



To:
Cllr Robert Francis-Davies
Cabinet Member for Investment,
Regeneration, Events & Tourism

BY EMAIL

Please ask for:
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Scrutiny

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28 March 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events and Tourism, following the meeting of the Panel on 12 March 2024. It covers the achievements against Corporate Priorities / Objectives / Policy Commitments and an update on 71-72 The Kingsway. This letter requires a response by 18 April.

Dear Cllr Francis-Davies,

On the 12 March, the Panel met to review achievements against Corporate Priorities / Objectives / Policy Commitments and progress on 71-72 The Kingsway. We are grateful to yourself and officers for their attendance and contributions.

Achievement against Corporate Priorities / Objectives / Policy Commitments

Paul Relf updated us on the various funding support that is available and gave an overview of the achievements in the planning and city regeneration teams.

Update on Developments

We discussed the empty Debenhams site and asked for an update on the progress of finding a tenant, we heard that there is an active steering group looking at all the options and you have offered to provide us with the holding costs. We noted the huge public interest in the site, you mentioned that whilst Debenhams is an important site in the Quadrant the Debenhams closure is not unique to Swansea. We also asked for a timescale on Castle Square and heard that a 12 month construction period will commence later this year.

We were interested in the Civic Centre and the wider work of Urban Splash mentioned in the report. You explained the interplay between sites with the Civic Centre development unable to start till fully vacated but it cannot be vacated until Copr Bay North is complete. We wondered if it the Council were starting to consider a time scale for the Civic Centre and heard that this is a priority site with an estimation of 5 years

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overall. We asked for an indication of a completion date on Copr Bay, whilst a timeline is not yet available we were given assurances that surveys are underway and everything possible is being done to bring this to completion.

We were interested to hear more about the commitment to invest in towns and villages and the officer informed us there are seven district centres each with a draft place making plan with funding available through a number of funding avenues. Officers are working through those schemes as quickly as possible. Active travel is also considered alongside green spaces with a partnership approach.

We were also interested in the progress with Penderyn and heard that they employ 15 full time equivalent posts. You have offered to provide us with visitor numbers. We also raised concern with TAN 15 and the impact on development opportunities along the river Tawe, you told us that the Leader is at the forefront of objecting to TAN 15 and that you have prioritised working with Urban Splash on the St Thomas site.

Hotels

We discussed hotel provision including the potential build on the site next to the Arena and the LC which you envisage to be a 4 star/higher end hotel. We asked if funding might be available from the Welsh Tourist Board, applications for interest are currently being accepted and once more is known you plan to explore gap funding opportunities. We also asked for updates on current hotel provision including the Dragon and Dolphin Hotels, your officer was able to update us that installation of Dragon hotels green living wall will commence shortly, thanks to a Transforming Towns bid and have also offered to update us on the Dolphin Hotel.

Job growth

We asked for more detail to the report regarding the creation of thousands of jobs in Swansea. We noted that figures in the Local Development Plan (LDP) were for the potential to create 13,600 jobs. We heard that the jobs referenced in the report are created with grant support with the number increasing over time, this data is being collected by officers and we would be interested to see this in the near future. Additionally, you explained that the LDP is a changing, evolving, and aspirational document which will be affected by economic change.

We raised concerns about providing space for companies. The report references a desire to attract new companies, we asked what these spaces might be and where they could be located. You responded that the Kingsway is providing much needed office provision along with other sites in the city provided by the private sector. Regarding industrial space, we particularly highlighted the lack of space for manufacturers and expressed concern for the large number of flats going up in the city

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centre. Officers replied informing us that grants are in place to support smaller manufacturers and that funding is being explored for sites which can accommodate manufacturing space around the county on which details can be provided in the near future. We would be interested to see these details when available.

We also raised concerns about job provision through grant schemes and the sustainability of these jobs once funding runs out. Officers assured us that sustainability is considered when awarding the grants and revenue costs are not funded. Grants are there to encourage and support business growth rather than directly funding a job role. Cash flow is scrutinised, and challenge is provided from Business Wales advisors. We would however appreciate more detail on this. You also mentioned small businesses coming out universities, higher and further education and offered to share some case studies with us in the future.

71/72 The Kingsway

Officers provided us with an update on the site which we were pleased to hear is closing in on practical completion with its key objectives to stimulate employment, economic growth and footfall in the city centre and surrounding areas with ongoing formal marketing of the building that will continue until fully let. Discussions with potential tenants continue and it is anticipated that the building will be fully let within a reasonable time scale but not on practical completion.

We asked for clarity on the total City Deal funding given, as the report references the Kingsway development has received 13.7m and we are also aware the Arena has received funding through this. You have offered to provide this. We also asked for an update on the side access to Picton Arcade, we feel this is important for local businesses not to be at risk of losing trade. We were informed that this is still being considered and it is moving forward. We also asked about bicycle storage in the development and heard there is provision as well as a number of electric bike charging points.

We raised concerns about the demand for office space as since the Kingsway site was conceived, other new private development office spaces have also been developed and home working is still very present. We were given assurance that despite hybrid working, businesses are still seeking quality office space as prior to these developments Swansea had almost no grade A office space. The offer will include a choice of spaces of different sizes with reconfiguration possible for flexibility, and in order to bring investment and jobs to Swansea, office space provision is needed and plays a part in the overall revitalization of the city centre. We were assured that all marketing opportunities were explored including a joined up approach to advertise what Swansea can offer.

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Your Response

We welcome your comments on any of the issues raised and request a formal response by 18 April in regard to the following –

- Ongoing holding costs on Debenhams and general update.
- Trading status of the Dolphin Hotel.
- Visitor numbers for the Penderyn Visitor Centre.
- Any further information to demonstrate that jobs created through funding business growth will not be temporary until funding runs out.
- Clarification on the total amount and breakdown of City Deal funding.

If any of these points require a commercially sensitive response this can be sent separately to the letter reply.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Development and Regeneration Performance Panel

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