



## RHONDDA CYNON TAF

### RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL RLDP STEERING GROUP

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the RLDP Members Steering Group held on Friday, 21 May 2021 at 10.00 am.

#### County Borough Councillors - RLDP Steering Group Members in attendance:-

Councillor G Caple    Councillor G Hughes  
Councillor J James    Councillor P Jarman  
Councillor S Rees    Councillor J Williams  
Councillor R Yeo

#### Officers in attendance

Mr J Bailey, Head of Planning  
Ms C Hewitt, Planning Policy Team Leader  
Mr O Jones, Development Services Manager (Planning Policy)  
Ms K Scott, Senior Planning Policy Officer

#### 8 Apology

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillors L M Adams, D Grehan, J Bonetto, G Thomas and M Powell.

#### 9 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

#### 10 Minutes

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the RLDP Members Steering Group for the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

#### 11 Rhondda Cynon Taf Revised Local Development Plan 2020-2030

With the aid of a Power Point presentation, the Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) provided an update on the revised LDP preparations relating to areas such as the candidate sites and the integrated sustainability assessment. He advised of changes to policy, legislation and political agendas since the adoption of the current LDP in 2011.

The Steering Group acknowledged that the notes from the previous meeting could be used for information gathering purposes going forward.

Members were informed that the purpose of this meeting was to seek their views on the strategic issues relating to the 13 topic areas within the presentation. Despite a number of cross cutting areas, all views and comments were welcome and would be gathered on the issues that the LDP should address and a range of strategy options.

In advance of the presentation, Councillor Jarman queried whether there is an expectation that the land-owners of the candidate sites already allocated need to re-submit them or whether they will be carried forward. The Development Services Manager advised that sites submitted at preferred strategy will be re-assessed and further information, where there is insufficient evidence, will be requested.

## **1. Housing (Including private market and affordable housing)**

### **Topic Papers used as a current model of information**

The topic papers from the earlier LDP set out information and data around population, trends for house building and dwelling requirements. They were useful models and could be adapted to reflect current concerns and used by the steering group as a guidance.

### **Empty Properties**

Bring empty properties back into use to avoid the blight within communities and respond to the demand for social housing throughout RCT. The RLDP should refer to the empty property sector. There needs to be discussions with private housing providers around regenerating empty properties.

There is an issue with empty properties in my ward, which are owned but falling into disrepair. Pressure needs to be out on those homeowners to maintain the empty properties.

Social landlords need to do more to bring back empty properties. Funding needs to be committed to social housing; are there alternative targets we can look at for the percentage of social housing on new development.

### **Greenfield Sites/Brownfield Sites**

Most greenfield sites have been absorbed by the housing sector and brownfield sites are more expensive. I support that both new and retrospective developments should be carbon neutral.

I am not against development in all greenfield sites, especially around the fringes of the settlement boundary, there is a process and mechanism in place for it. We should be meeting the 20% targets for affordable housing. Not meeting these targets is detrimental to the greenfield sites so we must work harder with brownfield sites and achieve our affordable housing targets.

Are there different targets in the South compared to the North of the County Borough?

These are not a first choice, RCT has lots of green spaces and lots of people are now moving into the area. Data shows lower levels of house building in the north of the county borough because residents are moving to the south of the borough drawn by the availability of amenities such as off-street parking. We need to be more creative

### **North/South Divide**

Is there a north/south divide in the plan?

Don't make the northern part of the County into 'dormitory' areas where people just eat and sleep and travel to other areas for work

### **Affordable Housing**

There is insufficient affordable housing especially in the South of the County Borough, the areas bordering Bridgend have different targets for affordable housing, 10% for strategic sites which doesn't fit today's needs. It's difficult to achieve the targets in these areas.

The Social Housing market is bigger now as many young people can't afford mortgages, they are out of reach as salaries don't meet the mortgage requirements. As previously raised, we need to stick to our 20% affordable housing targets to represent the needs of our residents

### **Candidate Sites**

If applications for candidate sites are refused by the Welsh Minister, does the Council look favourably at the site or reassess them?

### **Loss of Communities**

Housing sites in Cardiff West are a mass of housing and are not considering communities anymore, we need more community planning to include bandstands and focal points so as not to lose the community element.

### **Lessons learned from Covid-19**

More people are working from home so more space is needed. New developments need to adapt to this requirement. Can we put pressure on land banks in RCT?

### **Density of Housing**

I agree with the comments regarding empty properties and social housing. Density of housing needs to be addressed particularly with social housing.

### **Officer Response**

Officers responded to queries raised through discussions in respect of empty properties and confirmed they are also present in the south of the County Borough and the viability issues around affordable housing and how it is preferable to develop brownfield sites at a cost and with consideration given as to why they have remained undeveloped. At appeal stage, those applications outside the settlement boundary and associated with flood risk issues need to be overcome.

## **2. Transport Infrastructure (Highways, Public Transport and Active Travel)**

### **Transport in the South**

There is a transport deficit in the South which will, in part, be addressed by the Metro but the key issue is there is lots of housing proposed which is not supported by sufficient transport infrastructure. This needs to be addressed long-term in the RLDP. The metro and rail links are a strong objective in the plan, if the infrastructure is in place, commuting will be improved.

### **Ecology v's Economy**

Rail links get peoples off the roads which is necessary, but some highway development is needed. For some residents it's a balance between ecology and economy e.g. access to Zipworld has been improved via the highways. It is difficult to untangle this from environmental requirements, but the message for road building has to be carefully managed.

### **Buses**

Active transport requirements are in place but there aren't enough buses at it's not commercially viable for operators. There are a number of housing estates with bus stops but no bus routes which needs to be looked at. Commuters into Cardiff have to drive to the train stations as there are no buses, it's all interlinked.

### **Rail**

Transport is a cross cutting topic. EV connections in terraced homes is a major issue. Extending rail services has been on the agenda for the north for a while (and the topic of a working group) and we need to safeguard these routes protect the corridors of interest by identifying and securing the railway line for Rhigos and Hirwaun. Train travel to Neath and Swansea - we need to protect the land for these needs to be realised.

### **Ecological issues**

There are more buses servicing the Cynon Valley Line rail link than trains. Flooding affects rail lines such as Mountain Ash and Abercwmboi. The Metro plans will address some of the flooding issues. Communication has to be maintained with outlying areas, so they are not disadvantaged. Connecting communities to transport.

### **Cross Valley Travel**

The Metro is starting to address a number of issues, it needs to be integrated and accessible. Have to accept that people work cross valleys and developments such as Coedely and the Rhondda Fach relief will make it easier for people in the north to access employment in the south. We have to be realistic; some people will have to access the south for employment and the highway infrastructure needs to meet this.

## **3. Economy and Employment:**

### **Waste**

The waste management designation at Hirwaun industrial estate has to be

removed to support the recycling strategy -to better reflect the existing mixed use of the site.

### **Tourism strategy**

How can we further develop the northern areas for walking and outdoor activities and build on the recent success of zipworld. We need to develop this kind of economy and exploit the natural environment. These are key areas to develop. SME, start-ups in the north of the county borough are to be encouraged and build facilities that are fit for purpose.

The Leisure Strategy is interlinked with applications relating to Air BnB's and tourist accommodation such as yerts which attract tourism. One Public House in Rhigos wants to expand its hotel facilities but its outside the settlement boundary. There are applications with good proposals outside the settlement boundary, we need to make sure that the RLDP reflects the need for improving tourism facilities and the economy.

There are cross-cutting issues here, the tourism strategy, town centres. The market is diversifying now with more online shopping and we need to adapt. Investment is needed to attract people like free car parking, old models needs to be changed to a newer model to encourage business, to sustain the economy. This is a big challenge going forward. We have to do what we can to diversify.

### **Officer Response**

The Planning Policy Team Leader agreed that Covid-19 has changed the landscape regarding the employability of the market and there has been a shift in the role of town centres. Need to encourage SME's. Consider waste management

## **4. Health and Well-being (Pollution, Health of residents)**

### **EV Infrastructure**

This is another cross-cutting area. We have to encourage people off the road with better transport links. We have to encourage residents to move from diesel and petrol to EV, but currently there isn't enough infrastructure provision. It is expensive, could hydrogen vehicles be a viable option?

Sufficient EV infrastructure needs to be in place which will in turn reduce pollution and fumes. This is challenging but it needs to be addressed as it can affect people greatly. We need to make the change easier. The hybrid vehicle may offer the solution.

### **Healthcare facilities**

There is a shortage of healthcare facilities, such as dentists and doctors' surgeries in the community. The Health Board needs to keep responding to housing developments to create healthy areas. The issue of mental health could be factored into the RLDP with access to green space and recreational activities.

### **Cwm Taf UHB Estate**

From a procedural point of view, how do we develop the plan? Cwm Taf HB is a key partner and it would be useful if we had an idea of their planned estate over

the next 10 years before we make a judgement.

The Health Board has staffing issues relating to its current housing developments.

We would benefit from having an idea of Cwm Taf's plan over the next 10 years, some primary care facilities are not fit for purpose.

### **Nature Bathing**

The accessibility to the vast open spaces in RCT could be improved. Informal access needs to be formalised to help support our physical and mental health. 'Nature bathing' – get into nature and open green spaces.

## **5. Natural Environment (Including Ecology and Greenspaces)**

### **Green Spaces & the Ecology**

Councillors pledged to have a tree planting initiative across the county borough. Examples of strengthening green wedges and affinity to local community are visible across the county.

Obtaining a designated village green is difficult, strengthening green wedges is important. Better promotion of the green wedges between Rhigos, Hirwaun and Penderyn, supportive of tourism at Hirwaun strategic site. Re-designated for tourism and health and well-being. Cynon Valley river park and trail to be maintained as its being well used. Residents value green spaces as they realise the benefits of the natural environment.

Meeting affordable housing targets to the detriment of ecological issues, this is a concern. LDP should be protecting this. Little point having protections in the plan if it isn't supported.

A new forest in North Wales as part of NDF, place for creating parks. Designating areas for community park areas will help in the long term. Extra safeguard for the future. As a local authority we could designate important areas such as Tynant Woods.

### **Countryside Code**

There needs to be an element of education, residents need to be aware of the countryside code.

### **Officer Response**

The Planning Policy Team Leader advised that an assessment would understand the net gain of green spaces to recognise the roles these spaces play within our communities.

## **6. Climate Change (including Flooding, the Carbon Agenda and Renewable Energy)**

### **Flooding**

I am an advocate of an independent enquiry into the flooding. There is an impact of building on flood plains. What is the logic of wind turbine consent on land in Ynysgir that is a high-risk coal tip? The removal of peat, which is irreplaceable

and takes millions of years to materialise is at a high cost to the ecology.

### **Renewable Energy**

I support renewable energy, like the coal industry, in areas which can support it. There is a balance to be struck. Who will have overall control over land/sites that have ecological and historical benefit to the community? Who has overall control of the designation for renewable energy, WG or is there local flexibility?

Renewable energy needs to be better. We have to have generator points to supplement energy in times of crisis. We have done our bit. National Government missed the boat with nuclear and tidal energy as the latter would have created employment. It needs to be more imaginative with renewable energy schemes

### **EV Charging**

The local authority needs to consider EV charging points which needs to be factored into new developments.

Infrastructure for EV charging is essential.

### **Wind Turbines**

I am not averse to wind turbines as it is better than some of the alternatives such as tidal, which harms habitats. Wind is the least invasive and can be unpopular. We should be making better use of hydro energy with lots of hills and streams in our valleys such as Clydach and Treherbert.

## **7. Waste**

### **Waste treatment**

Any treatment of waste should be non-polluted. Recent application for stack, if waste is a pollutant the treatment of that waste should not be a pollutant too. There should be a moratorium on waste treatment.

### **Viridor**

Viridor Recycling in Cardiff is a great example of a forward-thinking plant. Sometimes difficult and unpopular decisions have to be made.

### **Zero waste**

We should try and prevent people producing so much waste in the first instance and encourage zero waste shops. Circular economy, re-use.

### **Officer Response**

The Planning Policy Team Leader confirmed that discussions would be undertaken with colleagues in Waste to look at alternative ways of dealing with the treatment of waste.

## **8. Minerals (Quarries and Safeguarding)**

### **Minerals**

The minerals we have are high grade and in demand throughout the UK for high

grade roads and runways (two things that may not be in such high demand in the future). We have to make decisions that are unpopular and reliant on enforcement of mineral usage. Some communities are unsure about regulations and enforcement. We have to make our contribution but shouldn't necessarily put our hands up to contribute too readily.

I don't think mineral extraction should not be a priority. Are we still tied into the Regional Technical Statement for Graig-Yr-Hesg given the changes to Local Government in 2022 and strategic decisions? What is the status of the regional arrangement? The regional arrangements seem to influence the sites in RCT.

### **Officer Response**

The Development Services Manager advised that the second review of the RTS has been undertaken and endorsed by WG and each LA was consulted. RCT has considered it but there aren't enough reserves in our existing quarries to meet the need. There has to be consideration for alternatives or approaching neighbouring authorities to take our apportionment.

## **12 Chair's Review & Close**

The Chair thanked Members of the Steering Group and Officers for their time and attendance at the meeting. The Chair suggested that there would be another meeting to consider the remaining slides and topics within the presentation at a date and time to be confirmed.

**This meeting closed at 12.00 pm**

**G. Caple  
Chairman.**