

Minute Annex



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

Please ask for:
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Overview & Scrutiny

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2nd February 2021

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism following the meeting of the Panel on 12th January 2021. It covers the report on the Swansea Rural Development Programme.

Dear Councillor Francis-Davies,

The Development & Regeneration Panel met on 12th January 2021. 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. During the discussion on the Swansea Rural Development Programme (RDP) Report, the following issues were highlighted which we would like to raise with you, for your consideration and response.

The Panel heard that Swansea Rural Development Partnership (RDP) is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) until 2023. It was pleasing to hear that the programme aims to promote strong, sustainable rural economic growth in Wales and encourage greater community-led local development. 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'.

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

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representatives operating over eight rural wards. Members queried which organisations are represented within the LAG. Officers cited SCVS, Wales Cooperative and Coed Fach, who recently stepped down from the Partnership. An open call for membership is due to be confirmed at the next LAG meeting scheduled on 13th January; seeking expressions of interest from the third and private sector.

It was pleasing to hear about the continued success of the programme and example projects. 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. The Panel heard that rural project outputs have exceeded targets thus far.

We also heard that current projects which are ongoing include - Community Supported Agriculture, Gower Off Road Cycle Routes and Big Meadow – Surf and Turf.

Members discussed how North Gower is also very important for linked cycle route access. Officers undertook to come back with more information on extending the cycle routes and associated bike hire.

Officers explained about the particular challenges faced by rural businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was concerning to hear about problems such as supply chain collapses and severe loss in trade resulting from the restrictions to tourism.

It was encouraging to hear that 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 it is understood there are now concerns regarding customer retention once supermarkets make delivery slots more widely available.

Officers explained that the 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.

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.

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, but in this instance, we require a formal written

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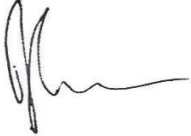
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response by 23rd February, regarding more information on extending the cycle routes and associated bike hire.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Jeff Jones

Convener, Development and Regeneration Performance Panel

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To:
Councillor Rob Stewart,
Cabinet Member for
Economy, Finance and Strategy

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2nd February 2021

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy following the meeting of the Panel on 12th January 2021. It covers the Project Update Report.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

The Development and Regeneration Performance Scrutiny Panel met on 12th January 2021. We would like to thank you, Cllr Francis-Davies and all the Officers for attending to present the items and respond to the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

During the discussion on the Project Update Report, the following issues were highlighted which we would like to raise with you, for your consideration and response.

Some queries were raised regarding follow up of the previous meeting discussions. Members requested more detailed information on the impact of Covid-19 cases amongst employees at the Arena site, particularly those who are not local to Swansea. Queries were raised about what is being done to safeguard the local population. We were assured 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.

We requested a detailed update on developments at Castle Square since the appointment of the Development Manager. You confirmed that good progress is being made and revised proposals are shortly to be released.

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We questioned your previous response, 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.

Project Update Report

It was pleasing to hear that the Arena is almost watertight and that external cladding is to commence shortly. The Panel heard that good progress is being made; a digital and Wi-Fi infrastructure provider has been confirmed.

The Panel heard that an agreement with Pobl had been completed regarding residential occupancy at Copr Bay. Officers explained that this was put to market and won by Pobl at the time; expressing their opinion that this had been a good outcome as it will reduce the Council contribution. Members queried whether consideration was given to using the housing revenue account to purchase these flats as the Council is trying to increase its housing stock. Officers explained that a capital revenue cap was now lifted and can look ahead to other opportunities. Members also queried the length of the lease agreement with Pobl. Officers are willing to provide the heads of terms agreement, although the units are designed for flexible change of use if ever required.

We questioned whether there have been complaints, or compliments, from local residents regarding the Arena building site. Officers confirmed that there have been both positive and negative comments received, and, understandably, also complaints in relation to the building site noise and activity. We heard that this noisy activity is likely to reduce now as the crane has been removed and preliminary building structures completed.

Members expressed their concerns over the anticipated take up of commercial units at Copr Bay in the current business climate. Officers confirmed that there has been a good level of interest, particularly from local businesses.

Regarding 71/72 Kingsway we heard that a tender on the construction contract relating to the development has been revised. It was explained that no contractors complied with the original terms and as such a revised specification has now gone out to tender. It was explained to the Panel that non-compliance was mainly due to the range of non-comparable alternative suggestions.

It was pleasing to hear that advanced work has been completed along Wind Street, including tree management aimed at making the area's historic architecture more

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visible. The Panel also heard that new street lighting has been installed and new coloured pea-lights on trees.

We asked about the current state of business in Wind Street, given national 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. You also explained to us that Swansea is leading the way in terms of recovery of jobs, indicating an 8.1% growth rate in this area.

In relation to the Skyline project, we expressed our concerns over the recent announcement that a similar attraction will open in Hirwaun later this year. The Panel expressed concern over competition and the possible impact on the proposed site at Swansea. You 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. You highlighted that the Skyline project is an international inward investment to Swansea and will not be a Council-funded development. We understand that this project, therefore, remains a viable and likely development; Skyline and the Welsh Government are still in negotiation with regards to funding, and the timescale for completion, should the project go ahead, is four years.

Members raised the idea of incorporating self-drive cars into Swansea's City Centre plans and Members queried whether the Arena site would be able to accommodate self-drive cars in the future. Officers explained traffic management for the city centre would be able to accommodate self-drive cars in the future. 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.

The Panel welcomed updates regarding the River Tawe Pontoons and the plans in place to develop this area of the city. It was heard that the pontoons development continues to progress in early form, pending 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. We would welcome further updates on this project in the future, and the prospect of water sports as a tourist attraction.

In relation to the Swansea Vale site, 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 that the ecology report was in the final stages of completion and would update the Panel on this project in due course. Officers

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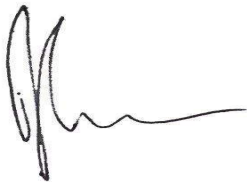
explained that NRW are revising the flood requirements and this will need to be considered before taking anything forward.

Your response:

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, but in this instance, please provide a formal written response by 23rd February 2021 to the following:

- Castle Square – Members requested a more detailed update on developments since the appointment of the Development Manager.
- Greater clarity sought on what constitutes local labour, and how exactly the figures in the previous response letter reflect Swansea's workforce.
- Drone (video) footage of the Arena is yet to be provided in place of a site tour, although aerial photographs have been shared with the Panel.
- Further update on the marketing of Felindre to be provided to future meeting.
- The Panel request details of organisations that have shown an interest in locating to Central Swansea.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Jeff Jones
Convener, Development and Regeneration Performance Panel

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