

PARTNERSHIP AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 19 April 2023

- PRESENT:** Councillor Dylan Rees (Chair)
Councillor Gwilym O Jones (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors Non Dafydd, Jeff M Evans, John I Jones, Euryyn Morris, Pip O'Neill, Margaret M Roberts and Ken Taylor
- Co-Opted Member - Mr John Tierney (The Roman Catholic Church)
- Councillor Llinos Medi (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Member for Economic Development)
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Executive,
Deputy Chief Executive,
Head of Regulation and Economic Development,
Head of Democracy,
Regeneration Manager (DGL) (for item 4),
Economic Development Manager (THJ) (for item 5),
Scrutiny Manager (AGD),
Committee Officer (MEH)
- APOLOGIES:** Councillors T LI Hughes MBE, Derek Owen
- ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Corporate and Customer Experience);
Councillor Gary Pritchard (Portfolio Member for Children, Youth & Housing Services);
Councillor Alun Roberts (Portfolio Member for Adults' Services);
Councillor Dafydd R Thomas (Portfolio Member for Highways, Property & Waste);
Councillor Robin Williams (Deputy Leader & Portfolio Member for Finance).

1 APOLOGIES

As noted above.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None received.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 March, 2023 were confirmed as correct.

4 ANGLESEY'S TOWN CENTRES IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

Submitted – a report by the Head of Regulation and Economic Development on the Anglesey's Town Centres Improvement Strategy for consideration by the Committee.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Member for Finance, in the absence of the Leader of the Council at the beginning of the meeting, said that over the years the town centres in most towns and cities in the UK have changed. He noted that the recently approved Council Plan includes the aims of 'improving the vitality and viability of our town centres' and 'that the people of Anglesey and its communities enjoy, protect and enhance their built and natural environment for future generations'. The Well-Being of Future Generations Act requires local authorities to address the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of their areas. He further said that Audit Wales undertook a study of Town Centre Regeneration in Wales and published a report in September 2021 with several recommendations for the Welsh Government and local authorities. This report and the Council's response was reported to the Governance and Audit Committee in February 2022. This process highlighted the need for the Council to develop a strategic approach to improving the town centres. The Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme includes a number of components, including capital grants and loans for town centre improvements. Various town or town centre regeneration strategies/plans have been prepared on Anglesey in the past, mostly aligned to a specific external funding opportunity, with several having been prepared for Holyhead over the years. It is now proposed that a single county-wide strategy covering the whole of Anglesey's town centres be prepared, and not tied to any particular external fund or programme, but reflecting the wider needs of the county and its town centres. The three larger towns of Holyhead, Amlwch and Llangefni have the most need, with Menai Bridge and Beaumaris being more prosperous.

The Portfolio Member further said that subject to the Executive's approval of the recommendations within the report, a process of stakeholder engagement and public consultation will take place to gather views, comments, and seek support for the proposed strategy, with a view to finalisation and adoption during 2023. Consultation will also be used to gather views, comments and suggestions for improvements to individual town centres to inform the preparation of individual place making plans and/or related projects, subject to resources.

The Regeneration Manager reported that Anglesey's town and town centres are focal points for the Island's economic, social and cultural activities. He noted that a high number of empty shops exist in Holyhead town centre reflects local economic issues and the growth of the retail park on the edge of the town as the main shopping area. He reported that the Holyhead empty shops initiative helped small businesses to start trading from empty shops and this had reduced the previously high vacancy rate, but over the pandemic the number of empty shops has returned to past high levels. He further said that the number of empty shops in Amlwch has also increased recently which no doubt reflects the loss of employment in the area. The conversion of surplus empty commercial units to homes is being encouraged and grant funding has been sought from the Welsh Government. The

Regeneration Manager also said that he considered that holiday accommodation could be a suitable use in Holyhead town centre.

The Regeneration Manager further said that staffing resources are limited to be able to materialise the work needs to regenerate the town centres and grant funding has been sought from the SPF funding grants towards recruitment of additional staff. Engagement and consultation with stakeholders and key partners will take place on the strategy and a public consultation will be undertaken during 2023, together which will be used to inform the preparation of individual town Place Plans. The Town Councils and several other organisations have a key role in improving and managing town centres and will need to be closely involved within the process. It was noted that members of the Llangefni Regeneration Group had arranged a visit to see the work being undertaken by local partnerships in Blaenau Ffestiniog and Bethesda.

In considering the report, the Committee discussed the following:-

- Questions were raised as to the definition of a 'town' and a 'town centre'? Reference was made that the Authority will need to prepare a Local Development Plan in the near future and it was suggested that it would be an opportunity to focus on the town and town centre. It was further said that the town centres will not be similar to those seen in the 60's and 70's. The Committee was advised that there is no single consistently applied definition of a 'town' or 'town centre' it was noted that the currently adopted Joint Local Development Plan, strategic policy for town centres (PS15) designates Holyhead and Llangefni as 'urban retail service centres', and the settlements of Amlwch, Benllech, Beaumaris, Menai Bridge, Llanfairpwll, Rhosneigr, Valley and Cemaes are designated as 'local service centres'.
- Reference was made that Anglesey is mostly rural areas with large and small villages. Questions were raised as to the vision for the large and small rural villages of the Island i.e. Benllech, Moelfre and Pentraeth. The Committee was advised that there is a rural development programme funded by European funding, with Menter Môn leading of the programme. As the European funding will cease the SPF funding will be the source of grant funding and an applications have been submitted to support projects within rural communities. Many small groups in rural areas benefitted from the recent CRF programme to provide community grants across the county. It was also noted that the County Council is a member of the WLGA Rural Forum which lobbies for rural areas.
- Questions were raised as to what opportunities and challenges are faced when being dependent on competitive grant funding to deliver the programmes? The Committee was advised that as grant funding is specific for a short period of time and it can be difficult when staff recruitment is required to carry out the programme. It was further noted that flexible funding to carry out project is important.
- Reference was made to the requirement of investment within the towns on Anglesey. The Vice-Chair referred to the Amlwch Port area and there is need for investment and regeneration of the area. Questions were raised as to the availability of private investment to fund Anglesey town centre regeneration programmes initiatives. The Committee was advised that significant decisions by stakeholders to locate in towns were often a catalyst for town centre

regeneration as seen in Menai Bridge. It was further said that the area around the square in Amlwch Port has visually improved with many residents renovating their homes. A company has been commissioned to survey the most dilapidated buildings in Amlwch and Llangefni which will be used to encourage the owners to renovate these buildings. A grant from Welsh Government has been secured to improve the frontages of buildings in two Anglesey towns. Arfor grant funding could also be beneficial to the improvements of towns. The Regeneration Manager said that Holyhead Town Council is willing to maintain assets improved with grant funding eg. Swift Square Toilets and the Fort watchtower.

- Questions were raised as to how the Regeneration Group of the Llangefni Town Council will be supported? The Committee was advised that the Economic Development Department attends Llangefni Regeneration Group meetings and grant funding needs to be sought for improvements of the town.
- Reference was made that the general public in Holyhead are not aware of the developments that to materialise from the Levelling Up Grants, Free Port Status and the Breakwater Development. The Committee was advised that internal arrangements need to be robust due to the developments in Holyhead and further engagement will need to be undertaken with the local community.
- Questions were raised as regards to the alignment with Place Shaping work streams and plans to strengthen the infrastructure within local communities and especially with electric car charging facilities. The Committee was advised that the strategy is to increase the electric car charging points available on the Island but that progress is dependent on grant funding. Anglesey now has one of the highest number electric car charging points relative to population.

It was RESOLVED:-

- **To note the content of the draft Anglesey Town Centres Improvement Strategy;**
- **To recommend the draft Strategy to the Executive for public consultation.**

ACTION : As noted above.

5 ANGLESEY FREE PORTS

Submitted – a report by the Head of Regulation and Economic Development on the Anglesey Freeport.

The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Member for Economic Development said that on the 23rd March, 2023, the County Council was made aware it had been successful in its Freeport application. This has resulted in significant work undertaken by the Officers of the Council and Stena Line and the commitment to submit the bid for the Freeport.

The Chief Executive reported that the bid for the Freeport status has been successful subject to the completion of a detailed business case. Meetings will be undertaken with both UK and Welsh Governments together with Stena Line to clarify the responsibilities, accountabilities and provide further guidance. He further said that work will need to be undertaken over the next 6 months to enable to release the £25m capital funding. The Chief Executive referred to the other

development projects in Holyhead i.e. Breakwater restoration, Morlais, Hydrogen Hub and Stena Line have plans to clear the previous Anglesey Aluminium site. He noted that there will be a need for strategic planning within the town of Holyhead, including other service area, such as education and health provision and to ensure that the developments do not have a negative effect on the residents.

In considering the report, the Committee discussed the following:-

- Reference was made that the project plan estimates that 3,500 to 13,000 new job opportunities will be created over a period of 15 years. Questions were raised as to what arrangements will be in place to ensure that they are high quality jobs and that Anglesey residents have the skills to take advantage of the opportunities? The Committee was advised that there are still uncertainties as to the benefits from the Freeport status and it was stressed that the figure of up to 13,000 job opportunities is relevant to the whole of North Wales and not specifically to Anglesey. It was stressed that work will need to be undertaken with Stena Line and the regional stakeholders, regional skills partnership and Llandrillo Menai to enable local people to be able to take advantage of the job opportunities that will result from the Freeport.
- Questions were raised as to the status of the third bridge across the Menai Straits and the improvements need to the highway network due to the Freeport status? The Leader of the Council responded that there is a need to strengthen the resilience and network links across the Island and pressure is continuing on Welsh Government for the third bridge across the Menai Straits.
- Questions were raised as to how many companies have expressed an interest in relocating on the Island due to the Freeport status? The Committee was advised that there are a number of expressions of interest by companies and organisations including GE-Hitachi, Rolls Royce SMR, Bechel, BP Lightsource and Menter Môn Morlais project when the originally bid submitted. It was further said that once the governance structures are in place, discussions with the interested businesses will continue. It was stressed that it is important to attract businesses that can generate long term and high value employment. The Committee expressed that it was important that young people are given the opportunity for apprenticeships with the companies that have shown an interest to locate on the Island and young people in the North Wales secondary schools should be made aware of the opportunities that will be available. It was also said that discussion need to be undertaken to reinstate the airline from Cardiff to Anglesey. The Chief Executive responded that every opportunity to raise the airline from Cardiff to Anglesey will be raised with Welsh Government. He further said that a skills and employment plan will need to be included within the Business Case of the Freeport. He noted that the partnership working with Llandrillo Menai, Msparc and the secondary schools is important to realise the potential job opportunities the Freeport status can generate. The Committee further questioned as to the training capacity within Llandrillo Menai to address the skills that will be required to fill the post generated by the Freeport to local people. The Chief Executive responded that there is a Skills Strategy for North Wales which drives the investment to create the training capacity within the colleges across North Wales. He noted that during the progression of the project a Skills Plan will need to be put in place. The young people within the secondary schools need to be made aware of the employment opportunities and that they

are able to upskill to be able to compete for the posts that will be available and thereafter be able progress in their career path in the future.

- Reference was made to the recent closure of the 2 Sisters Factory at Llangefni with the loss of over 700 jobs and the impact on the community and the Island. Questions were raised as to the kind of job opportunities that will entail from the Freeport status and the effects it could have on local residents been able to afford to buy houses and the effect on the Welsh language? The Committee was assured that the local needs of the Island is being considered and that residents and local businesses are able to take advantage of the opportunities resulting from the Freeport status. Historically, job opportunities in Freeport's across the UK has seen manufacturing, distribution and warehouse employment. However, on Anglesey there is the energy element which will attract employment. The Chief Executive said that the Welsh language is important and raised when relevant in every discussion that has taken place as regards to the Freeport.
- Questions were raised as to how it will be ensured that the project aligns with and contributes to the Energy Island programme and the Council Plan 2023-2028? The Committee was advised that there is a wide range of businesses, particularly those with supply chains related to the wider Energy Programme Vision which supported the Freeport bid together with the re-establishment of the land bridge between Dublin and Europe. It was noted that the aspirations within the Council Plan is included within the Freeport bid.
- Questions were raised as to whether there are concerns that businesses from other areas will relocate into Holyhead and will result in the effect on the economy of these area? The Committee was advised that the displacement of companies has been a matter of concerns that has been discussed during the development of the bid. However, it is important to note that the Freeport status is wider than the Holyhead area. It was noted that Officers are confident that the local businesses will be able to take advantage of the opportunities that will result from the Freeport status but other businesses needs to be attracted to align with the production skills to ensure growth for the Island.
- Reference was made that some of the main strategic risks of the bid have been identified within the report. Questions were raised as to how the Authority will manage and mitigate these risks and what will be the scrutiny process? The Committee was advised that it is recognised that further clarity and assurance will be required by both Governments as the bid is progressing through the Business Case process. Clarity on roles and responsibilities will need to be agreed with Stena Line. There will be a need for robust governance, a long term role of the Council and resources required to deliver it in a compliant and effective manner. Additional external expertise is essential to the success of the bid. It was further said that once the Freeport is established, regular feedback will be undertaken with Executive and the Scrutiny Committee to ensure that robust monitoring arrangements are in place.

It was RESOLVED:-

- **That the Scrutiny Committee recognises the role of the Council in developing and submitting the successful Freeport bid;**
- **To note the next steps in the development of a Freeport Business Case, prior to submission to both the UK and Welsh Governments.**

ACTION : As noted above

**COUNCILLOR DYLAN REES
CHAIR**