

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Special Economy and Development Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Tuesday 14th July 2015 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, A. Easson, R.M. Edwards, S.G.M. Howarth, P. Jones, R.P. Jordan, V.E. Smith, S. White and A.M. Wintle.

Members of Strong Communities Select Committee:

County Councillors A. Easson, S. Howarth, V. Smith and A. Webb.

Also in attendance County Councillors R. Harris, R. Greenland and P. Murphy.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs J. Robson	-	Head of Finance
Mrs K. Beirne	-	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Mrs D. Hill-Howells	-	Head of Community Led Development
Mr B. Winstanley	-	Estates Manager
Mr I. Hoccum	-	Energy Manager
Miss H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mrs. S. King	-	Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors R. Hayward, P. Jordan and K. Williams.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were received:

County Councillors P. Murphy, A. Webb and S. White declared personal non-prejudicial interests pursuant to the members' code of conduct, as members of County Farms.

County Councillors D. Dovey, D. Edwards, D. Evans, R. Harris and A. Wintle declared personal non-prejudicial interests pursuant to the members' code of conduct, as members of the Planning Committee.

3. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

We resolved to exclude the press and public during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972.

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4. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - SOLAR FARMS BUSINESS CASE

We were presented with a report which had been produced following the Sustainability budget mandate being agreed at Council. The report identified the potential income generated from construction of a solar farm, various sites had been considered and one had been identified as favourable.

Members scrutinised the report, issues discussed related to the following:

- Viability and costs of the project
- Added value of the project
- Potential income that could be generated for the authority
- Contingency, insurance, maintenance and degradation allowances
- Planning and development considerations
- Project management and expert guidance
- Similar and comparable models
- Prudential borrowing and budget pressures
- Project schedules and timescales
- Technological changes
- Effect on other Monmouthshire County Council policies

Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summing Up:

The Strong Communities and Economy and Development Select Committees scrutinised the business case at a special meeting held today (14th July). The Committees agreed that the following should be presented to Cabinet tomorrow and included in the final cover report to full Council as the conclusions of the committees.

The Committees have discussed the report and request that proper consideration be given to the mitigation of the following risks:

- **The project yield / return on investment and the security of tariffs**
- **The risk of future local government reorganisation**
- **The viability of the scheme given that projections are estimates**
- **Project delays / timescale – questioned whether 6 months is realistic**
- **Unforeseen additional costs (security, equipment maintenance/replacement, legal costs, appeals, project management costs, consultancy) ~ the Committees argue there is a need for a financial contingency plan**
- **The pace of technological advance over a 25 year period**

The Committees consider the following also require further consideration:

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- **The sum of £5K for community benefit is relatively low and it is unclear at the moment where and how the money would be spent**
- **The need to assess the cost/benefit analysis of similar proposals undertaken by other Local Authorities and to consider how risks have been mitigated by those authorities**
- **How this proposal aligns to other Monmouthshire policies and priorities ~ the need to balance such proposals with promoting tourism, countryside conservation and the priorities of the Local Development Plan**
- **Reputational concerns / moral considerations of the proposal**

In summing up, the Chair emphasised that the above was relayed to Cabinet on 15th July 2015 and the report be amended to reflect conclusions prior to being presented at Council on 30th July 2015.

Report Recommendation:

The committee resolved to agree recommendations within the report.

The meeting ended at 3.35pm.