

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Thursday, 9th October, 2025 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jane Lucas (Chair)
County Councillor (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Tomos Davies, Lisa Dymock, Jackie Strong, Tudor Thomas, John Crook and Martyn Groucutt

Also in attendance County Councillors:
Sara Burch, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism and Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Officers in Attendance

Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Craig O'Connor, Chief Officer, Place and Community Well-being
Deb Hill-Howells, Chief Officer Infrastructure
Nicola Edwards, Strategic Food and Tourism Manager
Carl Touhig, Head of Neighbourhood Services
Colette Bosley, Green Infrastructure Manager
Mark Cleaver, GI Strategy and Policy Officer
Kevin Ford, Destination Marketing Officer
Nigel Leaworthy, Commercial & Operations Manager
Susan Parkinson, Gi and Litter Education Officer

APOLOGIES: None

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

None.

3. Confirmation the minutes of the meeting held on 25th September 2025

The minutes were confirmed, with amendments from Councillors Dymock, Brown and Lucas, which are to be incorporated into the minutes before they are included in the RLDP Deposit Plan report going to Council later in the month.

4. Destination Management Plan

Cabinet Member Sara Burch introduced the report, Nicola Edwards delivered a presentation with Kevin Ford, and they answered the members' questions with Colette Bosley, Craig O' Connor and Nigel Leaworthy:

How will Monmouthshire leverage the Cardiff Capital Region and the Marches Growth Deal for partnership marketing and promoting its visitor offer?

The Cabinet Member confirmed the plan would open opportunities to work regionally, especially with Cardiff Capital Region, as visitors often travel across counties for events and attractions. Strengthening regional networks is a priority.

Did the visitor survey identify critical gaps in tourism assets, such as a dedicated conferencing centre or other infrastructure?

The Cabinet Member stated there are no plans to rival the ICC but to work with existing venues like Celtic Manor. Gaps identified include activities for families during poor weather and more open-air destinations. The Shire Hall renovation and new music venue are expected to help address these gaps.

What insights have been gathered from neighbouring border counties, and how can Monmouthshire differentiate its tourism offer?

The officer explained that global trends show visitors seek local cultural experiences and community connection. Monmouthshire's focus is on sense of place and celebrating unique local culture and traditions to stand out from similar counties.

What stakeholder feedback has been received regarding the proposed Welsh Government tourism levy and the tax/rates treatment for holiday lets?

The officers noted the fast-changing policy environment and that Monmouthshire County Council will not consult on the visitor levy until after the current administration. A Shared Prosperity Fund project will assess policy impacts on businesses and the destination to inform future decisions.

Can you provide further details on Monmouthshire's partnerships with the Marches Partnership and Cardiff Capital Region?

The officer described Monmouthshire's engagement in the Marches Partnership, including a completed tourism feasibility study aligned with local priorities. The Chief Officer added that work with Cardiff Capital Region includes promoting Monmouthshire for economic and tourism development, supporting sustainable tourism, and helping businesses access funding.

How will the Council manage potential tensions between increased visitor numbers and the protection of sensitive environmental areas such as the Wye Valley, River Usk, and Gwent Levels?

The officers explained that collaboration with partners is key, and marketing efforts aim to distribute visitors more evenly and promote less-visited "hidden gems." Sensitive areas are not actively promoted, and events are used to encourage off-season visits. Monmouthshire faces fewer problems than other destinations, but issues are addressed collaboratively.

What steps are being taken to make Monmouthshire's tourism offer more accessible for visitors with disabilities, and how will progress be tracked?

The officer described the "Destination for All" project, which provides grants to improve accessibility and enhances online resources (e.g., audio functionality, 360° tours). Partners like Abergavenny Town Council are also working on accessibility. Progress is tracked through these initiatives and ongoing improvements.

Is there a national site or self-certification system to inform residents about the accessibility of town centres or attractions, similar to difficulty ratings on walking trail apps?

The officers responded that there is no specific system currently, but resources are being invested in community engagement and links to improve accessibility information. Collaboration with the Countryside Access team is ongoing, and further development in this area is planned.

Why is tourism not more prominently emphasised in the RLDP vision, and how will car parking issues be addressed?

The officers clarified that the RLDP vision includes business thriving, which covers tourism, and that there are significant policies supporting sustainable tourism and visitor accommodation. The Destination Management Plan and RLDP have been collaboratively developed.

Is it appropriate to reference the Netflix series "Sex Education" in the tourism plan, and could alternative film references or local attractions be used instead?

The concern was acknowledged and the team noted that the series attracts visitors, but agreed it is a topic for further discussion. The Cabinet Member emphasised the need to consider how to leverage successful media while being mindful of appropriateness.

What effect will the 182-day occupancy rule and proposed licensing for B&Bs have on self-catering providers, and have these providers been consulted?

Officers explained that the market has seen an oversupply of self-catering, partly due to temporary "side hustle" lets. The new registration and licensing requirements aim to create a level playing field and improve standards. A policy impact assessment is planned to gather feedback from businesses, including self-catering providers. The details of licensing (fees, administration) are still being developed.

What support will be provided to established self-catering providers struggling with the 182-day rule and potential additional licensing costs?

The officers acknowledged the short-term challenges and reiterated that the policy impact assessment will address these issues. The aim is to balance market correction, safety, and quality, but details on fees and administration are not yet finalised.

What is the process if a developer submits an outline planning application before the RLDP is adopted?

Officers clarified that no planning applications could be approved until the RLDP is adopted and has gone through the required examination process.

How does the plan to increase tourism by 25% align with concerns about unregulated "side hustle" accommodation and the current level of self-catering provision?

The officer clarified that the oversupply is due to temporary, less-regulated accommodation, which impacts occupancy rates for traditional providers. The new registration and licensing are expected to correct the market and improve standards.

Will farm B&Bs and rural diversification businesses continue to be supported under the new regulations?

The officer confirmed that farm B&Bs and diversification businesses are important for the rural economy and will continue to be supported through the changes.

How was the visitor survey conducted, how were visitors approached, and how can the number of responses be increased in future?

Officers explained the survey was primarily online, promoted through social media and newsletters, and acknowledged the limited number of responses. They plan to implement rolling, annual surveys and use incentives and face-to-face engagement at events to improve participation.

How is the Council promoting responsible tourism and the countryside code, particularly regarding environmental impacts like litter and fly camping?

Officers confirmed that responsible and environmentally sensitive tourism is a core part of their messaging. They promote the countryside code, collaborate with partners, and integrate these values into marketing and community engagement.

Why is the Welsh language not more prominently featured in the tourism plan, and how will this be addressed?

The oversight was acknowledged and the officer agreed that the Welsh language should be more prominent in the plan, committing to address this in future revisions.

Why was Caldicot Castle only briefly mentioned in the report, and what feedback has been gathered from visitors to recent events held there?

Officers explained that they aimed for a diverse range of images and references in the report, acknowledged Caldicot Castle's importance, and noted its popularity among residents. They stated that they would need to check with the culture team for more detailed visitor feedback on recent events and would follow up with additional information.

Could the plan better highlight the castles located within Monmouthshire's market towns such as Chepstow, Caldicot, Abergavenny, and Monmouth?

The officers responded that town centre improvements are addressed through placemaking plans, which are the appropriate venue for such enhancements. The Destination Management Plan feeds into these place-based approaches, and opportunities for town centre improvements would be delivered within that context.

What improvements are planned for the appearance and maintenance of town centres, particularly in Chepstow, and could examples from other towns be used as models?

Town centre improvements, including in Chepstow, are expected to be delivered through placemaking plans, which align with the broader goals of the Destination Management Plan. These plans provide the framework for enhancing town centre appearance and maintenance, potentially drawing on examples from other towns

How many disability-accessible accommodation options are available in Monmouthshire?

It was explained that accessibility varies widely depending on individual needs. They try to provide access statements for all accommodation on their website but rely on operators to supply this information. Some businesses have received grants to improve accessibility, and there is demand in the market for accessible options.

What percentage of jobs in Monmouthshire are supported by tourism?

Officers stated that tourism currently supports 3,422 full-time equivalent jobs, with the plan aiming for a 25% increase over its lifetime.

Was a consultant used to produce the tourism report, who was it, and what was the cost?

Officers confirmed that a consultant (Marie Stevens) was used due to limited in-house capacity. The consultancy cost was £15,000, which they considered good value for the work delivered.

A member emphasised the need for tourism and travel strategies to adapt over time, highlighting a recent example of early collaboration between the town council and tourism development in Abergavenny.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report and their responses to the committee's questions. The report was moved.

5. Litter and Flytipping

Cabinet Member Catrin Maby introduced the item. Carl Touhig delivered a presentation and answered the members' questions with Mark Cleaver and Susan Parkinson:

What is being considered to change public behaviour around littering, alongside enforcement strategies?

The team acknowledged the importance of communication alongside enforcement, aiming for positive messaging to improve behaviour rather than just issuing fines. They confirmed that communication would accompany enforcement to raise awareness and encourage responsible behaviour.

How is the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) being applied, particularly in relation to dog fouling on green spaces and sports pitches?

The officers explained that enforcement officers would cover a wide range of areas, including sports pitches, parks, and town centres, with a focus on prevention and awareness, especially for children's play areas.

How can the public be better informed about new dog fouling rules before enforcement is applied?

The officers acknowledged the ongoing problem of dog fouling on pitches, described efforts to directly inform dog owners, and mentioned plans for additional public information, especially as sports seasons begin.

Have "clever bins" (smart bins) been installed, and are they effective in managing overflow?

The officer explained that smart bin technology had faced technical issues but was being resolved, with full deployment expected soon and data to be shared once available.

Could enforcement cases, such as roadside camera footage, be used publicly to deter littering?

The officers agreed that enforcement should be used for its deterrent effect, with publicity around enforcement actions to maximize impact and prevent future offenses.

Can general litter bins be used for dog waste, and how can signage be improved to clarify this?

The officer clarified that bagged dog waste can go in general litter bins, but if bins become too full of dog waste, it creates manual handling issues for staff, so using dedicated dog bins or taking waste home is preferred.

What are the funding amounts, durations, and contributors for EPR, Tidy Towns, Pride in Place, and Enforcement initiatives?

The officer explained EPR funding comes from packaging producers to offset public waste collection costs, with over £4 million secured for the current year and future funding to be clarified soon.

Does Tidy Towns and Pride in Place funding extend to rural areas beyond town centres?

Tidy Towns funding covers a wide range of nuisance issues, not just town centres, and Pride in Place focuses on town centres but may also support improvements to access and footpaths.

Can the council recover costs for cleaning mud left on roads by farmers when responsibility is clear?

Enforcement for mud on roads is primarily an education-first approach, with letters sent to farmers; enforcement is a last resort if cooperation fails.

A member stated that enforcement is contentious but necessary due to the high cost of litter collection, especially on trunk roads suggesting that periodic, targeted enforcement could effectively deter littering and dog fouling, drawing a comparison with parking fines, for which penalties discourage repeat offenses. The suggestion was made to work with fast food businesses to address litter from takeaway packaging, as changing lifestyles contribute to roadside litter.

What support can the council offer to help volunteers clean difficult areas like those affected by grass cutting?

Officers explained that verge mowing is done by local farmers, who are supposed to report littered routes, but communication can lag; area supervisors and frontline staff are empowered to respond when notified. They noted that reduced mowing frequency (now only once per year) makes litter more visible after cuts, and collaboration with local members helps address issues.

What can be done to address weekend litter in Caldicot town centre and encourage community involvement?

Officers highlighted that new Tidy Towns teams will provide extra capacity to respond quickly to such issues, including during road closures or after verge mowing.

Could plastic screens be installed on litter bins to prevent rubbish from blowing out, as seen on the Isle of Wight?

Officers addressed bin design, explaining the trade-off between accessibility and preventing windblown or vermin-scattered litter; closures or flaps can deter use due to hygiene concerns, but they are open to targeted solutions where problems are acute. Officers encouraged the Member to contact them about specific bin locations needing improvement and confirmed that new bins are being considered as part of Tidy Towns funding.

Could the Council formally recognise and thank volunteers who regularly pick litter, such as those in Abergavenny?

The Chair and officers agreed with the suggestion, expressing support for a formal recognition event or message to thank volunteers, or for the committee to join in with a litter picking event, and discussed the success of local groups like Keep Abergavenny Tidy. – **ACTION**. Officers noted similar volunteer groups exist in other towns and encouraged efforts to establish a group in Caldicot, where one does not currently exist, to further improve local cleanliness and collaboration.

Could more blunt signage be used on trunk roads during litter picks to inform drivers and raise awareness about littering?

Officers explained that while the council is responsible for trunk road litter picking, signage would require SWTRA's approval, but they are open to discussing more direct messaging to raise public awareness. – **ACTION: Carl to speak to SWTRA about more blunt signage**

Can dash cams be encouraged as a tool for reporting littering incidents?

Officers agreed that dash cam reporting, and school-based education, are valuable ideas and can be explored further.

Can councillors request the new sweeper for their wards, and is it effective on pavements, particularly for weed removal?

Officers clarified that there are three mini sweepers equipped for pavements and weed removal, and a larger sweeper rotates through areas, including villages, but resource limitations affect frequency. They noted that community councils can pay for enhanced services, and requests for sweepers in specific areas can be accommodated where possible.

What alternatives to chemical spraying are available for maintaining weed-free town centres?

The team acknowledged the challenge of weed management without chemicals and stated that they are continually seeking effective operational solutions, with new equipment and funding improving capacity.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the team for the presentation and their responses to the committee's questions. The members all wished to thank the team for its hard work in keeping the county clean, its responsiveness to Members, and thanked the officers, as well as volunteers, for their litter picking efforts.

6. Next Meeting: 6th November 2025

The meeting ended at **5.32 pm**