

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**16<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2018**

**PORTH TOWN CENTRE: DRAFT OUTLINE STRATEGY**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, PLANNING AND HOUSING IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING, COUNCILLOR BEVAN**

**Author:** Derek James, Head of Regeneration, Housing and Prosperity

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to:

- Set out a draft regeneration strategy for taking Porth Town Centre forward into the future that delivers economic growth and job creation.
- Seek Cabinet approval for the projects outlined in the draft strategy to be further investigated, consulted upon, developed and pursued, as appropriate.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Consider the draft Porth Town Centre Regeneration Strategy.
- 2.2 Initiate a public consultation exercise on the draft Porth Town Centre Strategy and receive a further report detailing the results from the consultation exercise.
- 2.3 Agree to the further development of schemes and projects outlined within the draft strategy.

**3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To continue to deliver on the Council's commitment to support the regeneration of town centres and encourage private sector investment in the high street economy, as set out in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's 2016-20 Corporate Plan "*The Way Ahead*".
- 3.2 To deliver this commitment and to tackle the many challenges currently faced by our town centres, the solution requires an integrated, co-ordinated and holistic approach to town centre regeneration that

harnesses the many exciting opportunities currently presented through the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

4.1 Town centres are facing a multitude of challenges to their future vitality and viability. Many of our High Streets are characterised by falling retail sales, reduced footfall, increased business failures and rising vacancies. The growth of internet shopping and multi-channel retailing also means that many retailers are actively seeking to reduce rather than increase their store portfolios.

4.2 Enabling vibrant and enticing town centres, with a strong offer, which recognises that they are at the heart of our communities is a clear commitment within Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's 2016-20 Corporate Plan "*The Way Ahead*". The plan also makes a commitment that they will benefit from investment to ensure an attractive environment exists for businesses, residents and shoppers.

4.3 To deliver this commitment and to tackle the many challenges currently faced by our town centres, the solution requires a sophisticated and sustainable approach to regeneration.

4.4 As such, the Porth Town Centre regeneration strategy sets out an integrated, co-ordinated and holistic approach to town centre regeneration that takes into account the distinctive role Porth has at the heart of the community and its important location for services, employment, housing and transport functions.

#### **5.0 PORTH TOWN CENTRE: PROPOSED STRATEGY**

5.1 In developing this strategy, it was important to understand the key challenges, but also the opportunities that exist in and around Porth that have the potential to support the regeneration of the town. These challenges and opportunities have been identified and categorised under the following themes within the main strategy (Appendix A).

- Connectivity
- Town Centre Gateway
- Car Parking
- Retail
- Housing

5.2 A summary of some of the key challenges identified during this process are set out below:

- A poor transport interchange exists between bus and rail services within the town. The current set up prevents a seamless transition for those who use the bus link service from the surrounding areas to the train service in Porth.
- Passengers using a connecting bus service to Porth train station currently have to pay separately for their bus and train journeys. This lack of integration is inconvenient for passengers and often results in them paying more for their journey. This is especially an issue for residents of the Rhondda Fach, Trebanog, Tonyrefail and Gilfach Goch as no rail link exists and therefore bus links to Porth Station are vital to allow commutable journeys.
- Porth Train Station and the approach to the station is currently aesthetically uninviting and very uninspiring. Many visitors travelling to the town will arrive at Porth without a real sense of arrival as the relationship between the transport interchange and the town is extremely poor.
- There are at present a number of prominent, vacant and under-used buildings in the vicinity of the train station and the town centre. Some of the buildings are seriously dilapidated and become local 'eyesores' and hotspot for anti-social behaviour resulting in the long term blight of the area, which is affecting inward investment, local businesses and property prices.
- Since 2011, Porth's town centre footfall has dropped year on year, from a weekly average of 13,210 to 9,274 currently.
- The Housing Market Needs Assessment has identified a need in Porth for more housing.

5.3 In addressing many of the challenges, the strategy sets out a number of opportunities that exist in and around Porth that have the potential to support the regeneration of the town.

5.4 A key opportunity that has been identified as part of this process which is pivotal to delivering this strategy, is the exciting opportunities currently presented through the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and the Valleys Taskforce.

5.5 One such opportunity is the delivery of the South East Wales Metro as part of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, which will make substantial improvements to the connectivity by public transport across the region. As part of this development, Porth Train Station will see an increase in train services from two trains per hour to four trains per hour in each direction from 2022. This presents an excellent opportunity to capitalise on this investment to facilitate significant change and kick start the regeneration of Porth.

## **Proposed Vision**

- 5.6 The proposed vision for Porth Town Centre is:

*‘To transform Porth Town Centre into a prosperous and attractive town, which offers a wide range of opportunities for visitors, residents and businesses; anchored by Porth Transport Hub and a much regenerated Station Quarter’.*

- 5.7 Central to the vision is the ability to create a sense of place by boosting the perception and experience of the town, generating a positive environment in which to live, work, visit and invest. The vision will help to rejuvenate and sustain the town centre, grow the local economy, increase job opportunities and provide for urban living. The renewal of key sites across the town, the development of the Transport Hub and Station Quarter will be the catalyst for such changes.

## **Strategic Objectives**

- 5.8 To achieve this vision, the strategy is supported by a series of strategic objectives that will drive its delivery and translate directly into a series of projects and actions:
1. To improve connectivity with the town centre and surrounding areas through the development of a Transport Hub.
  2. To create the conditions for the town to become a thriving Station Quarter.
  3. To improve the key gateways into the town.
  4. To support the development of housing.
  5. To provide the conditions to strengthen employment opportunities.

## **Making it Happen – the Key Schemes**

- 5.9 Achieving the vision and objectives for the town cannot be achieved with one simple scheme. Instead, it demands the implementation of a wide range of co-ordinated and integrated **physical** development projects. The draft Porth Town Centre Strategy takes each of these strategic objectives and sets out a wide range of projects and investment opportunities in more detail. This includes:

**The development of a modern quality Transport Hub and Station Quarter that efficiently links commercial development with residential areas.**

- 5.10 The delivery of this project will result in transformational change for Porth by improving the connectivity within the town centre and surrounding areas. This has the potential to attract more people to the

town to work, live, visit and invest therefore improving the footfall and the ability of the town to attract investment by creating jobs and homes. The potential also exists to create a modern well-designed arrival point that welcomes visitors, business people and residents, providing a high quality experience.

- 5.11 The strategy has identified the site currently occupied by the Alec Jones Day Centre as having the potential to accommodate a new Transport Hub. This site is ideally positioned for a Transport Hub; housing a bus interchange, taxi rank, cycle racks and linking to the train station and the park & ride. The site covers approximately 1,700 sq m allowing for the delivery of a new fit for purpose bus station, which will act as a catalyst for a much-regenerated *Station Quarter* with a mix of commercial, retail, office and residential developments.

(Appendix 1 within the strategy document includes a map outlining the proposed area for the transport hub and station quarter).

- 5.12 The development of a Transport Hub at this site would provide an integrated and improved interchange that aligns both the bus and train stations that will allow them to cope with future, increased passenger numbers and increased services, whilst offering easy access to the whole public transport network. Opportunities to encourage active travel through improved pedestrian and cycle routes and the creation of cycle docking facilities will also be a key feature of the Transport Hub development.
- 5.13 This project will also seek to work with Transport for Wales to develop an integrated ticketing system that offers local residents and visitor's simplicity, convenience and value for money across the bus and rail services serving the metro. This would address the current issue of passengers using a connecting bus service to Porth train station and currently have to pay separately for their bus and train journeys.

#### **The development of Porth Plaza into the Community Hub for Rhondda South.**

- 5.14 The opportunity exists for Porth Plaza to be developed as a Community Hub to provide a range of Council services from the same location. This will provide direct access to many of the services residents need on a daily basis as well as providing opportunities to receive business support, employment support and information, advice and assistance on a range of issues that affect people's quality of life and well-being.
- 5.15 Community hubs provide a focal point and facilities to foster greater local community activity and bring residents, the local business community, and smaller organisations together to improve the quality of

life in their areas. This development, located in the heart of the town centre, would bring more residents into the town; improving footfall levels and potential spend at local businesses.

- 5.16 In developing Porth Plaza into a Community Hub, it is also proposed to re-locate the services currently provided by Alec Jones Day Centre to the new Community Hub. The current Day Centre is currently underutilised with an average of 27 meals served per day. The co-location of services within Porth Plaza will enable the Council to provide a café style food outlet where food is available throughout the day, including hot meals. Residents and community groups would continue to have access to rooms to meet and the activities currently delivered as part of the Day Centre offer.
- 5.17 Bringing the current Day Centre services together with other services will provide a better offer and create economies of scale in terms of staffing and building costs. Making better, more cost effective use of our community assets and reinvesting resources in new or retrofitted, fit for purpose buildings will enable services to be sustainable in the longer term.

**The provision of additional long and short term parking to accommodate the future regenerated Porth Town centre.**

- 5.18 Improving the car parking offer throughout the town will improve the quality of infrastructure needed to support town centre investment and also allow visitors and shoppers to enjoy improved access to the town whilst creating a more positive experience.

**Extending the current Park and Ride provision within the town centre.**

- 5.19 The development of a **Phase 2 park and ride** facility is currently in the early stages of development and will be progressed during 2018 with completion expected in 2019. The facility aims to provide a further 72 (circa) parking spaces, taking the overall park and ride offer in the town to almost 150 parking spaces.

**The redevelopment of existing underused, disused and derelict buildings throughout the town to create housing, office and retail accommodation.**

- 5.20 A number of properties close to the train station and at key locations throughout the town centre have the potential for mixed-use development, with commercial and retail opportunities on the ground floors and the reuse of vacant floor space at upper levels, suitable for residential use. Converting unused or underused commercial space

into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the town.

**Explore opportunities to relocate Council Staff into Porth Town Centre.**

- 5.21 As part of the Council's proposal to transform Adult Social Care, Bronwydd House, which currently houses over 200 Council employees, has been identified as a site for extra care housing developments. As such, the first phase of this project will be to explore opportunities to relocate these staff to underused or vacant office space/premises within Porth Town Centre. This will generate footfall into the town that has the potential to enhance the town centre economically.

**Public realm improvements.**

- 5.22 The enhancement of the town centre streets and spaces as part of the Station Quarter and Transport Hub developments will raise the quality, value and confidence in the town. This will create a far more attractive environment for shoppers and visitors to the town, and enhance the town's distinctiveness.

**The introduction of the Town Centre Maintenance Grant.**

- 5.23 The Town Centre Maintenance Grant will provide financial support to town centre traders / landlords (including vacant properties) to undertake minor improvements and maintenance works which will improve the external front elevation of town centre properties. The scheme will contribute to a positive impact on the street scene, creating a more attractive and vibrant environment which has the potential to increase retail spend and stimulate further private sector investment.

**The redevelopment of the former Porth Junior school site for residential use.**

- 5.24 The development of new residential units within Porth will help diversify the existing housing stock, promote housing in sustainable locations that are well served by public transport; and increase the footfall into the town centre.

**Developing extra care housing for the elderly and vulnerable.**

- 5.25 The economic value of this development will be beneficial to the town as older people will be able to live within and be part of thriving local communities, including the town centre, and increase regular daily footfall to benefit the mix of local independent traders and national retail chains.

## **Next Steps**

- 5.26 The draft strategy sets out some clear next steps and an implementation plan that cover each project, along with an indication of the delivery timescales and which strategic objective the project supports.
- 5.27 A critical next step that has been highlighted in the implementation process is the need to carry out a public consultation on the draft strategy. To achieve the best results we will talk to the appropriate people and organisations to benefit the project development. Involvement of stakeholders and our residents is vital in ensuring that our regeneration projects deliver the best possible outcomes.
- 5.28 It is therefore proposed that Cabinet initiate a consultation exercise on the draft Porth Town Centre Strategy and that the results of the consultation be reported back to Cabinet for their consideration.

## **6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 An equality Impact Assessment form (EqIA) 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.

## **7.0. CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Prior to the Porth Town Centre Strategy going public, the Council have engaged with Alec Jones' family regarding the proposals to relocate the Day Centre to the new Community Hub in Porth Plaza. If the proposals are agreed by Cabinet, the Council will work with the family to look at how it can recognise the name and contribution made by Alec Jones going forward.
- 7.2 No further consultations have taken place at this stage; however, the report proposes that Cabinet initiate a public consultation exercise on the draft Porth Town Centre Strategy over a 6 week period. This will include a focused service user consultation on the specific proposals to relocate the services currently provided by Alec Jones Day Centre to the new Community Hub at Porth Plaza. The results of this consultation will be reported to Cabinet for their consideration.

## **8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications in developing this outline strategy for Porth, but as the opportunities are developed, the financial implications will be fully assessed, and where appropriate reported to Cabinet.



## **9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

9.1 There are no current legal implications, but as the opportunities are developed, the legal implications will be fully assessed.

## **10.0 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

10.1 The delivery of this strategy will contribute to the Council's corporate priorities:

- Economy – building a strong economy
- People – promoting independence
- Place – creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work

10.2 Enabling vibrant and enticing town centres, with a strong offer, which recognises that they are at the heart of our communities is a clear commitment within Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's 2016-20 Corporate Plan "The Way Ahead".

10.3 The strategy is consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the five ways of working:

- Long term – the objectives identified, and the actions that will deliver these objectives, are part of a longer-term vision of enhancing Porth and builds upon the long term vision of the Council.
- Prevention – the strategy recognises that there are a number of challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve the vision. The projects identified will respond to these concerns in order to ensure that they don't get worse or occur in the first place.
- Integration – the projects identified in the strategy will help deliver a number of the objectives identified within the Council's Corporate Plan. A key feature of the strategy is to ensure the approach to regenerating Porth is joined up, integrated and co-ordinated.
- Collaboration – intrinsic to this approach is collaboration with other public services and third sector organisations.
- Involvement – communities will be involved with the delivery of a full public consultation to obtain the views of wider stakeholders.

10.4 This approach makes a direct contribution to the seven national well-being goals, in particular a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities and a more equal Wales.

## 11.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 11.1 The report sets out a draft regeneration strategy for taking Porth town centre forward into the future that delivers economic growth and job creation.
- 11.2 The draft outline strategy includes a wide range of activity which is both short and long term for delivery involving a range of partners. It is both ambitious and realistic in its approach and achieving the vision and objectives for the town cannot be achieved with one simple scheme. Instead, it demands the implementation of a wide range of co-ordinated and integrated physical development projects.
- 11.3 The delivery of these projects would result in **transformational change** for Porth by improving the connectivity within the town centre and surrounding areas. This has the potential to attract more people to the town to work, live, visit and invest therefore improving the footfall and the ability of the town to attract investment creating jobs and homes.
- 11.4 As Porth is the gateway to the two Rhondda Valleys this transport interchange will not just benefit the residents of Porth but will also have a positive impact on a much wider population.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**CABINET**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, PLANNING AND HOUSING IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING, COUNCILLOR BEVAN**

**Item: PORTH TOWN CENTRE: DRAFT OUTLINE STRATEGY**

**Background Papers**

None.

Officer to contact:

Derek James, Head of Regeneration and Prosperity (01443 281115)