



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL**

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the RLDP Steering Group held on Tuesday, 14 March 2023 at 4.15 pm.

### **County Borough Councillors – The following RLDP Steering Group Members were present:**

Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor D Grehan
Councillor G Hughes	Councillor W Lewis
Councillor M Powell	Councillor S Rees
Councillor J Smith	Councillor L A Tomkinson
Councillor S Trask	Councillor R Williams
Councillor M Norris	

### **Officers in attendance**

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Mr J Bailey, Head of Planning  
Ms C Hewitt, Planning Policy Team Leader  
Mr O Jones, Development Services Manager (Planning Policy)  
Mr I Williams, Senior Planning Policy Officer  
Ms K Davies, Senior Policy Officer

### **Apologies for absence**

Councillor C Middle    Councillor G Hopkins

#### **14        Declarations of Interest**

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the RLDP Members Steering Group on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

#### **15        Minutes**

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

#### **16        THE REVISED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022-2037**

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting and he added that this was an opportune time to go through the key issues that the Planning Policy Team have been working on. At this point he handed over to the Planning Policy Team and advised that any 'next steps' can be looked at after the presentation.

The Planning Policy Team Leader set out the vision for the plan, explaining that a positive, aspirational statement that is in line with those plans that affect RCT is required. She added that a number of consistent

themes have emerged from meetings with stakeholders, such as health, cohesive communities and climate change and as such these have been incorporated.

The Planning Policy Team Leader welcomed any views on the vision contained within the presentation and asked “Is this where you’d like to see RCT by 2037?”. Members provided their comments on the vision and the following comments were provided:

Councillor Hughes felt that the Vision was ‘very wordy’ and queried whether it could be simplified or sit under something else?

Councillor R Williams asked whether the Vision could be set out in bullet points to make it clearer.

Councillor D Grehan agreed that bullet points would enhance the content and added that the economy is so important, as are the green spaces and it all needs to be incorporated into the Vision.

Councillor Powell noted that whilst the aspirations are worthy, it seems like “déjà vu” adding that a well-connected transport system has not been achieved to date and certainly not in the last 25 years. Councillor Powell asked whether it could be reworded slightly to reflect this, and he also questioned whether “sustainable transport” means public transport, and if so he stated that this is admirable. Councillor Powell also agreed with the need to format the content with bullet points.

The Planning Policy Team Leader thanked Members for their contributions and assured them that the team will try to make the Vision more appropriate. She added “Is there anything that you feel is most important out of these aspirations?”

Councillor G Hughes replied that high quality homes, services and facilities were fundamental, and it was suggested that the Council should go for the antithesis of poverty and instead focus on prosperity. The Planning Policy Team Leader explained that alongside the Vision, key issues need to be identified which has been achieved in conjunction with Councillors, officers and other stakeholders. In addition, much has been done with public consultation such as the Council’s “Let’s Talk” page which will remain live until 21<sup>st</sup> March.

The Planning Policy Team Leader explained that 86 issues have been identified (from over a thousand individual responses). These have been turned into objectives and it was agreed that the list of objectives would be circulated following the meeting.

Councillor D Grehan stated that many people from Tonyrefail have been in touch about green spaces, which are really important.

Councillor M Powell encouraged the sharing of the 86 final issues, covering all topics to allow Councillors to comment on them, as they see fit. He also asked if a copy of the presentation could also be circulated following the meeting and added that having sight of the information prior to the meeting would ensure it is more productive.

The Planning Policy Team Leader advised that there are 18 objectives that “cut across” a number of topics and themes. Each headline issue includes points below to address the specific objective. The objectives are also linked to the Sustainability Appraisal that have been commissioned for the evidence base (essential document).

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications added that the plan and its constituent parts will be presented to full Council for the normal decision-making processes, so there will be other opportunities for involvement by all Councillors.

Councillor G Hughes stated that the phrase “Locate development in sustainable locations” would, in his opinion, hamstring development. He requested that the wording be less specific.

Councillor R Williams added that it should be considered on a case-by-case basis, to allow flexibility.

The Planning Policy Team Leader continued through the next section on housing needs and numbers, objectives 2-18 on the presentation and invited questions:

Councillor S Trask stated that objective 14 should be a little more ambitious, stating that we want a “thriving” economy in RCT.

Councillor D Grehan queried what exactly the team would be looking at in terms of air quality, would this be traffic or industry? He asked how the Council can protect and enhance air quality and added that the quarry in Pontypridd has caused much concern in relation to air quality. Would we look to do studies?

The Planning Policy Team Leader confirmed that a number of stakeholders have also raised the issue of air quality, and she assured Members that work with colleagues in Public Health will continue. They have AQMAs and certain zones near the M4 where they are trying to manage the issue of air quality and looking to see how the plan can meet those objectives.

Councillor M Powell wished to make a point regarding objective 10 – quality and quantity of water resources. He queried whether new rivers is outside the Council’s remit, and he added that he has previously asked for studies in relation to air quality. He concluded that perhaps there are matters that we are looking to do but probably won’t achieve.

The Planning Policy Team Leader responded that the LDP will use all of the tools at its disposal to improve air and water quality

Councillor M Powell hoped that all Councillors will work together for the benefit of the County Borough, to get the most out of the LDP process.

### **Scale of Growth**

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) explained the purpose of this section relating to housing numbers and housing need. He explained the importance of considering various options in line with

Welsh Government guidance to formulate the level of growth that is required and wanted in RCT.

To assist with his presentation, the Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) shared the EDGE document which considered the scale of migration, births/deaths and the demographics within the Borough, as well as an employment and commuting profile. Furthermore, it builds on data from the ONS and census and the Welsh Government mid-year estimates. The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) advised that to gain an in depth understanding, EDGE utilises a standard piece of software called Popgroup, which allows for scenario testing, which has produced potential housing figures for the plan.

Councillor D Grehan asked whether the number of houses was general and whether there is any analysis to determine the numbers of commercial and social housing? The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) explained that there is a significant connection between the amount of houses built in total and the number of affordable housing and he added that it should also be noted that the LHMA breaks down the affordable housing need.

In response to a query regarding land ownership, the Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) advised that, as is the right, whoever owns the land dictates how it is developed or whom it is sold to. If the Council has land, it can certainly use this to develop affordable housing. There could potentially be funding from the Welsh Government's housing fund however this would not be guaranteed.

The Head of Planning emphasised that private house builders also include an element of social or affordable housing within their developments and that this is an important contributor to overall affordable housing numbers. Many affordable homes are delivered via private schemes.

Councillor M Powell pointed out that private house builders will not build the numbers that are required in RCT, that the Council needs to build its own homes and they should be energy efficient homes.

Councillor S Rees stated that the market for social housing is growing due to the cost-of-living crisis preventing residents from getting onto the housing ladder. She added that the social housing stock needs to increase, and shared ownership needs to be considered. Both Councillors S Rees and R Williams agreed that the housing market needs to be more creative, particularly if it is to support young people get on the housing ladder.

In response to a query regarding the difference between social and affordable housing, the Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) clarified that where there is a reference to 'affordable' in this analysis it is anything other than the private sales housing.

Councillor J Smith raised concern with regards to the numbers of residents sleeping on friends and relatives' sofas which warrants a more innovative approach to housing and a more inventive approach in the

future.

Councillor D Grehan conceded that the 'affordable/social' housing terminology is a battle and asked whether this Council can also start to build council houses as other authorities are doing. The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) assured that the Council is working closely with the Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) to deliver 100% social housing.

Councillor S Trask acknowledged the serious lack of available land, especially in the northern part of the County Borough. He noted that if we take the median and extrapolate that over the plan period, it equates to around 8,000 houses. He referred to the site in north Cardiff that will be delivering 11,000 houses, and added that finding suitable land is very much a challenge for officers.

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) informed Members that the local authority has a landbank of c.3,500 homes that although have a level of permission, have not yet been built on and he provided an overview of progress across the region:

- Caerphilly opted for an aspirational high growth strategy however the Welsh Government have perceived this as unrealistic, which has stalled their plan making process.
- The Southeast Wales region needs to deliver 66,000 homes to 2039 collectively. Cardiff, Bridgend, the Vale of Glamorgan and Caerphilly have committed to providing a combined 53,000 homes over this period.
- If this council pursued the higher housing scenario, the requirement for the remaining region would be even less.
- Neighbouring authorities see housing as the key to changing their areas and tackling some of their larger issues.

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) explained the various growth scenarios to Members utilising the information contained within the presentation.

Councillor G Hughes noted the need to build on greenfield land in order to build the number of houses required. He referred to the inherent contradiction in national planning policy of having to meet the housing need whilst simultaneously building predominantly on brownfield land.

Councillor M Powell stated that RCT needs to look at other areas and see how they've dealt with various housing tenures. He also raised the issue of larger homes low occupancy and added that there is a need to free up this type of housing stock for other people. Councillor M Powell also referred to the number of people from Bristol who are choosing to relocate to South Wales which drives prices up and prevents local people from being able to afford them.

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) responded that we need to be more considerate of the range of housing requirements and the various types, adding that the middle growth scenario is most likely to be considered as an acceptable by the Welsh Government.

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) set out the advantages and disadvantages of the growth strategies and maintained that the mid-500s per annum, 8,000 over the plan period, is the most appropriate option.

Councillor G Hughes stated that he wants to be as aspirational as possible in the delivery of affordable and market homes, and he added that RCT is in a positive position with the Metro, accessing major roads and green spaces making the County Borough an attractive prospect to all. He stated the importance of being innovative in how homes are developed and noted the lack of small bungalows and one-bedroom apartments. Councillor G Hughes questioned whether the Council's empty homes count towards its housing target.

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) advised that Welsh Government have indicated that it couldn't be counted as an additional one for one new property as per new builds but would only be included as a smaller allowance when considering the formal equation between growth of population and households against actual dwellings then needed.

Councillor W Lewis questioned whether the Council's Extra Care provision is included in the figures and whether there is a net gain with smaller Care Homes closing? The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) stated that previous completions have been included in the annual total of houses completed. However, he advised that confirmation as to whether this could formally be considered as new property requirements would be sought and relayed to the Steering Group.

Councillor S Trask noted that 550 dwellings per annum isn't too large a step beyond what has been built annually to date. He questioned whether there any factors that have been constraining development, whether there is anything within the existing LDP that is preventing this figure being reached year on year?

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) explained that the current LDP had an aspirational strategy that allocated 14,385 new homes, equating to 1,000 dwellings per annum. He added that after 2010, the market did not recover and with the exception of 2017, when over 700 houses were built, the local authority has not achieved the 1,000 dwellings per annum figure. He advised that the figure of 550 is more achievable.

In response to Councillor M Powell's proposals regarding empty properties, the Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) commented that there are around 3,000 empty properties in RCT. There is a considerable Wales-wide scheme that RCT is leading on to get some of those empty properties back into beneficial use. He concluded that there is no scheme to CPO properties however there may be grants available for certain renovation works.

In respect of Councillor M Powell's comments regarding the impact of the Welsh Government's moratorium on roads, particularly on sites such as Valleywood in Llanid, the Planning Manager commented that the roads

review presents a challenge to the whole of Wales with all areas impacted by the consequences of those decisions. He added that the local authority has to be realistic that some sites are going to be greenfield; it has to be a mixed strategy.

In response to a proposal raised that the Steering Group holds a meeting to consider the existing LDP and its objectives, the Service Director Democratic Services & Communication advised that this is an informal meeting for Members to have open discussion to share their views, however the plan has to be in compliance with other considerations and ultimately the decision on the plan will rest with full Council.

### **Settlement Hierarchy**

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) explained that the Settlement Hierarchy is the assessment of the towns and villages, and that the hierarchy is determined by their scale, function and their associated services and facilities. He added that the one change between this and the previous settlement hierarchy is that Pontyclun is now being considered part of Llantrisant/Talbot Green.

Cllr G Hughes asked for clarification regarding the mention of Blaencwm, as a settlement that should support no further development. The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) explained that there is a list of 29 settlements that are not within walking distance of services and facilities and are therefore deemed to be unsustainable. He added that there is no desire to see any further development within these areas.

Councillor S Rees stated that Llwydcoed and Cwmdare should be Smaller Settlements on their own. The Planning Manager assured the Steering Group that this would be considered. The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) added that sometimes things do not align with ward data and many places have an identity of their own but will be considered as part of the wider area.

Councillor M Powell stated that for education purposes, Beddau is part of Pontypridd area and should remain so. He also stated that Cwmbach is part of greater Aberdare, as opposed to a settlement on its own.

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) responded that the national plan (Future Wales, 2020-2040) considers Pontypridd as a growth area and therefore, there is an allowance for the smaller settlements to grow.

Councillor S Trask stated that he was expecting to see Llantwit Fardre, Church Village as Smaller Settlements but is somewhat relieved this is not the case, as people from Cardiff for example will want to live in these areas. The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) noted that Llantwit Fardre is a Smaller Settlement and that if there are a certain level of facilities within a Smaller Settlement, there's scope for a level of growth associated with it. He added that the local authority has no control over where these proposals come from and who will occupy any dwellings built there however if more are developed they will also cater for the residents of RCT.

Councillor M Powell noted that prior to the construction of the Church Village bypass; he suggested a dual carriageway would be beneficial for the sites that would naturally spring up along the road. He commented on the importance of the LDP looking at all aspects of it.

## **17 Next steps- Discussions on a Preferred Strategy**

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) explained the slide and its content and how this sets out how the above key areas of Spatial and Growth options along with the Settlement Hierarchy would be brought together to form a coherent Preferred Strategy. He added that further analysis of Candidate Sites are required to ensure that this could be achieved on the ground in terms of deliverable land for development.

However, the Development Services Manager advised that some of these decisions are hampered by issues such as National Flooding policy, proposed changes to National Biodiversity policy, the National Roads Review, Neighbouring Authority LDP uncertainty, increased pressure from Primary Healthcare. He added that it may be that the Preferred Strategy needs to take advantage of the allowed 3 months slippage period to the agreed preparation timetable to resolve these matters.

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) assured the Steering Group that the Planning Policy Team would circulate the information from today's meeting, including the extra objectives and issues raised through the discussions.

In conclusion, the Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) thanked Members for their valuable contributions to the discussions.

**This meeting closed at 6.15 pm**

**L Tomkinson  
Chair.**