



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel – Development & Regeneration**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Tuesday, 12 January 2021 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor J W Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

P M Black
S J Gallagher
C A Holley
M H Jones
W G Thomas

Councillor(s)

P Downing
D W Helliwell
P R Hood-Williams
P K Jones
T M White

Councillor(s)

E W Fitzgerald
T J Hennegan
L James
S M Jones

Cabinet Members

Robert Francis-Davies
Rob Stewart

Cabinet Member - Investment, Regeneration & Tourism
Cabinet Member - Economy, Finance & Strategy (Leader)

Officer(s)

Huw Mowbray
Phil Holmes
Liz Jordan
Emily Davies
Vicki Thomson
Clare James
Martin Nicholls

Property Development Manager
Head of Planning & City Regeneration
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Officer
External Funding Programme Officer
Economic Development Manager
Director of Place

Apologies for Absence

None

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Cllr Paxton Hood-Williams disclosed an interest in item 6

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

No declarations were made

3 Minutes of previous meetings

The Panel considered letters and minutes from previous meetings and agreed the minutes of the meeting on 3rd November 2020 as an accurate record of the meeting.

Some queries were raised regarding follow up of the previous meeting discussions:

- Swansea Central Phase 1 – Members requested more detailed information on the impact of Covid-19 cases amongst employees, particularly those employees who are not local to Swansea. Queries were raised about what is being done to safeguard the local population.
- Officers assured the Panel that all appropriate measures were being taken to limit the risk of Covid-19 infections, such as splitting the team into sections, pods working / living together, and compliance with all associated guidelines and legislation.
- Strategic sites – Skyline: Concerns expressed over the recent announcement that a similar attraction will open in Hirwaun this year. The Panel expressed concern over competition. Cabinet Members addressed this point, confirming that Skyline see this as a positive addition, and that Welsh Government and the Council are keen to see the clustering of attractions within the region.
- Skyline and the Welsh Government are still in negotiation with regards to funding; the timescale for completion, should the project go ahead, is four years.
- The Leader highlighted that the Skyline project is an international inward investment to Swansea and will not be a Council-funded development. The Leader reiterated the need to build on the tourism economy and bring more attractions to the region as a whole. Officers cited the Pembrokeshire region as a good example of clustering tourist attractions.
- Castle Square – Members requested a detailed update on developments since the appointment of the Development Manager.
- The Leader confirmed that good progress is being made regarding Castle Square and revised proposals are shortly to be released.
- Members questioned the previous letter response by the Leader, citing the pie chart as unclear in relation to what exactly constitutes 'local labour' (employment), as it appears to include all of Wales. Officers undertook to provide the local figures.

4 Public Questions

No questions were submitted by members of the public

5 Project Update Report

Huw Mowbray, Property Development Manager, updated the Panel on the regeneration projects in Swansea. The Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy (Leader), and the Cabinet Member for Investment Regeneration and Tourism, also attended for this item.

Swansea Central Phase 1

- Good progress being made. Digital and wifi infrastructure provider has been confirmed as Vodafone. Review undertaken to consider CCTV design and delivery as part of Phase 1.
- The Arena is almost watertight. External cladding to commence shortly.
- Pobl agreement complete together with show flat in readiness for NHBC inspection. A good outcome as will reduce Council contribution.
- Members asked if consideration was given to using the housing revenue account to purchase these flats as Council is trying to increase its Council housing stock. Officers explained that this was not an option at the time as a capital revenue cap was in place. This has now been lifted we can look ahead to other opportunities.
- Members queried the length of the lease agreement with Pobl. Officers are willing to provide heads of terms if needed, although the units are designed for flexible change of use if ever required.
- New Copr Bay website launched to incorporate new brand. Officers confirm a very positive response, particularly from local traders.
- The Panel queried why bamboo was being planted on site, as opposed to native plants. Officers confirmed that native plants are also being planted.
- Members queried which access groups had been consulted regarding this site. Officers confirmed they had consulted with residents and sent out newsletters.
- Members queried whether there have been complaints, or compliments, from local residents regarding the site. Officers confirmed that there have been positive and negative comments received, and, understandably, also complaints in relation to the building site noise and activity. This is likely to reduce now as the crane has been removed and preliminary building structures completed.
- Members queried current situation regarding tree removal in Wellington Street. Officers confirmed that two trees had to be removed due to the relocation of the access to Tesco, however, mitigation measures are in place and new trees have been planted.
- Members questioned whether there would be good take up of commercial units in the current business climate. Officers confirmed that there has been a good level of interest from local businesses.
- Members asked whether ATG have needed to shed further staff. Officers confirmed that most of ATG's staff are on furlough, however, as an equity business, partners have invested funds. ATG continue to look to appoint a manager for the Swansea Arena and plan to open their business up again this year.
- Members raised concerns over whether the Hotel development would be at risk. Officers confirmed that Cairns are still committed to moving forward and await response from Visit Wales concerning funding.

Swansea Central North

- As part of the spending review, GPA have been awarded funding for multiple hub projects across the UK. We are awaiting details of the funding award in order to progress.

- Welsh Government continue to review their accommodation strategy, expected to support localised hubs.
- The Panel requested details of organisations who had shown interest in locating to Central Swansea. The Leader replied that details could not be shared at the present time due to negotiations between various parties.

Kingsway

- The Panel heard that this development is reaching a conclusion and defects are being finalised. The scheme will exceed the original tendered sum by Dawnus and this overspend is expected to be covered by the bond in place.

71/72 Kingsway

- It was heard that a tender on the construction contract has needed to be revised. No contractors complied with the original terms and as such a revised specification has now gone out to bid. The Panel heard that non-compliance was mainly due to the range of non-comparable alternative suggestions.
- Panel Members queried whether we should be value engineering this project and were informed that we should not.
- The completion date is scheduled for February 2023.

Wind Street

- Advanced work already completed includes tree management which makes the area's historic architecture more visible, new street lights have been installed and new coloured pea-lights on trees.
- Discussions are ongoing with stakeholder groups, such as residents and disability groups.
- The Panel queried the current state of business in Wind St, given restrictions. Officers confirmed that most businesses are closed, however, owners are keen to see the works completed as this will help retain businesses and attract new business if/when applicable.
- The Leader confirmed that Swansea is leading the way in terms of recovery of jobs, indicating an 8.1% growth rate.

Marketing of Strategic Sites

- Dialogue meetings with selected partners have begun and meetings arranged for bidders to have the opportunity to meet representatives from SC planning and housing departments and Welsh Government.
- Ongoing discussion with Council colleagues with regard to how to proceed with updating parking standards.
- Members queried whether traffic management for the city centre would be able to accommodate self-drive cars in the future. Officers believe that it is future proofed. They explained that the road network has been mapped and drop off areas have been modelled into the project. They confirmed there is no reason why these areas could not be used by self-drive cars in the future.

Strategic Sites and Projects Overview

- Castle Square - revised requirements for additional greenspace and increased commercial opportunities.

- Skyline - Covid has caused delays across all Skyline projects. If Skyline decide to proceed then the timescale is expected to be: 12 month planning, 12 month design and 24 month build.
- Mariner Street – Works are progressing, although delays due to Covid-19. Heads of terms agreed with one anchor tenant. Discussions ongoing to secure second anchor tenant.

External Funding Overview

- Palace Theatre - Overall programme remains on track for June 2022 completion
- Woolworths store development being assessed - Hacer have requested TCL upfront for the former Woolworths property development. Likely to be mixed use as value in retail rental on ground floor.
- Pontoons development - continues to progress and we are trying to source funding to take this development forward. The Panel heard that river taxis and the Copper Jack boat will be able to drop off passengers at various access points along the River.
- There will be some limitations to how far boats can travel past the bascule bridge.
- Members asked whether this project will enable water sports. Officers stated that the River is already designated as a rowing river and the rowing club have expressed interest in a site along the river bank.
- Swansea Vale – Members queried the time taken to produce an ecology report and wished to highlight the increasingly rare site occupied (water meadow). Officers assured the Panel the ecology report was in the final stages of completion. Officers explained that NRW are revising the flood requirements and this will need to be considered before taking anything forward.
- Felindre - Officers confirmed they would update the Panel on this project in due course.

6 Commercial Opportunities in Rural Areas

The Panel were grateful for the presentation given by Vicki Thomson, External Funding Programme Officer. Clare James, Economic Development Manager, also attended for this item. It was noted that:

- Swansea Rural Development Partnership (RDP) is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) until 2023.
- The Panel heard that the programme aims to promote strong, sustainable rural economic growth in Wales and encourage greater community-led local development; being community led as opposed to business led.
- The Panel heard that Swansea RDP's Local Action Group (LAG) administers the locally led 'LEADER' fund, being made up of private, third, and public sector representatives operating over eight rural wards.
- Officers explained that a 'One Planet' approach is taken, having regard to the impact activities have on the planet and taking action to reduce the resources consumed/waste produced.
- Rural project outputs have exceeded targets thus far.

- Officers set out the financial position of the project, £281,900 being the remaining budget yet to be allocated.
- The Panel heard about completed projects, such as the Killan Community project, under which a Solar Farm will progress to access further Government funding. The 'Market at the Mill' was another example of a successful project which now continues to trade selling local produce.
- Current projects which are ongoing include - Community Supported Agriculture, Gower Off Rd Cycle Routes and Big Meadow – Surf and Turf.
- The Panel understand that the last funding window was during summer 2020 and will need to be utilised by February 2023.
- The Panel heard that, depending on the amount of the grant, there are two different application processes.
- It was explained that although the Rural Development Programme is centred around a community approach (rather than individual business support and development), the Swansea RDP team recognises there is a responsibility to work with businesses to identify the necessary mechanisms that create a resilient foundational economy.
- Members heard about specific challenges faced as a result of the pandemic:
 - Over the last 9 months, Rural Swansea has experienced significant impact due to the pandemic and a wave of local restrictions put in place to protect public health.
 - Tourism businesses have reported their inability to capitalise on visitor spend; demand for accommodation has been non-existent.
 - Hospitality businesses have reported severe losses in trade due to the restrictions.
 - Primary and secondary food producers have reported collapses in the supply chain.
 - Food retail has seen increased demand for locally produced foods. Those which have the capacity to deliver to customers have reported increases in sales but have concerns regarding customer retention once supermarkets make delivery slots more widely available;
 - All businesses have reported difficulties with financial support through restricted commercial activity, lack of clarity on restrictions and difficulties within supply chains.
 - Swansea Food Partnership was set up as a direct response to discussions with rural food businesses in RDP areas, who expressed a need and interest in a coordinated approach for food and drink business support and networking. Currently, the Swansea Food Partnership has no funding and is seeking resources to achieve identified outcomes.
- Members raised concerns over available funding now that the UK has left the European Union. Officers explained that the European funding already secured will be available to spend until 2023. Other funding streams are being explored, namely the 'Shared Prosperity Fund'.
- Members commented on the lower than average global footprint per person in Swansea at 3.25 gha.
- Members queried which organisations are represented within the LAG. Officers cited SCVS, Wales Cooperative and Coed Fach, who recently stepped down from the Partnership. There is to be an open call for additional group members.

- Members queried whether local food resources were also sustainable and if any account is taken of eating less meat.
- The Panel commented on the positive work and projects they had heard about, including the Gower cycle routes. Members queried the progress of this, however officers explained that delays have been met due to land access permissions and inevitable Covid-19 delays. Officers undertook to come back with more information on extending the cycle route and bike hire.
- Members discussed how North Gower is also very important for cycle routes.
- Members questioned whether there were links with other RDPs in the region. Officers stated that the regional teams meet every six weeks to share good practice.
- The Panel raised concerns over the historic Penclawdd cockle picking industry, and the effects suffered as a result of an estuary diesel spillage earlier this year. Officers undertook to liaise directly with that group once again.

Actions:

- Drone footage of the Arena is yet to be provided in place of a site tour.
- Further update on the marketing of Felindre to be provided at future meeting.
- Greater clarity sought on what constitutes local labour, and how exactly the figures in the previous response letter reflect Swansea's workforce.
- More information to be provided to the Panel on extending the cycle route and bike hire.

7 Letters

The meeting ended at 12.08 pm