



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

24TH JANUARY 2019

PORTH TOWN CENTRE: DRAFT STRATEGY

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

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to set out the results of the public consultation exercise carried out on the draft Porth Town Centre Strategy; and the focussed 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.
- 1.2 In addition, this report seeks Cabinet to approve the Porth Town Centre Strategy and the further development and delivery of schemes as set out within the document.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Considers the responses to the public consultation exercise undertaken in respect of the Porth Town Centre Strategy and determines whether any amendments are required to the proposals.
- 2.2 Considers the responses to the focussed service user consultation on the specific proposals to relocate the activities currently provided at Alec Jones Day Centre to the new Community Hub at Porth Plaza and determines whether any amendments are required to the proposals.
- 2.3 Subject to 2.2, and in response to the feedback received through the consultation as set out in paragraph 7.4 and 7.8 of the report, authorise the Director, Public Health, Protection & Community Services to undertake a further engagement exercise with the service users of Alec Jones Day Centre to identify and put in place the necessary arrangements for alternative hot meal provision.

- 2.4 Subject to 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 above, approve the Porth Town Centre Strategy (subject to any changes as result of the engagement process outlined above) and the further development and delivery of schemes as set out within the document.

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 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 As such, the Porth Town Centre 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.
- 4.4 On the 16th October, Cabinet agreed to initiate a public consultation exercise on the draft Porth Town Centre Strategy and receive a further report detailing the results from the consultation exercise.

5.0 PORTH TOWN CENTRE: PROPOSED STRATEGY (SUMMARY)

- 5.1 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’.

- 5.2 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

- 5.3 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.

- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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).

- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 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.

- 5.8 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.
- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 In developing Porth Plaza into a Community Hub, it was 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 residents and community groups with access to rooms to meet and socialise.
- 5.11 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.

- 5.12 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.

- 5.13 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.

- 5.14 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.

- 5.15 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.

- 5.16 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.

- 5.17 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.

- 5.18 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.

- 5.19 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.

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.
- 6.2 In relation to the specific proposals to relocate the services currently provided by Alec Jones Day Centre to the new Community Hub at Porth Plaza a full equality impact assessment has been undertaken. This was undertaken given the proposal will affect persons with a protected characteristic, particularly age and disability. The full equality impact assessment is presented at Appendix 2 and shows that although there are areas of concern it is possible to take steps to mitigate any adverse impact, for example:
- Whilst the current Day Centre activities can be successfully transferred to the Community Hub, the reconfigured building may not

be suitable to offer the hot meals that are currently provided from the Day Centre. Therefore, it is proposed that, subject to members decision, to mitigate the impact on service users the Council will explore alternative provision within the town centre where service user can be signposted to other local cafes/providers. Ongoing community engagement will be central to the development and future of the Porth Plaza Community Hub.

- By exploring the potential of allocating additional disabled parking bays at Porth Plaza car park to meet the potential increase in demand if the Day Centre activities are transferred to Porth Plaza community hub.

7.0. CONSULTATION

7.1 As previously mentioned, on the 16th October, Cabinet agreed to initiate a public consultation exercise on the draft Porth Town Centre Strategy over a 6 week period. It was also agreed that this would 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.

7.2 The following paragraphs present the findings of the consultation on the proposed strategy for the regeneration of Porth Town Centre:

Porth Town Centre Strategy Consultation

7.3 The 6 week consultation period ran from the 29th October until 10th December 2018. The consultation used a range of methods including a questionnaire, two public face to face engagement events held at Porth Plaza and Morrisons and a number of smaller engagement events held at community and leisure centres. In addition to this, officers attended an Older Persons Wellbeing event at Ystrad Sport Centre to raise awareness with over 70 people in attendance.

7.4 The response to the consultation exercise are presented at Appendix 3 and can be summarised as follows:

- In total, 139 people attended the face to face events and there were 72 responses to the questionnaire.
- 80% of respondents to the questionnaire felt that the strategic objectives outlined in the proposals would improve Porth Town Centre although some concerns were raised about increased parking issues and the timeline for the project causing disruption to the area.
- The face to face engagement events responses were mostly positive with very few negative comments being made. The majority of people were supportive of the overall strategy and particularly supportive of the proposed transport hub. Negative comments centred mainly

around concerns about increased traffic and parking issues. Local food businesses also expressed concern that if Porth Plaza were to include a café/dining area this will be unwelcome competition and contradict the vision set out within the strategy specifically around support for town centre businesses. The businesses did however express an interest in working with the Council to come up with an appropriate solution and possibly provide the hot meals themselves.

- 7.5 The full consultation report is presented at Appendix 3 and includes comments received from respondents during the consultation exercise. Overall, the consultation shows that respondents are supportive of the Porth Town Centre Strategy and welcome the proposals.

Alec Jones Day Centre Consultation

- 7.6 The targeted consultation period ran for 6 weeks, from the 29th October to the 10th December, 2018. The following methods were used to consult with Day Centre service users;

- An online and paper questionnaire.
- Drop in Engagement events on the 16th and 22nd November 2018, located at the Day Centre
- A dedicated email address (consultation@rctcbc.gov.uk) and freepost address if needed.

- 7.7 The responses to the consultation exercise are presented at Appendix 4 and can be summarised as follows:

- Overall, 27 people filled in a questionnaire and 39 people engaged directly with us at the events.
- The main reasons for using the Day Centre were for meeting friends and socialising (82% of service users) and to have lunch (70% service users).
- Respondents were asked what they would do if the Day Centre activities were to transfer to Porth Plaza. 92% of service users responded to this question stating that they would attend the new Community Hub and nobody stated that they would stop attending the activities.
- Respondents were asked what they would do if the Day Centre meals were to transfer to Porth Plaza. 91% of service users responded to this question stating that they would attend the new Community Hub for a hot meal.
- It is important to note that further comments from the service users were focussed on their desire to have the same service and meals, at the same cost, as they currently receive in the Day Centre.

- Service users were asked what the impact of the proposed transfer of the day centre would have on them. Some of the responses stated that there would be no impact, as long as the current facilities were transferred to Porth Plaza.
- There were concerns raised regarding the lack of parking at Porth Plaza.
- Discussion with the service users showed that they value the work and friendliness of the staff at the centre and some of the comments made were regarding concerns about the impact the proposal would have on the current Day Centre staff.

7.8 In addition to the above points, during the consultation a number of service users expressed concerns about the layout and open plan nature of Porth Plaza. Some service users expressed a wish to see a separate dining area exclusively for their use. With the proposed reconfiguration/usage of Porth Plaza this would not be possible.

7.9 Service users also expressed a view that the provision at Porth Plaza should be the same type of meals, available at the same time of day and at the same cost. If Porth Plaza is reconfigured to make the ground floor and entrance more vibrant, including the movement of the library to create a better service offer with additional community room capacity, it may not be possible to provide like for like service provision to that currently available in Alec Jones Day Centre. However, the current Day Centre activities, including community group activities, could still be successfully transferred to the Community Hub

7.10 As part of the consultation process the Council also engaged with the family of the late Alec Jones' regarding the proposals to relocate the Day Centre to the new Community Hub in Porth Plaza and to look at how it could recognise the name and contribution made by Alec Jones going forward if the proposals were agreed. The family thanked the Council for its consideration of them as part of the consultation process, and as such found the proposals for Porth to be very interesting. The family suggested an appropriate way in which to recognise Alec Jones' positive contribution would be to erect a plaque on the site of the former Day Centre or new Transport Hub.

7.11 In conclusion, in light of the consultation feedback, the concerns raised by local businesses and existing service users of the day centre and the constraints around the layout of Porth Plaza, it will be necessary to explore alternative options for provision of hot meals in the town. One option would be to explore an arrangement with a local café or food business which would address the wishes of existing service users and respond to the concerns of local businesses around potential competition.

7.12 The full consultation report is presented at Appendix 4 and includes comments received from respondents during the consultation exercise. Overall, the consultation shows that respondents are supportive of the services they receive at the Alex Jones Day Centre transferring to the Porth Plaza Community Hub.

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 This report sets out the results of the public consultation exercise carried out on the draft Porth Town Centre Strategy; and the focussed 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. Overall, the consultation shows that respondents are supportive of the Porth Town Centre Strategy and welcome the proposals.

11.2 The new Community Hub at Porth Plaza will provide a range of services that are responsive to the needs of Porth town centre; these would include a front facing newly designed library and employability support. Whilst the current Day Centre activities can be successfully transferred to the Community Hub, the reconfigured building may not be suitable to offer the hot meals that are currently provided from the Day Centre. Therefore, it is proposed that, subject to members decision, to mitigate the impact on service users the Council will explore alternative provision within the town centre where service users can be signposted to other local cafes/providers. Ongoing community engagement will be central to the development and future of the Porth Plaza Community Hub.

11.3 The 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.

11.4 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.

11.5 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.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity

Contact Officer

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Item:

Background Papers

[Cabinet](#) – 16th October, 2018.

Officer to contact:

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