



**To/
Councillor Robert Francis-Davies
Cabinet Member for Investment,
Regeneration & Tourism**

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

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SPC/2019-20/2

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 13 May 2019. It is about River Tawe Corridor Development, Swansea Marina, Skyline, New Local and Regional Business Opportunities, Archives Service, Sports Facilities, Parks, Santander Bike Hire Scheme, Swansea at 50, and Seafront Development.

Dear Councillor Francis-Davies,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 13 May

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 13 May 2019 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism.

We appreciate you providing a written paper in support of your appearance. The Q & A session gave us an opportunity to explore priorities and achievements in relation to your wide-ranging areas of responsibility.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, and share the views of the Committee, and highlight any outstanding issues / actions for your response. The main issues are summarised below:

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU
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River Tawe Corridor Development

We discussed progress with the river corridor development. The Committee noted in your written paper that major funding has been secured to support the next stages of regeneration of the Tawe corridor, in particular Hafod and White Rock sites, to help deliver the Penderyn distillery and wider Copperopolis zone. You reported that the total project cost was around £4.6m and included funding for access improvements, including footways and river pontoons, and building refurbishments including the Morfa (Bascule) Bridge. You also stated that discussions were ongoing in relation to the Skyline development on Kilvey Hill which would also contribute to the master plan. Given available budgets you told us that that some riverside improvement works would need to be delivered from S.106 agreements in due course.

We asked you about the refurbishment of the Bascule Bridge, which we understood is going to be lifted and removed from its position for restoration, and projected timescale and costs. You stated you would provide a written response in order to provide more detail about this project, including costs.

Swansea Marina

We discussed the success of Swansea Marina and asked you about current berthing occupancy levels, costs, and the relationship / future plans with the Swansea Yacht & Sub Aqua Club regarding pontoons and moorings on the riverside, in particular the income received by the Council.

We heard from you that the Marina is almost fully occupied, and that the Club, not the Council, controlled the berths in the riverside. We asked you to confirm the Council's financial arrangements with the Club in relation to their management of moorings in the river.

You stressed the Marina was an important part of the jigsaw in terms of overall river corridor development and would benefit from the Skyline Project. You told us that more was needed to make the Marina more of a visitor destination and increase tourism in that area, and its linkage with other developments was important.

Skyline

We asked you to provide update on the Skyline project on Kilvey Hill. You reported that a Heads of Terms was signed with Skyline, the New Zealand leisure company, for a cable car and luge and that scheme design and funding discussions were continuing. You added that the Skyline have visited Swansea on several occasions, undertaken market testing and preliminary cost estimates as part of their feasibility due diligence.

We asked you to clarify whether such discussions were at local level or at Welsh Government level, as we understood that Welsh Government funding was now an important factor in delivering this project. We noted that the development would require grant assistance with the significant upfront capital investment required and the company was currently in discussion with Visit Wales in order to secure funding support. However, you felt that things were close and a final decision may come in the next few months.

New Local and Regional Business Opportunities

We heard that the Council has been selected to lead the regional Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme. You reported that this programme has a value of £27m over 3 years and was already providing opportunities for the private sector to invest. The programme was designed to deliver commercial, residential and strategic development outcomes across the region, and would enable business support activities e.g. start-up workshops, and better liaison with businesses to provide bespoke provision, and support regeneration priorities including improvements to vacant buildings / units in Swansea to make them more attractive to businesses.

Archives Service

We understood that the development of the Civic Centre site has been on hold due to the economic climate however remains a key development plan for the Council. We asked you about the long term plans for the Archive Service, currently situated in the Civic Centre, and what thought has been given to future accommodation for the service.

You stressed that whilst changes were not imminent there have been discussions about future relocation and accommodation needs. Clearly there was a need to provide safe and secure storage for the vast amount of physical documents, records and exhibits, as well as maintaining public access. You stated that one factor was recognising the trend of more people accessing historical information and records on-line, i.e. more virtual visitors than physical customers needing to visit the service in person. You stated that over 90% of archived material was available digitally. Therefore, a city centre location may not necessary in the future.

The Committee was concerned that any future plans should remain public facing and ensure public access given the number of people who visit the Archive Service. You assured the Committee that no decisions have been made, and any firm proposals would be consulted upon.

Sports Facilities

When the Committee met you last year you talked about the proposals for an International Sports Village, in partnership with Swansea University, on the King George V Playing Fields. In May 2018 you reported that a strategic working group had been established with the universities to ensure communications around key projects in the City and alignment of priorities to move projects forward – one of which would be an International Sports Village incorporating the Wales National Pool. We noticed that your written paper on this occasion did not make any reference to this project and the Committee asked about this.

You stated that the vision and key issue here was one of branding the facilities already in place as an 'International Sports Village', and subsequent improvement. It was not about putting a new building on the site. We heard that you were still working with the University on issues such as shared use of facilities and promotion of the site as an integrated sports facility.

Parks

We were interested to learn that the Council has developed a draft licence agreement to formally engage with the Friends of Parks groups in order to improve the governance and arrangements between Council and various groups and increase opportunities to obtain grants.

Santander Bike Hire Scheme

We discussed the bike hire scheme and recognised it has proved to be popular. Given its success, we asked whether there were any plans to expand the number of hubs, particular in locations further along the seafront and Mumbles.

You stated that the Santander scheme was effectively a scheme to connect the University campuses, rather than a total system for Swansea, and one which has benefitted from the Council's support. You referred to the vast cycle network in Swansea and agreed that there should be more hubs.

Swansea at 50

The Committee looked forward to the various events and activities planned to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Swansea's city status. The Council has encouraged local communities to get involved and asked whether there was any financial support for community events. You argued that this was a city-wide celebration, not a Council celebration, therefore hoped that everyone would join in. You stressed that there were no extra resources, but acknowledged the amount of excellent volunteers across Swansea who would be supported in other ways, including with branding. You also reminded

councillors that they could utilise their community budgets in order to help support any such community events celebrating the anniversary.

Seafront Development

The Committee was aware that the Council was consulting on possible small-scale development at a number of council-owned sites along the seafront in order to generate income and make the prom a more attractive place to visit for locals and tourists, and enhance the bay. The sites in question being: Land on the Mumbles side of the West Cross Inn; Land around the skate ramp, West Cross; Blackpill Lido; Sketty Lane car park, and two of the six Langland tennis courts.

Parallel to public consultation in order to gather ideas, we were aware that the council had published a Prior Information Notice (PIN) on the Welsh Government procurement portal Sell2Wales, aimed at potential development partners. You told the Committee that this process was about gathering ideas and a sounding exercise to test the market without any commitment, starting with a blank sheet of paper. You were clear that this was not about selling off any land, but working with partners to produce ongoing revenue from our land.

There were some comments from committee members about what would or would not be acceptable to the Council, and perhaps whether the Council should have been more specific about what it wanted. There were also concerns about detrimental impact on the current enjoyment of views of the bay around West Cross.

You told the Committee that the Council should not pre-judge the planning process and it was important to get views in first. You recognised that there were mixed views about future development of the seafront but feedback from people calls for more facilities along the bay, such as the former 360 café.

Overall the Committee welcomed discussion on the future of the seafront to improve amenities, including better facilities for the disabled and public toilets, and the quality of the bay. The Committee asked that you engage with it further along the process about the seafront development. Clarification about the decision making process would be appreciated. Nevertheless, we would like a discussion with you once you have a clearer picture of what has emerged in response to the PIN notice and consultation, and the ideas that have been generated. Therefore please consider this and let us know when we should arrange a committee meeting with you, at the earliest opportunity.

Your Response

In your response we would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically refer to our request for you to:

- provide more detail about the restoration of the Bascule Bridge, including costs;
- confirm the Council's financial arrangements with the Swansea Yacht & Sub Aqua Club in relation to their management of moorings in the river; and
- come back to the Committee to further discuss possible development of the seafront, following feedback from the PIN Notice and public consultation.

Please provide the response to this and any other comments about our letter by 2 August. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

We look forward to specific discussion on seafront development in due course. In addition, the next Q & A session with you is scheduled for 9 March 2020. We look forward to following up on overall portfolio developments then.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Jones

COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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