



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**15<sup>th</sup> MAY 2023**

### **PONTYPRIDD PLACEMAKING PLAN – SOUTHERN GATEWAY PROJECT PROGRESS UPDATE**

#### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR FOR PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER (CLLR MARK NORRIS)**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to:

- 1.1 Provide an update on the development of projects within the Southern Gateway area of the Pontypridd Placemaking Plan.
- 1.2 Outline the proposed next steps and seek Cabinet approval to move to the next development stages on the projects within the Southern Gateway area (as set out in Section 6)
- 1.3 Seek Cabinet approval to carry out publicity with the community and key stakeholders on the agreed next steps.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the progress made on project development and delivery at the former M&S and Dorothy Perkins/Burtens buildings, the former Bingo Hall site.
- 2.2 Endorse the design and redevelopment options for the Southern Gateway area, including the Bingo Hall Site and M&S and Dorothy Perkins/Burtens buildings.
- 2.3 Authorise Officers to progress implementation of the development options set out in this report, including the proposal to carry out publicity with the community and key stakeholders on the agreed next steps.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To inform Cabinet of the status of ongoing projects in the Pontypridd Southern Gateway area and the progress made to date.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The 'Pontypridd Town Centre Placemaking Plan' was approved by Cabinet in June 2022.
- 4.2 The Placemaking Plan builds upon the foundations of what has already been delivered and provides a framework for delivering new development and investment to further improve the prosperity of Pontypridd, enhance the townscape and make it even more resilient to future change and challenges.
- 4.3 The Cabinet approval was given following a 4-week public consultation exercise on the draft Placemaking Plan, with a particular focus on the early ideas for the redevelopment of the former M&S and Dorothy Perkins/Burtons buildings and former Bingo Hall site. These sites sit within what the Placemaking Plan defines as the 'Southern Gateway' area of Pontypridd Town Centre. The majority of public response to the consultation was positive.

### **5. SOUTHERN GATEWAY**

- 5.1 The Placemaking Plan sets out the aims for the Southern Gateway and the concept masterplan, which formed the basis of the public consultation, included key prominent sites such as the former Bingo Hall site and Marks and Spencer/Dorothy Perkins stores and proposes enhanced links between the station and the high street and an improved public realm that opens the entrance to the town and establishes a riverside plaza.
- 5.2 Redevelopment of this 'Southern Gateway' area is proposed to be the next phase of the implementation of the Placemaking Plan.
- 5.3 Members may recall that in February 2022 Cabinet agreed that officers could move to the formal procurement stage to secure a development partner to deliver a hotel-led development on the site of the former Bingo Hall.
- 5.4 Officers reached the final stages of preparing the necessary documentation to undertake the procurement exercise in the Autumn of last year, but unfortunately, this coincided with the financial crisis and market instability caused by the UK Government's mini-budget in late September 2022. At that time, it was not considered prudent to seek a contract with a development partner for a major construction project, given the uncertainty in the market. Since then, as Members will be aware, the economy has experienced a downturn, high inflation has prevailed, affecting construction supply costs, and a general cost-of-living crisis has ensued. As a result, it has become evident that the

viability gap in delivering a hotel at the site has increased significantly and that the amount of public sector grant that would be needed to deliver the development has rendered the project unviable and difficult to justify against other competing priorities.

- 55 As a result, alternative design proposals are currently being considered for the site, and these are set out in section 6 below.
- 56 At the February 2022 meeting, it was also agreed by Cabinet that a funding application should be submitted to Welsh Government to demolish the vacant and dilapidated M&S and Dorothy Perkins/Burtens buildings and to commence the demolition process if and when funding and any necessary statutory consents are in place. An update on this project and the proposed development solution is outlined in section 6 below.

## **6. PROJECT PROGRESS UPDATE**

- 6.1 As noted previously, implementation of the Southern Gateway projects is proposed to form the next phase of the implementation of the overall Pontypridd Placemaking Plan. Redevelopment of the key sites and premises detailed below will kickstart the transformation of this part of the town.

### **6.2 Former Marks & Spencer and Dorothy Perkins / Burtens Buildings**

- 6.3 Further to Cabinet's approval, as outlined in paragraph 5.7, a funding application was submitted to Welsh Government to support the demolition of the M&S and Dorothy Perkins/Burtens buildings. The buildings have been vacant for some time, are unsightly, and their demolition would help to clear the site for future development.
- 6.4 Welsh Government formally approved the funding application in March 2023, providing a grant of £1,283,745 to support the demolition of the buildings, which represents 70% of the total project cost of £1,833,923 and 30% (£550,178) is funded from the Council's own existing resources. This funding has enabled the project to move forward and ultimately will bring much-needed improvements to the urban environment in Pontypridd.
- 6.5 A demolition contractor has been appointed, and preparatory work commenced on site on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The contractor has started with disconnecting services and the soft strip out of internal fixtures and fittings. In addition, the contractor is working on the segregation of waste streams, and all waste is being removed to off-site recycling centres.
- 6.6 The demolition works are scheduled to commence in June of this year following the approval of demolition consent by Welsh Government and are expected to be completed by the Winter 2023. The contractor will use specialist equipment and techniques to carry out the demolition work safely and efficiently, ensuring that any potential risks to nearby properties and people are managed. The design also incorporates boundary treatments to ensure the structural integrity of adjacent structures.

- 6.7 A comprehensive communication plan has been developed and is currently being implemented for the project. As part of this initiative, the contractor has produced a newsletter which has been distributed to all businesses in the town centre. A press release has been published as part of the communication strategy.
- 6.8 The demolition of the buildings will allow for a new area of public realm to be created, creating better connections between the high street and the riverside and also opening up views to the park and creating a much stronger route to the entrance to the park when compared to the existing narrow, side lane. This concept was tested in the 2022 formal consultation exercise with support coming from an overwhelming majority of respondents.
- 6.9 Since then, a multi-disciplinary team has been assembled to create a design proposal for the site that has had to respond to the additional technical evidence and knowledge that has been gathered and recognising that the vast majority of the site effectively sits on stilts over the River Rhondda. Nevertheless, the current option is both functional and aesthetically pleasing and will succeed in revitalising the area and making it more attractive for residents and visitors. (The current concept plan for the proposal is shown in Appendix 1).
- 6.10 Furthermore, the public realm will be equipped with ducting and infrastructure that will facilitate the hosting of pop-up markets, street food outlets and the installation of low-maintenance, sturdy street furniture and green landscaping features. The design will also be refined to take into account the flood modelling that the design team is currently undertaking to ensure it remains safe for users and where possible, adds protection to the surrounding area from flood events in the future.

### **6.11 Former Bingo Hall / Angharads Nightclub**

- 6.12 As explained in Section 5 above, it has not been possible to proceed with the procurement of a hotel development at this site, and instead, the project team has been developing alternative options for the site. These include the development of a bus interchange and the creation of a high quality public realm area that opens up the high street and town to visitors and commuters. (The current concept plans are attached at Appendix 2.)
- 6.13 Whilst the potential for a hotel at the Bingo Hall site did receive support in the 2022 formal consultation exercise, a number of respondents suggested that the site be developed for public realm and open space as it would open up the top end of the town and potentially improve air quality. The following excerpts have been taken from the consultation report.

*“The prominence of the former bingo hall means revamping this site will have huge benefits for the overall visual impact upon entering the town from the south.”*

*“The bingo Hall site should be left open, so the town is "opened up" to*

*public, natural light & pollution free high street please!”*

- 6.14 Transport for Wales (TfW) is delivering the electrification of the Core Valley Lines which will provide high-frequency rail services with 24 trains/hour arriving at Pontypridd Rail Station throughout the day. This marks a step-change in the accessibility and connectivity of Pontypridd. In addition, proposals are evolving regarding bus franchising and pilots are being undertaken for integrated ticketing between bus and rail. Opportunities for interchange between bus and rail are limited.
- 6.15 The Bingo Hall site provides a unique opportunity to introduce a two-bay bus layby opposite the railway station which will improve bus/rail integration and provide a new focal point for bringing visitors and commuters into Pontypridd. Initial discussions with TfW indicates a willingness to work together to improve transport interchange at the station forecourt to enable a more holistic approach to be taken. This also gives rise to the potential to explore enhancements to linkages between the station and the high street and linkages to wider active travel networks.
- 6.16 In light of this unique opportunity to enhance sustainable transport infrastructure and interchange in Pontypridd, the Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority (CCRTA) made regional funding available during the final weeks of the 2022/23 financial year to develop initial proposals and has also submitted a regional bid to Welsh Government for Local Transport Fund grant to continue design and commence delivery in the current financial year. The outcome of the bid is expected in May 2023.
- 6.17 The CCRTA bid is for £0.93M. The cost of providing the bus bays to the South Side of Sardis Road and the public realm works, which will potentially require significant structural changes to the former Bingo Hall site, is initially estimated to be in the order of £1.5-2M, subject to ground investigations and structural surveys. Additional grant funding will therefore be required to complement CCRTA transport
- 6.18 As such and recognising that these proposals fall squarely within the positive responses to the 2022 formal consultation, it is not considered that any further formal consultation is necessary. However, it is important the Council continues to engage with the community on its Placemaking Plans for Pontypridd, and it is recommended that subject to Cabinet’s approval, an extensive publicity exercise is undertaken on the proposals prior to the redevelopment proposals being delivered. (It should be noted that Cabinet have already agreed to the demolition of the Marks & Spencer and Burtons buildings, and this will proceed as outlined in section 6.)
- 6.19 Despite not proceeding with the development of a hotel on the Bingo Hall site, the need for hotel space in the town is still recognised and the Council will work with partners and the private sector to enable alternative provision elsewhere within the town with a focus on using existing buildings within the town centre. Members may already be aware of proposals being prepared to convert the former HSBC bank which may include the refurbishment of the former Butcher’s Arms Hotel space above. This project will in part be funded through a loan under Welsh Government’s Transforming Towns programme.
- 6.20 Members are advised that in their current form it is considered the

proposals at both sites can be delivered under the Permitted Development Rights afforded to the Council under the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (as amended) and therefore no formal planning application need be submitted.

**7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening form was prepared prior to the consultation exercise being undertaken in 2022. The results of the consultation have been used to complete the full equality impact assessment and to determine any amendments to the Placemaking Plan.

**8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The results of the consultation have been used to complete the Welsh Language Impact Assessment and to determine any amendments that need to be made to the Placemaking Plan.

**9. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

9.1 The public consultation exercise was undertaken during the period 1<sup>st</sup> March to 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022 in respect of the draft Pontypridd Town Centre Placemaking Plan including a focus on this Southern Gateway area. Further engagement is proposed on detailed plans as they are developed.

**10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

10.1 As detailed in 6.4 above, the funding for the demolition of the M&S/Dorothy Perkins/Burtons site has been approved by Welsh Government, with match funding from the Council's own existing resources.

10.2 External funding opportunities will continue to be explored for the development of both the M&S/Dorothy Perkins/Burtons and Bingo Hall sites, and, where necessary, will be supported by funding already secured through the Shared Prosperity Fund and / or the Council's own resources (core capital funding and/or infrastructure reserve).

**11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

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

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

12.1 The Placemaking Plan has been developed in accord with the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-2024 'Making a Difference' which highlights that its town centres will be vibrant, thriving places where people wish to live, work and socialise and with Welsh Government's 'Town Centres First' approach, aimed at putting the health of town centres at the heart of the decisions taken by the public sector, businesses and communities.

12.2 All proposed developments will contribute to the goals of the Well Being of Future Generations Act. In particular, the economic and environmental well-being of Wales, supporting the delivery of a prosperous Wales, a more resilient Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

**13. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS**

13.1 Successful implementation of the Placemaking Plan and its associated projects are of strategic significance to Rhondda Cynon Taf and the wider South East Wales region.

**14. CONCLUSION**

14.1 The proposal put forward provide a high quality entrance to the town, enhancing the setting within the Conservation Area, and a clear and legible route from the top of the town, Sardis car park and train station through to the town centre itself. The proposals will also open up the town to the green, riverside area and provide a much more inviting access into Ynysangharad Park and the National Lido.