

## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**19 JULY 2016**

#### **REDEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER TAFF VALE PRECINCT SITE**

#### **REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLANNING IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Councillor Bevan)**

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#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members on progress to date in respect of the redevelopment of the former Taff Vale Precinct site and to seek approval for the proposed next stages of the development of the site and the adjacent area.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:-

- 2.1 Note the progress made since the Council acquired the long leasehold interest on the site in March 2015.
- 2.2 Authorise the demolition of the remaining site structure to allow the site to be redeveloped without current restrictions, including the submission of consents as necessary.
- 2.3 Authorise £1.5million spend from the Council's Investment Priorities budget for site demolition and associated costs, and the use of external funding opportunities.
- 2.4 Authorise the submission of an outline planning application for the proposed redevelopment of the site, and subsequent applications, subject to outline approval.
- 2.5 Agree to further development work being undertaken to progress the design options for the provision of a link bridge connecting the town with Ynysangharad Park and Lido and to maximise the number of parking spaces available in the adjacent Gas Road car park.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The former Taff Vale Precinct site currently acts as a disincentive to significant future investment in Pontypridd Town Centre. The implementation of the proposed actions to redevelop the site and undertake complementary activity will not only safeguard and maximise the opportunities from existing investment, but will also act as a catalyst for future economic opportunities presented by the site and the town centre to be realised.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The former Taff Vale Precinct Site is situated in Pontypridd in a highly prominent position. It is bounded to the south-east by the River Taff, to the north east by Bridge Street and to the north west by Taff Street.
- 4.2 The site abuts the boundary of the Pontypridd Town Centre Conservation Area and is surrounded by historic assets including the Grade I Listed and Scheduled Ancient Monument William Edwards Bridge, the Grade II Listed Museum and the Grade II Listed Ynysangharad War Memorial Park.
- 4.3 From the mid 1960's a commercial development containing offices, shops and a basement car park occupied the site. In 2009, planning permission was secured for redevelopment of the site with 70,000sq ft of commercial use and the site's buildings were subsequently demolished. However, development halted in 2012 when the developer went into receivership. The development of the site was subsequently held up by the complex tenure arrangements.
- 4.4 The Council actively engaged with prospective purchasers and some interest in the site was received from private sector developers and Registered Social Landlords. However, despite seeing significant potential in the site, and having aspirations for high quality mixed use development, all the prospective investors failed to make meaningful progress.
- 4.5 The site presents a major regeneration opportunity but in its current state acts as a disincentive to significant future investment in the town. Therefore, in March 2015, with the support of Welsh Government resources from the Vibrant and Viable Places Regeneration Framework, the Council acquired the Receiver's long leasehold interest, thereby removing a significant restriction to the future development of the site.

## 5. PROGRESS TO DATE

- 5.1 The Council has been clear that the site is a key opportunity for the town, but how this is realised could involve various forms and mixes of development. The importance of securing the *right* development is paramount. In order to achieve this since April 2015 considerable work has been completed to investigate site conditions and the potential for the re-use of the existing structure and also to consider all potential development opportunities for the site.
- 5.2 The detailed and complex structural work concluded that if the existing structure is to remain, following substantial repairs, that any new development would need to follow the lines of the existing structure below, which would result in a development similar to the former use of the site with low level perimeter units and a central higher level block.
- 5.3 To maximise this redevelopment opportunity and to allow the site to be redeveloped without such restrictions, the demolition of the existing remaining structure is required. Clearly the retaining wall to Bridge Street, Taff Street and Crossbrook Street will need to be retained / replaced.
- 5.4 Other preparation work completed includes geotechnical and geoenvironmental studies; ecological work including bats and otters; structural, mechanical and electrical surveys; and asbestos assessments.
- 5.5 Specialist commercial property advice has also been sought to consider all potential development options in light of current and anticipated future market conditions and to propose a strategy for the future redevelopment of the site. To support this work, architectural services have been commissioned to prepare concept designs for the site.
- 5.6 To complement the proposed redevelopment of the Taff Vale site and the significant regeneration activity already undertaken in Pontypridd, a feasibility study for a new footbridge over the River Taff has been completed. The bridge would connect the town with the Ynysangharad War Memorial Park and recently completed Lido restoration project, to encourage pedestrian movement around the whole town centre.
- 5.7 Three potential design options are included within the feasibility study and the options vary in configuration and structural form but all share a strong architectural basis and have been developed taking into account the site constraints. Further development work is now required to refine the options and associated costs in respect of design and location.
- 5.8 The current proposed location for the bridge is to span from the Council's Gas Road car park, which is adjacent to the Taff Vale site, across the River Taff into to Ynysangharad War Memorial Park. To accommodate the anticipated future

increase in motorists using the car park, it is proposed that options for increasing the number of parking spaces available is explored.

## **6. PREFERRED TAFF VALE SITE REDEVELOPMENT OPTION**

- 6.1 The size of the site and the potential scale and extent of any new development lends itself to a mixed use development opportunity and the potential options explored include the provision of residential, commercial, retail and public sector use.
- 6.2 In January 2016, views on preferred future uses were sought from local residents and businesses via a questionnaire that was distributed throughout the town and on-line. 1,551 respondents completed the questionnaire and the main preferred uses for the site were retail and restaurants, with a selection of other uses in the middle range including public services, hotel, bars and gym, with housing and student accommodation being least supported in the consultation.
- 6.3 As noted above, this site represents the single biggest development opportunity in Pontypridd. It needs to deliver footfall in the town to help sustain and improve the town's retail and commercial offer, whilst also contributing to the vibrancy on Pontypridd. A key message from the commercial property advisors was that a mainly retail led scheme would neither be likely to be deliverable nor viable in today's climate.
- 6.4 A range of purely commercial mixed use options were reviewed, but the key to certainty of delivering development of the site within a reasonable timeframe, is for any scheme to include public sector development, rather than a reliance on a changing commercial marketplace. Therefore, having considered the need to increase footfall in the town to support the existing local economy as well as acting as a catalyst for future investment, the development option that is proposed contains major office accommodation development for private and public sector occupancy together with A3 (food and drink) uses.

## **7. NEXT STEPS**

- 7.1 It is proposed that an outline planning application for the Taff Vale site redevelopment is submitted as soon as possible, and development models and funding options are developed
- 7.2 It is proposed that the remaining Taff Vale site structure is demolished to allow the site to be redeveloped without current restrictions.
- 7.3 Opportunities to secure funding sources for the redevelopment of the site, and further development work to progress the design options for the link bridge are explored.

- 7.4 Options to maximise the number of parking spaces in the Council owned Gas Road car park are explored.

## **8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full report is not required at this time. The screening form can be accessed by contacting the author of the report or the Cabinet Business Officer.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 Further consultation on the proposed Taff Vale site redevelopment will be undertaken as part of the Statutory Planning process.
- 9.2 Consultation on the proposed new pedestrian bridge and any proposed changes to the car park will be carried out when further development work has been undertaken.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The financial implication for the Council in respect of the Taff Vale site redevelopment at this stage is £1.5 million. This amount has been designated within the Council's Investment Priority budget and will allow for site demolition and clearance and the preparation of the outline planning application.
- 10.2 Further detailed financial appraisal work will be required on the scheme, which will take account of potential development models and build costs.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 Planning Permission will be required in order to progress the redevelopment plans for the former Taff Vale Precinct site.

## **12. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES / SIP**

- 12.1 The development opportunities outlined in this report will make a positive contribution towards the Corporate Priorities "Building a Strong Economy" and "Improving our Communities".



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**Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee***

Corporate Service Scrutiny Committee

***Contact Officer***

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