

Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Performance Panel Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The overarching remit of the Panel is to be responsible for ongoing monitoring of Council performance in relation to development and regeneration, including the 'health' of the city centre, wider economic development across Swansea and discussion about progress on the Swansea Bay City Deal. The Panel is focused on contributing to the ongoing development and regeneration of Swansea by acting as a critical friend for the Cabinet, and helping to ensure accountability.

2. Key Activities

Meetings have included a regular update on the current development and regeneration projects as well as a focussed item.

Since the last update in November 2021 Cllr Chris Holley has taken over as Panel Convener in May 2022 from Cllr Jeff Jones. The Panel has covered the following topics and sent 5 letters to Cabinet.

Meeting	Topic(s)
25 January 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Swansea Business Improvement District (BID) 2. Foreshore Developments 3. Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report
8 March 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. South West Wales Regional Economic Delivery Plan 2. Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report
5 September 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report
14 November 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. City Centre Retail 2. Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report
23 January 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tourism Destination Management Plan 2. Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report
20 March 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Audit Wales Report – Town Centre Regeneration 2. Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report

3. Achievements / Impact

Swansea Business Improvement District (BID)

- This item was discussed while Cllr Jeff Jones acted as Panel Convener.
- The Panel received an overview presentation, submitted by Russell Greenslade, Chief Executive of Swansea BID.
- Members asked questions regarding performance measuring, area coverage and membership.

- Members asked if any businesses chose not to contribute to the BID levy and heard that all businesses contribute, equating to about 813 within the Swansea BID area.
- The Panel asked about other areas outside the central BID area and heard that Mumbles had begun to look into setting up a separate BID prior to the pandemic.
- Members commented on previous work of Swansea BID and the valuable nature of the work undertaken.
- The Panel remarked on the challenges faced by city centres across the country.
- The Panel heard that Swansea's regeneration projects have been commented on by the London BID, in relation to the progress and speed of projects.
- Members queried the impact of the closures of large retailers on the city centre trade and how empty spaces will be promoted.
- Members commented positively on the idea of displays in vacant shop windows, rather than leaving shop windows empty.

Foreshore Developments

- This item was discussed while Cllr Jeff Jones acted as Panel Convener.
- The Panel asked questions about plans for the Civic Centre and were advised to wait for the revised Swansea Bay Strategy which at this point was under development.
- The Panel were informed of the partnership with Urban Splash which they have continued to monitor through the Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report.

South West Wales Regional Economic Delivery Plan

- This item was discussed while Cllr Jeff Jones acted as Panel Convener.
- The Panel considered a report on the South West Wales Regional Economic Delivery Plan, which at the time had been recently approved by Cabinet.
- It was noted that the new Delivery Plan will be adopted / owned and overseen by the new South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC). Regeneration Directors will keep track of progress and will be responsible for developing business cases, securing investment and ensuring delivery on the CJC's behalf.
- The Panel were informed that the economic and policy context has changed considerably at the Welsh and UK level since 2013, particularly in light of Brexit and the impact of the pandemic. The new South West Wales Regional Economic Delivery Plan, developed jointly between the four Councils in the region and in partnership with the Welsh Government, responds to those changing circumstances with a Plan that is fit for the future.
- Panel members welcomed the mission to focus on renewable energy and development of a net zero economy. The importance of attracting visitors to the area, as eco-tourism, was also raised, and felt perhaps not emphasised enough in plans. It was noted that Mission 3 did acknowledge the importance of nature and biodiversity in Swansea's offer and experience and recognises the attraction of Swansea's natural environment to visitors and provides springboard for relevant projects to support this.
- Panel members requested a meaningful breakdown of the increase in 20,000 jobs to understand where the growth has come from, e.g., specific sectors, which was subsequently provided.
- The Panel noted the regional plan was not led by available funding which in turn shapes projects, but rather establishes what is needed in the area and how funding can then deliver that. The Panel explored access to funding streams, and it was noted that the Council was working hard to ensure Swansea and region can access every available penny as we emerge from Covid and into recovery.

- The Panel asked about the time scales of the new standards and were told that the current consultation documents indicates 10 years, however due to Councils highlighting the difficulty financing the programme, there may be a revision of this target.
- The Panel wished to highlight that money spent on Welsh Housing Quality Standard has come from revenue contributions and Welsh Government Funding, not Council Tax as this has been a misinterpretation in the past.

City Centre Retail

- Panel Members were aware of the challenges city centres have been under in the last few years and were pleased to hear about increased footfall in and around Swansea city centre.
- They were made aware how city centres function differently due to the impact of out of town and online shopping and the need for a mix of retail, accommodation, leisure and dining to create a wider experience beyond just shopping. They felt it was important to get the right mix of student and private accommodation.
- The Panel were informed that the Swansea Arena in general is over performing and plan to hear more about this after March 2023 when it has reached 12 months of trading.
- Panel Members were pleased to see some of the recent repurposed developments and encourage this into the mix alongside brand new developments.
- Russell Greenslade shared with the Panel that roughly 70 new businesses had opened up in the last 18 months and that city centre spend has been good.
- The Panel will be revisiting this topic in around 6 months' time.

Tourism Destination Management Plan

- The Panel were updated on key achievements from the period 2017-2020 and were particularly interested in the STEAM research which found that in 2019, 4.8m visitors came to the area creating £477.22m and nearly 6000 jobs in the industry. They also noted the upward trend of visitors to the area since 2008.
- The Panel received an update on the progress of the Destination Management Plan 2023-25 with a plan for approval in April 2023.
- Questions were asked around the maximisation of assets like Swansea Market, travel corridors, local eco-tourism and Swansea's Day visitor guide. The Panel felt that the Heads of the Valleys Road and local tourists will form a larger part of Swansea's tourism market going forward.
- The Panel felt that there is a need to increase holiday accommodation to meet demand and avoid the take up of residential properties for holiday lets. They were informed about the bed stock survey which helped map out the number of smaller lets and Airbnb's and if introduced, statutory licencing and the tourism levy will level the playing field. Also the 182 day planning rule will mean some businesses which do not operate to this level are selling up or face an increase in business rates. This was a concern for the Panel.
- The Panel acknowledge that with over 6000 jobs, local tourism is a significant employer and will expect an update on the Tourism Development Plan annually.

Audit Wales Report – Town Centre Regeneration

- The Panel felt the need for some Welsh Government guidance in place/strategy for Local Authorities to follow and is missing from this report.
- The Panel felt investment in local communities was important and that these small businesses are often at the heart of these communities.
- The Panel heard about the changing needs of city centres that they move to a mix of uses and not the retail centres they have been historically.
- Members felt that there needs to be the right mix of Local Authority and private sector investment and had concerns that large private businesses may not be interested in Swansea due to the lower spending power available. They were pleased to hear that there is interest from private developers to come to Swansea and that providing flexible spaces is important.
- The Panel felt it would have been helpful to have comparisons with other Local Authorities.
- Overall the Panel were pleased with the progress in Swansea but felt it would be useful to respond to Audit Wales about their report and in particular to query the £900m investment made across Wales and to request more up to date information.

Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report

- The Panel receive an update on all current developments at each meeting.
- This has included sites like Swansea Arena, the Civic Centre, Skyline and the Community Hub. It has also included the TAN15 flood risk assessment.
- Panel members held a closed session at their January 2023 meeting to scrutinise commercially sensitive information relating to a number of sites specifically in relation to costings and land acquisition.
- Members ask a variety of questions at this regular item concerning purpose, progress, funding, delays, and challenges for the projects discussed.

4. Future Work Programme

The programme for the remainder of this municipal year is as follows:

Meeting	Topic(s)
15 May 2023	1. Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report

5. Action for the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None