

## **Minutes of a Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held via video-conferencing on Thursday, 3 March, 2021.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Marc Davies (Chairman),  
Councillors Clive Davies; Euros Davies; Ifan Davies; Gethin Davies; Meirion Davies;  
Keith Evans; Elizabeth Evans; Gwyn James; John Adams-Lewis; Maldwyn Lewis;  
Lyndon Lloyd MBE; Dai Mason; John Roberts.

**Also in attendance:** Councillors Catherine Hughes, Dafydd Edwards, Rhodri Evans,  
Gareth Lloyd, Ray Quant MBE (Cabinet Members) and Councillors Ceredig Davies,  
Mark Strong.

**Officers in attendance:** Russell Hughes-Pickering, Corporate Lead Officer Economy  
and Regeneration; Rhodri Llwyd, Corporate Lead Officer Highways and Environmental  
Services; Elin Prysor, Corporate Lead Officer Legal and Governance and Monitoring  
Officer; Arwyn Davies, Corporate Manager Growth and Enterprise; Meleri Richards,  
Rural Communities Coordinator; Phil Jones, Corporate Manager Highways Services;  
Sarah Groves-Phillips, Service Manager Planning Policy; Lisa Evans, Scrutiny and  
Standards Officer; Kay Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

10.00a.m. –13:30p.m.

### **1 Welcome and Apologies**

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting. No apologies were noted.

### **2 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

The following members disclosed Personal/Prejudicial interests in minute 5  
below and withdrew from the meeting whilst the matter was being discussed:  
Councillors Marc Davies, Ifan Davies, Meirion Davies, Dai Mason.

### **3 Response to the consultation on the Ceredigion Economic Strategy document 'Boosting Ceredigion's Economy - A Strategy for Action 2020-35'**

Arwyn Davies, Corporate Manager Growth and Enterprise presented the report  
on the Response to the consultation on the Ceredigion Economic Strategy  
document 'Boosting Ceredigion's Economy - A Strategy for Action 2020-35' in  
order that the Committee may review the responses to the consultation on the  
Strategy and to consider recommendations to the Cabinet as it prepares to adopt  
the Strategy.

The purpose of the strategy is to inform CCC's approach and action to support  
the growth of the economy of Ceredigion over the next 15 years. The plan will be  
a framework for supporting the economy of Ceredigion - focused on the areas  
within the influence of Ceredigion CC to make a difference to the economy – i.e.  
how it uses its capital, human and revenue assets to positively impact the  
economy in Ceredigion over that timeframe. Whilst its focus is on the activities  
controlled and managed by the County Council, it will also cover its key role in  
various partnerships that will also help drive the economy of Ceredigion. It will  
inform service-level action and business planning in the future.

In putting the initial draft strategy together, there was significant engagement with key stakeholders as follows:

- Public survey aimed at young people, businesses and the general public (available online and in hard copy).
- One to one discussions with interested organisations and sectors, in particular businesses.
- Attendance at various groups and meetings to discuss the development of the strategy.
- Internal engagement with officers and Members.
- Three public drop in sessions for businesses in Cardigan, Aberystwyth and Lampeter.

The draft strategy was approved for consultation by Cabinet on 17th March 2020 and a formal consultation was launched in December 2020.

The original economic baseline report, as well as the report on the impact of Covid-19 on the economy was included as part of the consultation on the draft economic strategy.

The detailed response to the consultation is included in the report.

Overall, there were high levels of support in the survey results for each of the themes:

- 74% Agree or strongly agree with the proposed actions for the “People” theme
- 68% Agree or strongly agree with the proposed actions for the “Place” theme
- 75% Agree or strongly agree with the proposed actions for the “Enterprise” theme
- 80% Agree or strongly agree with the proposed actions for the “Connectivity” theme

The consultation largely concludes that the main issues have been identified, and that the proposed interventions are supported.

Members welcomed the opportunity for discussion. It was noted that the main focus of the Strategy is to focus on what is achievable by the Council and would provide a framework in order to expand on detail moving forward such as working with partners to help agricultural business to meet challenges faced by the sector. County farms are also an important part of the Strategy’s framework. Work has commenced in relation to affordable homes with the scheme available in Ciliau Aeron and the Assets Panel would provide further opportunities in future. Improved transport links to the county are included in the Strategy; the need for help and support for new and small businesses is ongoing along with support given to young people to start their own businesses. Concerns were raised in relation the issue of phosphates in the region from Llechryd to Lampeter which may lead to planning refusals for developments in that area. This issue is widespread across Wales, however, the Strategy would help with lobbying WG. The increasing need for care services as an important part of growth in the local economy was also noted.

**Following discussion the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed:**

- That Cabinet give consideration to the concerns of the Committee that development will be limited in certain areas of Ceredigion due to the NRW decision in relation to new developments along riverine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) because of the potential to increase phosphate levels within the SAC.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Manager Growth and Enterprise and his team for their excellent work on the Strategy.

#### **4 Ash Dieback Action Plan (ADAP)**

The need to develop an Ash Dieback Action Plan (ADAP) was reported to Scrutiny on 5/11/2019. The ADAP is required in order to provide the Council with a mechanism to manage the risks posed by ash dieback, thereby minimising health & safety, economic and environmental impacts and avoiding the risk of reputational damage to the Council.

In line with the best practice approach advocated by Defra and the Tree Council, Ceredigion County Council have developed the action plan to outline how to manage the anticipated risks and issues associated with the spread of Ash Dieback across the county.

The action plan has been prepared to help make sure that the necessary work streams are put in place to ensure that the county is ready and adequately resourced both to respond to the effects of the disease and to minimise long term adverse impacts through promoting resilience.

Phil Jones, Corporate Manager Highways Services delivered a presentation on the Ash Dieback Action Plan. It was noted that the disease is accelerating in Ceredigion faster than the rest of the country due to the natural damp environment in the county.

It was noted that the costs estimated in the report to eliminate Ash Dieback from the Council's property were assessed based on neighbouring counties' costs but may not cost as much as quoted once work commenced. A new post created to undertake the work of identifying diseased trees and informing land owners would remove pressure from existing staff and would also address the need to deal with other tree diseases and problems in the county. Dealing with Ash Dieback was noted as a significant health and safety priority for the council. Discussions in relation to costs is ongoing with the finance service but costs are not part of budgetary pressures thus far.

Many members noted that costings in relation to buying the relevant plant and machinery necessary and undertaking the work in house should be explored along with using trees felled on council owned land for bio-mass purposes. Affected Ash wood becomes very brittle therefore is not suitable for the wood works industry.

Replanting would cost approximately £2m. Carbon reduction would also be affected but this would be unavoidable.

Correspondence has been sent to residents informing them of Ash Dieback.

Following consideration the Committee agreed to approve the ADAP and to ensure that resources, human and financial, are secured for its successful implementation and delivery. This is to provide the Council with a mechanism to manage the risks posed by ash dieback, thereby minimising health & safety, economic and environmental impacts and avoiding the risk of reputational damage to the Council.

The Corporate Manager Highways Services was thanked for his informative report.

***At this juncture, the Chair was taken over by Councillor Euros Davies as Councillor Marc Davies has disclosed a personal/prejudicial interest in minute 5 below and withdrew from the meeting.***

## **5 Ceredigion second homes and holiday lets data**

Sarah Groves-Phillips, Service Manager Planning Policy was welcomed to the meeting to present the report to inform the Scrutiny Committee of the latest available data in relation to Holiday Lets and Second Homes countywide in order to follow up the motion to Council and to further investigate the number, spread and impact of second homes on the county of Ceredigion.

Due to the fact the Holiday Let / Second Home market is a relatively unregulated industry, there is no one source of data to distinguish the exact numbers of properties that are second homes or that are rented out permanently or temporarily as holiday lets. In order to make comparisons nationally, the most reliable source of data is council tax information. With the caveat that this is dependent on owners accurately registering the correct typology and it is likely that this is not always the case. The total number of properties listed as second homes or holiday lets (by Council tax) is 2125. This compares to an overall total of domestic properties paying council tax of 35,574 which equates to 6% (rounded) of all dwellings paying council tax being registered second homes / holiday lets.

The Ceredigion bed stock survey last undertaken in 2019 highlighted there were 633 self-catering holiday accommodation units available during the study period available in Ceredigion. Finally a recent study into peer to peer platforms such as Air BnB conducted by GTS (UK) Ltd with 12 pilot authorities including Ceredigion highlighted that between 2016 and 2019 the growth of such lettings had increased nationally and in Ceredigion (for entire place listings) amounted to just over 1000 units in Aug 2019.

In making comparisons nationally of how Ceredigion fairs, council tax data will be used, as this is available for all authorities in Wales and presents the most reliable source of data.

Ceredigion has lower rates of second home ownership and holiday lets (5.91%) than our neighbouring coastal authorities Gwynedd 10.77% and Pembrokeshire 9.15% but we have higher rates compared to non-coastal authorities. Ceredigion has the fourth highest rate of holiday let and second home ownership of local

authorities in Wales. A possible explanation for the rate remaining below 6% is likely explained by the distance of Ceredigion from major transport routes and relative isolation.

Holiday Lets and Second Homes form part of the non-serviced accommodation market which annually from 2007 to 2018 has accounted for between 70 and 73% of tourism economic impact in Ceredigion (£238.83 million/72.2% STEAM 2018). Those which are rented out on a short term let basis will likely have a higher return to the local economy but second homes for one individual family will also have economic benefits in the form of the foundation economy and the tourism and leisure spend of the occupants.

There is no definitive evidence to say at what threshold second homes become a particular problem. Due to the fact most second homes are located in traditional tourism economic dependant areas, which have naturally higher house values given their coastal/rural and desirable locations. However we know that they can cause problems including;

- A lack of housing supply to meet local demand
- Impact on local services, the amenities of local residents and the community
- A lack of permanent population in order to maintain and support local community facilities
- Seasonal employment opportunities only
- Impact on the local housing market (increasing prices)
- Local impact upon Welsh Language rates

Second homes and holiday lets impact upon housing affordability locally there is no ward level data available to illustrate if specific wards are impacted across Ceredigion. In the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures for 2019, Ceredigion had the 3rd highest ratio nationally, behind Monmouthshire and Vale of Glamorgan. In the years between 2004 and 2010 the affordability ratio in Ceredigion was the highest nationally. The ratio has always been within the top five LAs nationally for the last twenty years. The trend in recent years since the peak in 2007, has been a decrease, although there was a slight uplift in the latest figures for 2019.

There is currently no mechanism to control second homes and holiday lets for most properties, as all residential dwellings are classified as 'C3 dwelling use'. Which allows them to be switched back and forth from a residential dwelling to a second home/holiday home without consent under national legislation; The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 as amended and the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 as amended. Exceptions apply where a dwelling has been conditioned as a holiday let at planning application stage such as in the case of farm diversification where traditional farm buildings have been converted. In such cases they are conditioned as holiday lets and planning consent would be required to turn them into permanent residential dwellings.

Sarah Groves-Phillips, Service Manager Planning Policy noted that the WG Minister had yesterday issued a written Statement: Second Homes in Wales from Welsh Government:

[https://gov.wales/written-statement-publication-second-homes-developing-new-policies-wales-report?utm\\_source=rss-announcements&utm\\_medium=rss-feed&utm\\_campaign=announcements-Written+Statement%3A+Publication+of+%E2%80%98Second+homes+%E2%80%99+Developing+new+policies+in+Wales%E2%80%99+report](https://gov.wales/written-statement-publication-second-homes-developing-new-policies-wales-report?utm_source=rss-announcements&utm_medium=rss-feed&utm_campaign=announcements-Written+Statement%3A+Publication+of+%E2%80%98Second+homes+%E2%80%99+Developing+new+policies+in+Wales%E2%80%99+report)

During discussion, points noted included the following:

- i. Many 'Buy to let' houses are owned by local people.
- ii. There is currently no legislation in place that landlords may only rent out their properties to local people. Letting agencies, according to an internal survey undertaken by the policy team, noted that they prefer to let houses to local people rather than those from further away unless they are returning to live in the area. Most estate agents noted that most houses were bought by people to improve on their present residence or by people relocating to the area.
- iii. The WG Future Wales The National plan 2040 would need to be considered in future decision making as adopted on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Feb 2021

The Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to endorse the Motion proposed to Council:

Ceredigion County Council calls on the Welsh Government to:

1. add a new clause to the Planning Act so that it is compulsory to make a planning application before obtaining the right to convert a residential home into a holiday home or a holiday let
2. adapt the policy framework to allow for maximum thresholds to be set with regard to the number of holiday homes in a given area
3. make it compulsory for second-home owners to ask for planning permission before turning a second home into a holiday business or an AirBnB business

The Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee also agreed to recommend to Council that a 100% increase is levied on the council tax of holiday homes in the county.

The Chair thanked Sarah Groves-Phillips, Service Manager Planning Policy for her presentation and informative report.

***At this juncture, the Chairman, Councillor Marc Davies, returned to the Chair and thanked Councillor Euros Davies for chairing minute 5.***

#### **Forward Work Programme 2020/21**

Members considered and AGREED the Draft Forward Programme 2020/21 as presented and along with the following additions for future meetings:

- i. Car parking in towns – look at financially; location; annually; seasonally.
- ii. Rivers and flooding

It was also agreed that the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to place 'NVZ directives costs to county farms' on its forward work programme.

**7 To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 October 2020 and 19 February 2021 and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes**

a. The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 October 2020 were AGREED as a true record. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2020.

b. The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 February 2021 were AGREED as a true record. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2021.

**8 Any other business.**

There were no other business matter to discuss

**Confirmed at the meeting of the Committee held on xx xx, 2021.**