

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance Thursday, 9th December, 2021 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor P. Jordan (Chairman)
County Councillors: A. Davies, G. Howard,
B. Strong, F. Taylor, S. Jones and V. Smith

Officers in Attendance

Cath Fallon, Head of Economy and Enterprise
Roger Hoggins, Head of Service - Strategic Projects
(Fixed Term)
Scott James, Strategic Procurement Manager
Jane Lee, project Manager, Regeneration and
Placemaking
Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES: Councillors J. Becker, D. Evans, M. Feakins and R. Roden

1. Declarations of Interest

To be recorded as and when appropriate.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no representations from members of the public present at the meeting.

3. Usk and Woodside Master Plan

The Head of Strategic Projects introduced the report, explaining that the draft Usk and Woodside Improvement Masterplan had been jointly commissioned by MCC and Usk Town Council (UTC) in 2018, initial work beginning in 2015 relating to traffic management issues. ARUP consultancy had undertaken the work with a working group consisting of MCC Members, officers, Usk Town Council and Llanbadoc Community Council the commission. He explained there has been wide consultation through stakeholder events to bring us to the position we are in today of bringing this to you for pre-decision scrutiny. The report included details of specific projects and an improvement and action plan, which we recommend is formally adopted by MCC, as it has by the other partners involved. For MCC, it is helpful to have a wider plan with short, medium and long term goals and it enables us to own the objectives, along with Usk Town Council and Llanbadoc Community Council. He advised that having a structured plan is welcomed by national government and it helps when bidding for future funding, however, officers are not underestimating the challenge of finding funding for the delivery for some of these ambitious projects.

The chair thanked the officer for the concise outline of the report and invited members:

Member Questions:

- With structural funds disappearing, how quickly can we expect new funding streams to enable us to progress?

Depends on which projects we take forward. Active travel funding could cover public realm and transport projects but opportunities are quite dynamic, so if we were to consider for example the redesign of Bridge Street or Twyn Square, funding streams would be active travel and transport funding. Sometimes funding comes available at relatively short notice, so having clear plans in place and ideas, would put us in a very good position.

- Would the old civic amenity site be a quick win, an opportunity possibly for some markets and parking? Will there be additional parking around the prison when the road has been resurfaced.

I understand bids have been received to understand its market value in order to determine its future, but it hasn't currently been sold. In terms of the area by the Memorial Hall, there would hopefully be provision there but there are draining issues to address.

- In terms of parking, can I just clarify what we would be envisaging people do? Are we anticipating people visiting but not by car, using public transport?

The parking strategy has been considered in the past for all towns and we may need to revisit this as a whole in terms of charging, but also determining how the car park is used. It's been an ongoing problem to balance the needs of residents and those visiting for leisure or work and is likely to need to be undertaken at some point to determine what is right for each town.

- How would you differentiate between regeneration projects and public realm projects?

The lines between the two are rather blurred, as are the funding streams, but there are other regeneration funds that we could possibly access in the future as the situation is constantly changing in terms of funding, as Welsh Government priorities evolve. Sometimes we have to use multiple funding streams for a single project which can be challenging.

- Also how are you and partners going to manage expectations because the plan is very aspirational.

This is a chicken and egg situation because if you haven't got clear plans in place, you cannot access funding, but having plans in place does raise expectations. So we will look at trying to find projects that are ready and can be delivered in a timely way when funding becomes available. There are various funding streams within town regeneration and there is also matched funding for development and strategic projects that can help with design work and feasibility projects. There are projects that we can look at but the funding situation is fluid, so we recognise managing expectations is a challenge for the steering group.

- From a local perspective, what is the priority here? To increase parking or to pedestrianise Bridge Street? I just wondered what the priorities are and are those planned for?

It is difficult, but at the moment, parking would tend to be the greater priority because pedestrianisation of Bridge Street is not currently feasible, without a wider public transport network. A bypass if it was ever to be agreed would be many years in the future.

- I'd like to raise a few points:
 - The lack of enforcement of car parking regulations
 - There is a need for a very good clean up of the area
 - I conducted a survey of residents a few years ago which had a 60% response rate in which people raised traffic issues and access considerations in Woodside and I sent this to the Highways Department but didn't receive any feedback.
 - In terms of Maryport Street Car Park, there are many different accesses and these all reduce car parking numbers.
 - Please can you put more disabled parking adjacent to the surgery?
- The question around what the priorities are for Usk is important, in terms of what we want Usk's offer to be. The plan is helpful in setting our priorities and having projects that are ready as and when future funding becomes available.

Chair's Conclusion:

We welcome this report and recognise the importance of having this plan in place to capitalise on future funding opportunities. The committee unanimously endorses the report and its recommendations.

4. Strategic Procurement

The officer introduced the report by explaining that this was a position update following a detailed report being brought to the committee earlier in the year. She reminded members that the Cabinet had agreed in July 2021 that the Council's would enter into a mutually beneficial Delegation Agreement with Cardiff Council, for the discharge and provision of our strategic and operational procurement services. The committee was being invited to scrutinise progress including the development of an associated training plan for Officers.

The officer explained that early changes had been realised and she thanked Cardiff's Head of Procurement and our Procurement Manager for their hard work in achieving these so early. She presented the key points outlined in the report and drew members attention to the progress section, reminding the committee of the objectives and anticipated outcomes of this partnership working initiative.

The chair invited questions from members.

Member Questions:

- What are the early wins for Monmouthshire in this collaboration?

We have been able to bring some of the experience and knowledge we've developed over the last few years in Cardiff to assist Monmouthshire in the challenges going forward. We have started to develop a procurement strategy but to date, have focussed on developing seven clear objectives to provide a clear sense of direction of travel, for example, decarbonisation, social value, which are very challenging. We would like to help MCC accelerate their work, by drawing on our experience and lessons learnt, so that MCC doesn't have to go through the same learning curve. For example, in Cardiff, we have undertaken Carbon Modelling, so that will be to MCC's advantage. The 'Toms Model', which is concerned with achieving social value is something Cardiff has been at the forefront in introducing in Wales and we are starting to see the fruition of this work. The attention to detail around some of MCC's spending for example, until now, there haven't been the resources to examine this in such depth and this has given us the opportunity to undertake this important reflection.

- The most important thing in my view is the resource to be undertake this detailed analysis and it's clear that we didn't have the ability to be able to analyse the detail. It's not all about saving money, although there will be opportunities to save money, it's about realising the value of the money that is spent. I would like this committee to take a role in looking at these contracts in detail at a future point to see a return on investment. I think there is huge potential and we are moving in exactly the right direction in maximising the value of the public's money.
- I am particularly interested in how you would make spend more accessible through business and the third sector, do you have any examples?

There aren't any specific benefits we could highlight yet, but your contract procedure rules when redrafted for example, sought to require service areas to seek to include local business in opportunities. Some of the issues have been 'how do our service areas know about local suppliers' and there is some new software that is going to help us do that and tell us who those local contractors are. We are looking at greater visibility of the approach of going to market and ensuring local businesses have the opportunity to bid for contracts, so that we can develop a clearer contract register so we can track and monitor that. We are trying to better understand areas of spend where we have a good use of local suppliers versus some areas where we are struggling. If we look at the detail, we may see there are no suppliers or that there are some who we could look to engage with. We don't want to do this work in isolation, but collaborate with others and with Welsh Government, so an example of a partnership piece of work we are currently undertaking is 'improving the visibility of local suppliers'.

The 3 dedicated procurement officers that will be recruited will help us get some real traction on this. It is difficult to recruit experienced procurement officers but we have recruited to one of the 3 posts which mean MCC will have more capacity than previously, but we have had to focus on clarity of objectives, analysing spend and developing robust governance. The new posts should help us develop our forward plans.

- Can you tell me how this relates to social care recruitment?

This sector has some unique challenges and we are doing a specific piece of work in Cardiff on this at the moment to understand how spend is being managed in the organisation. To date, we have been concentrating on getting the foundations right.

- What do you mean by supporting social value and socio-economic? I am keen to know exactly what that means and how public sector spend will support communities that are currently socially excluded.

I would comment that if you are asking whether MCC has maximised opportunities to achieve social value before now, the answer would be probably not, but this is exactly what this collaboration is about so that we are not simply complying with governance regulations, but learning how to proactively make progress in ensuring the 'living wage' is paid. Therefore, we are taking the time to be very clear about what our objectives are. I understand your view that we should have been doing this already, but it's challenging and MCC wants to work with Cardiff to learn and develop from the position we are currently in.

- Where can we see the granular information on our contracts? Is this something we can expect fairly soon?

We are trying to tackle this on a number of fronts ~ through firstly a greater visibility of how money is being spent, but secondly, on how this informs our forward plan of how money will be spent in the future. We can only move forward from the current position we are in.

Chairs Conclusion

The chair offered thanks to MCC officers and the Head of Strategic Procurement at Cardiff Council for their time in attending to present the committee with a progress report. It was agreed that officers would be invited to return in 9 months' time to provide a further progress update.

5. Economy and Development Select Committee Forward Work Plan

The chair drew members' attention to the Special Meeting of the Economy and Development Select Committee that would be held on 14th December at 2pm to discuss the Replacement Local Development Plan.

6. Council and Cabinet Work Planner

The committee noted the report but did not highlight anything needed particular scrutiny that hadn't been taken into account in developing the Select Committee's work programme.

7. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

8. Next Meeting

3rd February 2022 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at **11.18 am.**