



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the RLDP Steering Group held on Tuesday, 24 January 2023 at 4.00 pm at Virtual.

The following RLDP Steering Group Members were present online:-

Councillor D Grehan	Councillor G Hughes
Councillor W Lewis	Councillor C Middle
Councillor S Rees	Councillor J Smith
Councillor L A Tomkinson (Chair)	Councillor R Williams
Councillor J Bonetto	

Cabinet Member for Development & Prosperity, 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)

Apologies for absence

Councillor M Powell Councillor S Trask
Councillor G Hopkins

9 Welcome & Apologies for Absence

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting and Members were reminded that this was the second meeting to seek Members' views on the remaining strategic issues as set out in the briefing paper.

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors M Powell, S Trask and G Hopkins.

10 Declaration of Interest

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

11 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the RLDP Members Steering Group on the 8th December 2022 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

12 Overview of the Revised Local Development Plan 2022-2037

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) provided a brief update on progress relating to the RLDP to date including the role of the Members' steering group. He added that a number of meetings were previously held in 2021/2022 however, for several reasons, inclusive of the pandemic, operations ceased on the RLDP (2020-2030) and instead commence work on the RLDP 2022-2037. The first meeting for this new plan period was held in December 2022.

The Development Services Manager (Planning Policy) commented on the purpose of the Members' Steering Group, which is to guide the preparation of the plan, not a specific decision-making group, but as an open forum where issues are discussed prior to reaching any decision-making stages. He invited any views or queries from Members to the policy team via email or phone, should they not be raised in the meeting.

The Development Services Manager outlined the progress of the policy team who have met with various other Council departments and stakeholders including NRW, as part of the LDP Forum and Stakeholder Group. He added that they have prepared evidence to date on what is in the existing towns and villages and which of those would be the most appropriate for growth and produced a large amount of analysis around housing figures, in terms of working out what the level growth should be required over the plan period. As a result of the evidence collated, the team have compiled a number of Growth and Spatial Options, which highlight how much RCT is going to grow by and where.

The Development Services Manager confirmed that it is the Welsh Government that sets out national policy and guidance in relation to the preparation of the LDP.

In response to a query regarding the involvement of the private sector in employment and whether there was previously a specific Business Forum, the Development Services Manager commented that there are currently many stakeholders who contribute to these issues, the Federation of Small Businesses who engage in the LDP Forum and the Council's Town Centre Team link in with local businesses. Additionally, the team have commissioned consultants on the Employment Land Review who will liaise with a number of businesses and companies that run/lease out industrial estates.

The Head of Planning advised that the town centre businesses are engaged, and he confirmed that he would present the feedback to the Council's Regeneration section in relation to re-establishing the business forum. Furthermore, Cllr Middle wished to send an email to the Development Services Manager to address the employment issue.

The Spatial Options:

Option 1 – Continue with the Current LDP

The Development Services Manager commented on the north/south split to encourage development and attempt to prevent dereliction, depopulation and decline in the north, whilst trying to manage growth in a sustainable manner in the south. He added that everything was based around the designated Principal Towns and Key Settlements, with eight large Strategic Sites (mainly large, constrained brownfield sites).

Previously, forecasts were used to assess how much housing is needed but when the 14,385 figure was put into the plan, it became apparent from the next set of projections that the large amount of housing was no longer required. Further, following the crash in the housing market only half of the housing allocated was delivered, although that figure proved incorrect.

Cllr Hughes sought clarification on the north/south split and whether it will deliver the

required development in the Rhondda if this strategy remains in place although he conceded that the Rhondda is more constrained geographically than the Cynon.

The Development Services Manager explained that most of the sites that came forward in the Cynon were former school sites. He also added that unfortunately, the private land has not come forward in the north and housing in the north is typically not as viable as elsewhere in the County Borough.

Members felt that housing in the Rhondda has become 'locked' from a highways perspective and asked if the Council is capitalising on the Heads of the Valleys and the land for housing/employment? The Vice Chair reiterated his previous comments that the Tonyrefail community does not want more development in the area.

Option 2 – Strategic Highway Network

The Development Services Manager reminded Members of the work that has been undertaken in the Principal Towns such as the M4 corridor, which is viable and marketable, the A470 (Pontypridd/Treforest Industrial Estate) which presents strategic opportunities and A465 is focused on tourism and the advantages that the dualling will bring. He added that there would be limited growth for areas like the Rhondda, and additionally the Welsh Government are encouraging a move away from road-based travel.

Cllr Hughes commented that those developments do not benefit or support the Rhondda and it will create greater stress on those areas in the south of the county borough, particularly in terms of the road network.

Cllr Middle added that the Rhondda would be a good place to live but there are limited options for development and the big industries are gone for good. He pointed out the need to capitalise on public transport to allow residents of the Rhondda to commute to Pontypridd, Cardiff and the wider area.

The Planning Policy Team Leader explained that the reason for these options is to build on the work already in place, although finding a way to encourage growth in the Rhondda is key.

Cllr Grehan commented on the need to ensure that sites are available should employers wish to relocate to the Rhondda.

The Planning Policy Team Leader advised on the need to match employment with housing as the sustainability and placemaking elements of national policy encourage these facilities to be situated with the population. She added that there are large brownfield sites all over the Borough and uses other than housing certainly need to be taken into consideration.

Members agreed that Green Wedges and green areas of land are important to residents, and yet housing developments are eradicating them when they should be protected. Vacant brownfield sites in the Rhondda are now hot spots for fly tipping and antisocial behaviour and should not be vacant for years. Members commented on the need for decent quality housing linking with improved public transport so that residents can travel to the south of the Borough to work.

Cllr Smith also commented on the potential hazards of having a single road out of Maerdy to the rest of the Rhondda Fach if there is a fire or landslide, and concern around managing heavy plant machinery in areas like Maerdy if these areas are developed.

The Planning Policy Team Leader agreed that RCT needs to encourage development around existing transport hubs to try and reduce the need for the private car to remove additional pressure on the road networks.

Option 3 – Town Centre First

The Development Services Manager provided an overview of this option, which is based on national guidance and policy, as set out by the Welsh Government and aims to develop town centres to promote sustainable travel and good access to public transport with placemaking also a major factor in this strategy option.

He added that residents located close to facilities, will reduce the number of car journeys and encourage residents to use public transport. The issues with this option include limited growth. The ONS principal projections state that c. 560 dwellings per year is required, which equates to around 5,000 dwellings.

The Development Services Manager asked Members to consider the following matters:

- How 'high' (i.e., how many storeys) should be developed within the town centres?
- As large parts of the south are not connected by rail, this is an issue in terms of cross valley links, would certain sites be overlooked because they are not close to the town centre?
- How do we deal with old buildings? Should they be rebuilt?

Cllr Middle agreed with the principle of bringing vacant buildings back into beneficial use and large buildings, such as the Tonypandy town hall would be ideal for social housing.

Cllr Hughes reflected that town centres need to become 'hubs' which include a range of retail, work, leisure and employment opportunities that would increase the footfall. He added that these centres are traditionally well served by public transport and this approach has merits. He raised a concern that large derelict buildings (like the aforementioned town hall, which has planning permission for housing) can become magnets for antisocial behaviour and the strategy would look to overcome this problem of dereliction.

Cllr Lewis commented that there is a need for improved planning applications as some are inadequate in terms of living standards and are too small in size and not suitable as dwellings. She added that it is important to that ensure quality accommodation is available

The Development Services Manager and the Head of Planning agreed that this is a problem citing a lack of high-level national standards for private housing with limited floorspace but are marginal in terms of acceptability. The Head of Planning commented that the National policy has not been forthcoming. He added that careful thought would need to be given to this matter and work would need to be undertaken within the parameters available.

In response to a query regarding measuring the housing need, the Development Services Manager explained that it is measured through a complicated analytical data process. The ONS have statistics on inward and outward migration, as well as births and deaths. These statistics are used to develop forecasts for various scenarios. He stressed that there is a requirement to demonstrate that the LDP is deliverable.

The Development Services Manager agreed to provide data and share the Edge housing

paper with Members following the meeting.

With regards to supporting young people onto the housing market the Development Services Manager explained that as part of the LHMA, some of the need is market housing and the remainder is affordable housing however, there are a number of tenures that comprise these. Detailed policies are in place to allow a range of tenures to come forward on a site.

Cllr Grehan raised a concern around the need for a clear definition of affordable housing and what this entails as well as the need for definite definitions of social housing, rather than placing various tenures under the umbrella term “affordable” He requested that this is clear in the LDP.

Option 4 – Southern Growth Strategy

The Planning Policy Team Leader provided an overview of this strategy option which focuses growth in the Southern Strategy Area only, with a particular focus on the M4 corridor. She added that there are issues with this strategy such as over-development and the loss of some of greenspace; high value agricultural land could be lost (however Welsh Government guidance is available for this issue); public transport is poorer in this area, which could potentially make it more of a car-based strategy; and some of the big strategic sites in Cardiff and Bridgend are on the borders, which may limit capacity.

Option 5 – Metro and Public Transport Nodes

The Development Services Manager outlined this option as one which focuses on the location of the best public transport hubs and maximises development on land closest to these train stations to reduce the need to undertake car journeys. This strategy aims to take advantage of the Metro and it would also be beneficial in terms of climate change, given that the population would be encouraged to travel in a more sustainable manner.

The Development Services Manager also outlined the disadvantages of this strategy option and posed the following questions:

- If this scheme is adopted, could we reduce the need for the private car?
- The areas covered by the existing railway lines with good connectivity are the Rhondda Fawr, Cynon Valley, Pontypridd and Taffs Well. Are other areas of RCT as well served by public transport?

Members discussed specific sites such as the old Llwynypia site, for development. The Development Services Manager advised that the LDP process requires proof of deliverability on sites, or the plan will be considered ‘unsound.’ Previously, allocations were purely aspirational. He confirmed that land can be allocated as ‘regeneration sites’ which means that they are included in the plan (inside the settlement boundary), although they are not included in the overall housing numbers.

Members discussed public transport as being key and how the Rhondda and Cynon could be attractive places to live, with good commutable distances to Cardiff and cheaper housing. Members considered that the housing stock is limited. They felt that this strategy has potential but queried whether aspects from each option could be included in the plan. The Planning Policy Team Leader confirmed the next steps will include reducing the options.

Option 6 – Key Strategic Sites in the South

This would involve a key or large strategic site so much of the growth would be on one or two particular sites. The existing southern strategic sites have started to come forward but if that one site did not come forward, the required numbers for the plan would not be achieved. The area also has some ecological issues to overcome.

Members requested clarity on the maps in terms of the large candidate sites and the existing settlement boundaries and they raised concerns in respect of the limited investment in the North of the county borough. Members highlighted the potential impact of the Cardiff and Bridgend Strategic Sites on the existing road infrastructure.

Option 7 – Urban Containment

The Planning Policy Team Leader provided an overview of this strategy option which considers land/buildings inside the existing settlement boundaries and the intention to use those vacant parcels of land and empty properties, bringing these back into beneficial use. The strategy would involve an analysis of the existing brownfield sites within the County Borough and consideration of windfall sites. She advised that this is a high-risk strategy as the windfall sites cannot be included for housing numbers and existing planning permissions may not materialise. Brownfield sites need funding which may not be available. The Planning Policy Team Leader advised that there are not enough sites/land in some areas to deliver the required numbers and large developers would also be unlikely to build with this type of strategy.

Option 8 – Local Needs Strategy

The Planning Policy Team Leader provided an overview of this strategy option with the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) considering what is required from an affordable housing perspective but also looking at market housing. She advised that it splits the County Borough into 13 areas and indicates what is required in each area. Development is dispersed and there will be viability issues in most areas in the north and as with other strategies, there is a lack of land. She added that once again, large developers are unlikely to build in these areas. The lack of large sites will not deliver new schools and/or other facilities if housing is delivered in the way that this strategy option proposes. The Planning Policy Team Leader confirmed that the LHMA report would be circulated to the Members' Steering Group following the meeting.

In response to a query, the Planning Policy Team Leader explained that the Affordable housing need covers Low-Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) and Social Rent, as stated in the LHMA.

Members agreed that there are useful elements within of all of the strategy options.

Cllr Rees commented that it would be useful to encourage those sites with planning permission to come forward and to stop land banking. She added that mortgage rates are preventing many young people from accessing the property market and stressed the importance of future proofing to ensure that young people are not being priced out of the housing market. Further to the issue of land banking, Cllr Grehan suggested charging to prevent it from happening.

The Planning Policy Team Leader advised that this information regarding housing need forms part of the LHMA. Also, they are undertaking an update of all permitted housing sites in the County Borough, which will continually be updated through the LDP preparation process to determine how these will contribute to the housing need. However,

it is difficult to stop developers 'land-banking'. The Team Leader added that they needn't re-allocate permissions, but should keep them within settlement boundaries to show a level of clarity to the public.

The Head of Planning also commented that Welsh Government have considered land banking, but without any national policy preventing it from happening, it would be exceptionally difficult to do that through a Local Development Plan. He added that the local authority does have more control when renewing applications permissions every three or five years, when they can be refused if there is no realistic prospect of them being delivered but land banking is a national issue.

In conclusion, the Development Services Manager thanked everyone for their engagement and comments, which would form part of the evidence gathered to date. He advised that the objective is to take forward a suitable spatial strategy for the County Borough, guided by the town centre first principle and potentially the opportunities presented by the metro. He pointed out that nonetheless, even if the lower end of the potential housing numbers were sought, it would be necessary to also allocate housing in wider parts of RCT and potentially greenfield land in the south of the county borough. He confirmed that other high-level policies prepared for the Preferred Strategy will include ecology, climate change and renewable energy.

The Development Services Manager agreed to circulate the documents previously mentioned and consideration to be made as to when best to share the Candidate Sites (these are subject to ongoing assessments).

The Head of Planning commented that many of the constraints relate back to flooding and the revision of the technical advice note. He confirmed that notification of a further consultation to the flooding TAN has been circulated recently and he was due to attend a Welsh Government event to discuss the details.

Next Steps

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for attending the meeting and acknowledged the requests for a future meeting to be held via a hybrid arrangement, whereby Members have the option of attending in the Council Chamber or virtually.

The Service Director Democratic Services advised that a number of committees had been categorised as hybrid with working groups as virtual only, however, subject to Members wishes, it would be possible to hold the next meeting of the RLDP on a hybrid basis with details of the next date to be circulated in due course.

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This meeting closed at 6.00 pm

**Cllr L Tomkinson
Chair.**