

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Thursday, 7th November, 2024 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jane Lucas (Chairman)
County Councillor Lisa Dymock, (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Tomos Davies, Lisa Dymock, Jackie Strong, Laura Wright, John Crook, Tony Easson, Angela Sandles and Martin Newell

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Ian Saunders, Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.
Colette Bosley, Green Infrastructure Manager
Philip Young, Head of Estate, Ministry of Defence

APOLOGIES: County Councillor Tudor Thomas

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

The first speaker discussed the need for an environmental impact assessment for the CS0270 development, highlighting concerns about air quality and traffic emissions in Monmouth. He emphasised the importance of monitoring and mitigating air quality impacts. He also mentioned the inconsistency in air quality policies and the need for better monitoring methodologies to understand the true nature of traffic emissions.

The second speaker raised concerns about the quality of drinking water in Monmouth, citing reports from the Drinking Water Inspectorate about significant risks of water contamination, specifically mentioning cryptosporidium. They urged reconsideration of the Dixton Road development due to potential water contamination risks. Concerns were raised about the feasibility of achieving 50% social or affordable housing in the Dixton Road development due to current economic and legislative challenges. It was noted that housing associations may not have the funds to purchase the required affordable housing stock.

The third speaker objected to Redrow Homes' proposal to forgo an ecological impact assessment for the Dixton Road development, citing various environmental and ecological concerns, including the impact on drinking water, air pollution, and the habitat of endangered species.

ACTION: To send these concerns and information to the Cabinet Member and officers to consider

Councillor Martin Newell read a letter from a resident opposing the experimental traffic order on Goldwire Lane. Concerns included ambiguous signage, potential congestion, emergency access issues, and the impact on local residents. **The Chair thanked the resident for her contribution. The committee noted it as an ongoing issue and invited the resident to return with further information in due course.**

The fourth speaker emphasised the importance of Vauxhall Bridge as the only level access pedestrian route onto Vauxhall Fields, which connects the north and south of the town. She highlighted its use by residents for accessing work, school, and leisure activities, particularly for less able individuals.

The fifth speaker supported the previous points concerning the bridge, and reiterated its importance as a safe route from Osbaston into the town centre.

3. Question and Answer Discussion on Ingles/Vauxhall Bridge, Monmouth

Philip Young (Head of Estate, Ministry Of Defence) addressed the committee and answered the members' questions.

Key points from members:

- A member enquired about the timeline for a resolution and whether there is a Plan B if funding is not approved. Mr Young responded that he could not provide a definitive timeline or details about a Plan B but once funding is available, the MOD will work quickly and closely with MCC to ensure any inconvenience is brought to an end as soon as possible.
- A member asked if the Education department is aware of the bridge's closure and if there is a potential funding route through the Welsh Government for safe routes to school.
Chair:...
- Cabinet Member Angela Sandles provided an update on the ongoing efforts to resolve the bridge closure, including regular contact with local MOD officers and discussions with the town council. She emphasised the importance of reinstating the right of way for residents.
- The Cabinet Member read a statement from Councillor Catrin Maby, expressing concern about the impact of the bridge closure on the local community and the need for a speedy resolution.
- The Chair asked about the impact of the closure of Vauxhall Bridge on the community, particularly regarding safe pedestrian access, the well-being of the town, and the safety of children walking to school. Mr Young explained that the bridge was closed on public safety grounds due to structural concerns. He mentioned that a scheme to refurbish the bridge has been approved, but funding is currently lacking. The matter is receiving high-level attention within the MOD, and once funding is available, the works will be programmed and undertaken swiftly.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked Mr Young for attending today. She welcomed anyone who has not yet signed the petition regarding the bridge to do so as it will support Mr Young to get the matter resolved. The committee agreed to write a letter supporting the push for funding to repair the bridge, emphasising the importance of resolving the matter for the community's well-being. – **ACTION**

4. Scrutiny of STEAM

Cabinet Member Angela Sandles introduced the report. Nicola Edwards delivered a presentation and answered the members' questions with Councillor Sandles.

Key points from members:

- A member enquired about the data sets in the STEAM report, specifically how visitors arrive, how they travel once they arrive, and if there is any investment in promoting public transport for tourists. The officer explained that the majority of visitors arrive by car and travel around by car as well. She mentioned that efforts are being made to promote public transport and work with transport operators to encourage its use, although it is challenging in a rural destination like Monmouthshire.
- It was further asked if any public money is invested directly into tourist promotion and if there is a correlation between such investments and positive impacts on the data. The officer responded that while the team does record and report on marketing metrics, detailed visitor research is expensive, and they do not currently have the budget for large-scale visitor surveys. She mentioned that the new Destination Management Plan would address these issues and provide more detailed insights.

- A member asked about the correlation between the labour market statistics and the STEAM report. The officer clarified that the labour market statistics were not part of the report. She explained that the STEAM report focuses on the number of jobs supported by tourism, which is distributed across various employment sectors, including both employed and self-employed individuals. She mentioned that the 15% figure represents the total employment in Monmouthshire supported by tourism.
- A member asked about the occupancy rates of hotel accommodation compared to self-catering accommodation, and enquired about the support for the private self-catering market, considering factors like tourism tax, business rates, and the necessity for holiday lets to have a certain number of days of occupation. The officer explained that non-serviced and self-catering accommodations drive economic impact growth in Monmouthshire. She noted that the accommodation profile is skewed in favour of non-serviced accommodations, which have recovered better post-pandemic. She highlighted the challenges faced by self-catering providers, such as the 182-day occupancy threshold for business rates, which is higher than in England, and mentioned that the visitor levy could be an opportunity if the revenue generated is reinvested to improve the visitor experience.
- The member also questioned the need for further hotel accommodation versus improving self-catering options. The officer emphasised the importance of having a good range of different types of accommodations to attract various visitors, including those who choose destinations based on specific hotels.
- A member asked how Monmouthshire is addressing the challenges posed by extreme weather on tourism and how to keep people coming back. The officer responded that destinations with wet weather attractions have been more resilient, highlighting the importance of having compelling experiences that are not affected by extreme weather. She mentioned that Monmouthshire already has some attractions like castles and halls that cater to this need.
- The member also enquired about incorporating visitor feedback into the new destination management plan and any areas identified for improvement through stakeholder engagement sessions. The officer noted that common issues raised include car parking, public toilets, and public transport, which affect both residents' quality of life and visitor experience. She confirmed that these insights would be incorporated into the new Destination Management Plan.
- A member asked about qualitative insights gathered from visitors e.g. what they value about the Monmouthshire experience, their expectations, and areas for improvement. The officer responded that the team has lots of insightful data on what visitors think about Monmouthshire, including their motivations, activities, and perceptions of the area's strengths. This information will be presented as part of the new Destination Management Plan.
- Concerning budgetary constraints, the member asked if there are potential funding opportunities beyond Welsh Government, including cross-border tourism initiatives, that Monmouthshire could leverage. The officer explained that funding for destination marketing has been reducing, and they rely on partnerships with Visit Wales, Welsh Government, and private sector partners for promotional activities. She noted that opportunities for funding from UK Government are limited due to the perception of displacement activity.
- A member enquired about the data on bed spaces, specifically if it includes campsites and airs (dedicated motorhome parking spaces) within the non-serviced accommodation data. The officer confirmed that the non-serviced bed spaces data includes caravan and camping, as well as glamping. She also clarified that Monmouthshire does not currently have any airs.
- A member asked about the breakdown of the impact of Airbnb and self-catering units on tourism and employment. It was explained that serviced accommodation, such as hotels, is the most valuable type of accommodation as it supports more jobs and delivers the highest value of all tourism. However, Monmouthshire has more non-serviced accommodation, including self-catering and Airbnb, which has been driving economic growth post-pandemic.

- The member asked how Monmouthshire County Council's website could be used for greater promotion of events in the county. The officer mentioned that MCC's website has a calendar of events that is free for event organizers to add their information to, promoting events across the county.
- A member asked about the effect of traffic congestion on the visitor experience, e.g. around Chepstow, whether there is potential for park and ride facilities in Monmouthshire, and if there is any liaison with bus companies and tour operators to organise trips to the county. The officer explained that some larger event venues, like Chepstow Racecourse, organise park and ride schemes for large events. However, organising such schemes for smaller numbers would be difficult and costly. She also mentioned that travel trade activity, including encouraging coach companies and tour operators to come to Monmouthshire, is done collaboratively as part of a Southeast Wales regional marketing campaign. This includes attending trade shows and working with operators to include Monmouthshire experiences in their itineraries.
- The Chair asked if Visitor yield and price is per head per day, or includes an overnight stay. The officer explained that the report covers two different metrics: economic impact per visitor (visit yield) and economic impact per visitor day. The average economic impact per visitor is £144, which varies significantly between day visitors and staying visitors. Day visitors contribute between £42 and £279, while staying visitors contribute £439, which includes their overnight accommodation costs. The average economic impact per visitor day is £93.43.
- The Chair asked what can be done, or is recommended, to deal with the squeeze on self-catering profits from the 182-day occupancy rate. The officer agreed that there is a risk, the size of which is not known, but from the regular feedback received from self-catering operators what they are most struggling with is the 182-day occupancy threshold.
- The Chair asked about the relationship between this report and the RLDP. The Cabinet Member explained that discussions with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development and officers have highlighted the openness to various approaches from tourist operators. The team is willing to collaborate and encourage these operators to come to the county. They have numerous links on their websites, such as MonLife and Visit Monmouthshire, which provide ample opportunities for tourism. She emphasised that there is room in the RLDP for positive developments in tourism and collaboration with operators moving forward.
- Councillor Brown proposed that the committee gives a recommendation to Welsh Government that the 182-day occupancy threshold be reviewed – **ACTION**

Chair's Summary:

Thank you to the Cabinet Member and officers. A number of points were raised by the committee including questions about increasing private self-catering accommodation and the impact of taxes, traffic congestion, and park-and-ride schemes; promoting Monmouthshire and expressing interest in hearing reports on the impact of different types of accommodation; enquiries about how visitors arrive and travel within the area, and the value of self-catering accommodations; discussing what drives visitors and their expectations, and asking about potential cross-border funding; emphasising the importance of tourism to Monmouthshire and the need to keep tourists returning, mentioning the Corporate Plan and the upcoming Destination Management Plan; and there was a discussion on the Visitor Yield from council tax and profits, as well as the implications of the 182-day occupancy rule for self-catering accommodation, and the RLDP.

The committee agreed to draft a letter to the Welsh Government, with the help of officers, to address the challenges posed by the 182-day occupancy threshold for self-catering accommodations and its impact on the tourism economy of Monmouthshire. The legislation needs to be in place for self-catering accommodation to be properly regulated.

5. Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

Members were updated that the Water Quality item for the next meeting has been expanded to include concerns about sewerage in the Shirenewton area, at Councillor Brown's request. Members were asked about their particular areas of interest, concerning Active Travel following Governance & Audit Committee's action for scrutiny to review the success of schemes and to seek assurance that adequate progress is being made. Officers will email members for suggestions for future scrutiny –

ACTION

Councillor Strong expressed concern that the Flooding Strategy might not be ready until Summer; officers have been reminded that it has been on the committee's work programme for some time and is in the Corporate Plan – scrutiny officers expect it to come in March. Councillor Brown requested that the committee be updated about the Night Shelter Petition – **ACTION**.

Scrutiny officers noted Councillor Brown's suggestion to add Chepstow to the list of Placemaking Plans to be scrutinised – scrutiny officers have requested an update on these. Councillor Strong suggested that the age of the county is factored into the Placemaking Plans and Councillor Dymock suggested that Town and Community Councils are invited to participate as well. The Chair encouraged residents to come to speak to the committee about any of their concerns.

6. Cabinet and Council Work Planner

7. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2024

The minutes were confirmed, proposed by Councillor Strong and seconded by Councillor Brown, who noted the following correction: 'Mountain Road' to be replaced by 'Moun-ton Road'.

8. Next Meeting: 5th December 2024 at 10 a.m.

The meeting is at 2pm.

The meeting ended at **4.25 pm**

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