.

- A member asked why the local transport strategy isn't included within the RLDP and why transport assessments aren't conducted until the planning stage.

Officers advised that infrastructure considerations are part of the planning process, and transport assessments are typically conducted during the planning stage.

- A question was asked as to what processes can be put in place to mitigate the potential harms caused by the post-development loss of green spaces, which could increase surface runoff and intensify flooding.

They were advised that all developments in Wales are subject to sustainable drainage requirements, meaning that runoff must be managed within the site itself to prevent increased flood consequences.

- A member questioned whether the 'dark skies policy' will sufficiently mitigate the harms caused to the greater horseshoe bats, when taking into account the urbanisation of the site and the loss of their feeding locations.

The officers reassured members that environmental considerations, including the impact on local wildlife, are part of the planning process and will be taken into account.

- A member asked about the land ownership of the proposed Abergavenny East development; specifically, if the landowner of CS0293 has agreed to the master plan, and if the land within Monmouth Housing Association's control is within its control. The member expressed concerns about the ability to deliver the proposed master plan if these conditions are not met.

Officers confirmed that both landowners have put their sites forward for development, but that neither has fully agreed to the master plan. The master plans are developed based on the planning policy framework that the Council wishes to impose. Negotiations and detailed conversations with all partners will continue, to ensure that the development proposal is realised.

- A member queried whether the Council is the Council prepared to use compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) as a policy principle to advance key strategic developments.

The Cabinet Member advised that a range of opportunities are available to the Council, and that the approach will be pragmatic and effective, with negotiation being the first priority.

- A member asked about the potential harms from post-development urbanisation, specifically the paving of gardens, which they were concerned could increase runoff and intensify flooding. The member asked whether anything can be done to mitigate such potential harms.

Officers responded that this was a valid point and suggested that the Planning Committee could reduce permitted development rights further if there is evidence that it would result in additional surface runoff. Additionally, any application will need to submit a flood consequence assessment at the planning stage.

- A member highlighted the need to ensure good connections for the large development on the eastern side of Abergavenny, and stressed they felt it was important to achieve a balance between housing and employment land across the county. They raised their concern about pedestrians crossing the AA465 and emphasised the need to integrate travel infrastructure in Abergavenny, asking for reassurance about travel connections if the Abergavenny East development goes ahead.

The Cabinet Member advised that discussions with the developer, the Design Commission, and the Trunk Road Agent have indicated plans for three crossing places across the A465, controlled by lights, to ensure safe pedestrian and driver experiences. He explained that the infrastructure would aim to ensure residents feel comfortable crossing the road and would integrate the new development with the town.

- Concern was expressed by a member about the significant infrastructure gaps in areas like Monmouth, Caldicot, and Chepstow, particularly in terms of transport, healthcare, and education. They asked how the plan would ensure that communities wouldn't be even more strained in terms of essential services. They also expressed concerns about the practicality of walking and cycling for working couples and young families and their view that there is a lack of clear commitments and timelines for improving the infrastructure.

The Cabinet Member and officers responded that the RLDP is a high-level document and advised that detailed planning applications will follow for all sites. They emphasised that active travel links are being integrated from the early stages to encourage walking and cycling. They also advised that there is ongoing work with the Health Board to manage and respond to healthcare pressures and they stressed the importance of achieving balanced development across the county.

- Another member echoed their concerns around the lack of infrastructure and stated that there is a need for detailed planning to support the proposed developments.

The Cabinet Member and officers discussed the infrastructure delivery plan, which includes provisions for transport, education, and healthcare facilities to support the new developments.

- A member questioned the viability of the RLDP without an in-depth viability statement, especially for major sites. They asked how 50% affordable housing and net zero carbon ready homes would be achieved.

Officers explained that the RLDP allocates land for development, and that the Council has other strategies to attract businesses and create jobs. The economic strategy for example, aims to create a mix of job opportunities, including high-value jobs. The officer confirmed that the viability of 50% affordable housing has been assessed and has been deemed achievable.

- It was questioned why Caldicot East/Portskewett was being identified for a significant share of the county's housing needs and what was the rationale for concentrating development in an area with already limited amenities. The member asked for clarification on plans to address these issues before construction begins.

Officers responded that Caldicot is considered to be a sustainable place for development due to its amenities and connections. Members were advised that the development will include a new primary school and active travel links to ensure sustainability. Officers confirmed that the Council is working to ensure that infrastructure and amenities are in place to support the new development.

- A member asked for clarity on the land grade for the employment land north of the Portskewett site and raised their concern as to whether farmers are being kept up to date with the process, highlighting a farmer who was unaware of the proposals.

Officers acknowledged the need to engage with all landowners and farmers and promised to follow up on the specific case mentioned, reiterating that the Council is committed to ensuring that all stakeholders are informed and involved in the process.

- A member raised concerns about the traffic congestion at High Beech Roundabout in relation to the Mountain Road site and suggested that sites in Chepstow should be contingent on High Beech roundabout improvements. The member expressed concern that there are so few references to road infrastructure in the main body of the report and highlighted the need for

site-specific requirements for road infrastructure improvements, similar to those in previous plans.

The Cabinet Member and officers responded that High Beech Roundabout is part of the Welsh Government's trunk road network, and that improvements are being considered through a Welsh Government study. They advised that the RLDP includes safeguarding land for potential improvements and confirmed that the development will incorporate necessary mitigations as they are identified.

- It was asked whether the 26 houses at the Shirenewton site are in addition to the 11 houses previously planned at Clearview Court and how concerns about sewage capacity in the area will be addressed.

Officers clarified that the development boundary has changed, and that the 26 houses are the new allocation, with the previous 11 houses no longer included. They acknowledged the existing sewage issues and reassured that they are committed to working with Welsh Water and NRW to address them.

- A member emphasised the need for affordable housing to be available to local people in the Shirenewton area and suggested a mix of housing sizes, including three-bedroom homes, to accommodate young families.

Officers stated that they agreed on the importance of a housing mix and confirmed that the allocation process would prioritise local needs. The advised that the policy framework aims to provide a variety of housing options, including two, three, and one-bedroom properties, to meet the needs of the community.

- It was questioned how the public consultation for the RLDP will ensure that the voices of people who are intended to benefit from the plan can be heard, particularly working-age people and those with young children. They emphasized the need to engage this underrepresented group effectively.

The Cabinet Member responded that the consultation process will include exhibitions, online consultations, public meetings, and drop-in opportunities in all population areas. Efforts will be made to advertise these events widely, including using gazebos on High Streets to increase visibility. He also highlighted the role of local councillors in encouraging community engagement and ensuring a balanced representation of views.

- A member sought reassurance that the RLDP will protect the Nedern and the living levels, emphasising the environmental importance of these areas and the need to balance housing development with environmental protection.

The Cabinet Member advised the committee that the Nedern and the green land around the castle are not only protected but celebrated in the plan. He emphasised that these areas are seen as assets that will connect the existing town with the new development, ensuring their protection and integration into the community.

- The Chair expressed concerns about the removal of habitat in relation to CS0270, and the claim that a buffer would improve it, and expressed concern about the best quality land being removed.

Officers responded, advising that while development will result in the loss of some agricultural land, the plan includes measures to enhance the remaining habitat, in line with planning policy requirements.

- Concerns were expressed about traffic congestion issues at the proposed site, given the increase in cars, as well as pollution, and it was asked how the exit on to Hereford Road can qualify as an emergency exit. A member queried whether there are any guarantees that the site will not grow further.

The Cabinet Member and officers responded, discussing the infrastructure requirements, including improvements to the local bus network and safeguarding land for potential road improvements. They confirmed that detailed transport assessments will be conducted at the planning application stage. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the importance of addressing pollution and mentioned that the environmental health team would review the concerns raised about air quality.

- Another member questioned the possibility of extending the consultation period.

The Cabinet Member explained that there are various engagement methods for the consultation process, and he emphasised the role of local councillors in encouraging community participation.

- A question was asked as to whether the affordable housing can really be considered as 'affordable' and whether there would be a consequent impact on the Section 106 monies associated with developments.

Officers explained that viability assessments will ensure the 50% affordable housing target is achievable and that the mix of social rent, shared ownership, and market housing options will address affordability. The Cabinet Member Griffiths addressed concerns about the affordability of housing, explaining that the proposals are based on the local housing needs assessment. He emphasized that 50% of the population

can afford market housing, 17% can afford low-cost home ownership or shared equity, and the remainder would need social rent. He also mentioned that shared equity properties revert to the Council or social landlord at the point of sale to ensure they remain affordable.

The Cabinet Member also sought to reassure the committee that the sums required for Section 106 contributions in the future are comparable to those achieved in the past, indicating that the stress on affordable and zero-carbon housing will not squeeze out funding for necessary infrastructure.

Additional Comments from Members

- A member expressed their concern about the visibility of the site from the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the effect on the view when entering Monmouth.

- Another member emphasised the need to encourage more working age people and retain younger people in the county.

- It was also queried how the Council plans to avoid the risk of Monmouthshire becoming more of a commuter zone than it already is.

Chair's Summary:

As part of her summary, the Chair highlighted the following key points and issues raised by members during the debate:

- Active travel concerns and traffic growth.
- Concerns about commuting traffic due to higher-paid jobs outside the area.
- Concerns about amenities in the Portskewett ward.
- Concerns about the healthcare infrastructure in all areas.
- Monmouth's lack of travel links.
- Concerns about traffic congestion at the Mounton Road site.
- Some concerns about car emissions and pollution, members stressing the need to protect the Nedern and Castle grounds.
- Dark skies policy and bat habitat concerns.
- The need to balance development with environmental protection.
- Concern about the sewage issues in the Mounton Brook area.
- The need for affordable housing for local people and appropriate housing sizes for growing families, particularly the importance of housing for younger people.

- Questions around Abergavenny East development, concerns particularly relating to transportation and active travel, the master plan, land ownership, and compulsory purchase considerations.
- Ensuring local voices are heard and engaging the community effectively.

The Chair acknowledged the substantial public input into the meeting, both in terms of speakers and written submissions and advised that all written submissions would be forwarded to the Cabinet Member and officers following the meeting for their ongoing consideration.

Thanks were given to the public for their input and the Chair explained that the Place Scrutiny Committee is unable to make decisions, but having scrutinised the RLDP Deposit Plan would be offering its feedback to the Cabinet Member and Officers, as to whether the Committee supports the plan in its current form.

A vote took place, with four members of the committee expressing they were not in favour of the plan in its current form and four members supporting the plan in its current form (1 member having left early).

4. Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

The Forward Work Programme was noted and the timescales for the Parking Review would be clarified.

5. Cabinet and Council Forward Plan

The plan was noted.

6. To confirm the minutes of previous meetings:

- 11th July 2024
- 24th July 2024 (Special)
- 3rd September 2024 (Special)

The minutes were confirmed, proposed by Councillor Lucas and seconded by Councillor Wright.

7. Next Meeting: 7th November 2024

Confirmed as 7th November 2024

The meeting ended at **5.08 pm**