



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY PANEL

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,
ON THURSDAY, 17TH JANUARY 2013 AT 2.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor K. James - Chairman
Councillor C.P. Mann - Vice Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs A. Blackman, Mrs P. Cook, C. Elsbury, D. Havard, S. Kent, J.A. Pritchard.

Together with:

N. Liversuch (Manager Countryside and Landscape Services), M. Williams (Building Consultancy Manager), P. Cooke (Team Leader, Sustainable Development & Living Environment), E. Lucas (Head of Procurement), D. Coles (RDP Delivery Manager), K. Silcox (RDP Sustainable Energy Officer), S.M. Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors M. Adams, K. Dawson, Mrs D. Ellis and Mr A. O'Sullivan (Chief Executive).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the Sustainable Development Advisory Panel meeting held on 7th November 2012 (minute nos. 1-5; page nos. 1-4) were approved and signed as a correct record.

3. CWMCARN FOREST - HYDROELECTRIC SCHEME UPDATE

In March 2011 the Authority commissioned a study into the feasibility of generating hydroelectricity from the Nant Carn watercourse at Cwmcarn Forest. The study concluded that the site has potential and that the payback period could be 10 years or less. There are several issues that would need further work and clarification before the project could be fully endorsed and significant capital investment would be required to take the project forward. It was estimated that it would cost approximately £2k to £3k to proceed to the next stage.

Members were advised that some of the electricity generated could be used by the Authority buildings but as much of the electricity will be generated at night when demand is low, it is likely that more than half of the energy generated would be exported to the grid.

Members expressed their support for the scheme and endorsed the recommendation in the report as follows: -

RESOLVED that the positive progress made to date and the potential to generate hydro electricity at the Cwmcarn Forest site be noted. If and when funding becomes available, further work will be required to define the scheme and to quantify the project risks.

4. ACTIVITIES BEING DELIVERED BY LOCAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RDP) PROJECTS

The Panel received a report and Powerpoint presentation from Dan Coles, RDP Delivery Manager, on the RDP and the various projects that are underway. The Rural Development Plan (RDP) 2007-2013 is the mechanism by which the Welsh Government (WG) funds activities which support the countryside and rural communities. It is jointly funded by the European Union (EU) as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and WG.

The RDP for Wales aims to strengthen the farming and forestry industries in Wales; maintain and protect the environment and rural heritage and improve the economic competitiveness of rural communities and areas. It is divided into four axes: -

Axis 1 predominantly funds projects that are led by WG and are aimed directly at farming and associated industries. Axis 2 is run by WG and is the provision of the Glastir agri environment scheme for farmers. Axis 3 aims to improve the rural economy by providing support to farming families to diversify into non-agricultural activities, support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises and support for the encouragement of tourism activities. It also aims to improve the quality of life in rural communities by supporting basic services for the rural economy and population. Axis 4 supports sustainable rural development in Wales in the longer term through an approach called LEADER, which seeks to generate new ideas and ways of working through grassroots and stakeholder engagement and involvement.

The presentation concentrated on Axis 4 activity in the Caerphilly County Borough. Axis 4 follows the LEADER approach in that project delivery must be determined from the bottom up, with meaningful engagement with local people to make lasting improvements. The project works across the three themes of the Caerphilly RDP strategy, being rural industry and produce, tourism and recreation and villages and communities.

In order to engage with appropriate stakeholders, officers have established informal interest groups, termed networks that are open to anyone to discuss relevant issues and develop ideas. Meetings are held to encourage co-operation within the local economy and identify projects eg. timber and craft network members have undertaken more direct selling locally and are planning to create a new co-operative between local businesses. Officers are helping local farmers to create a buying group for fuel and other supplies and local food businesses are now buying directly from one another as a result of officer support. The RDP Team has worked with community groups and local food businesses to turn community venues into ad hoc restaurants serving quality local food in areas where this is not accessible. The pop-up restaurant initiative has been developed as a model for income generation for community groups. Elsewhere local people have been assisted in putting on an art exhibition at Babel Chapel, which was attended by nearly 400 people.

The project also funds the work of the timber yard, which collects timber that is felled locally, usually through management works, and recovers it to a site where it can be milled. Bi-products, such as woodchip and sawdust, are also collected and as much timber as possible is put to productive use by providing it to local community groups, charities and public sector organisations, including CCBC services. The timber yard includes a small workshop that Groundwork Caerphilly use to train clients and a lot of the timber is supplied to trainees to make products and learn skills. Other success stories include Alexandra Hunter, a mobile farrier and Claire Lukins, Plant 2 Plate prepared food.

The current funding for projects runs until the end of 2013. Most projects have applied for extensions and additional money until the end of 2014. The next RDP (2014-2020) is still being discussed at EU level and WG are formulating their ideas. The new programme will include funding for local projects but it is not clear how these will be delivered or whether Caerphilly will be eligible.

The Chair thanked Dan for his very informative presentation and discussion ensued on the issues raised. Members endorsed the recommendation in the report and noted the valuable contribution of the local RDP programme to sustainable development in Caerphilly.

5. SALARY SACRIFICE CAR SCHEME (GASS SCHEME) PROGRESS REPORT

The report provided an update on the outcomes and progress of the introduction of the Salary Sacrifice Car Scheme into the Authority following its launch on 1st July 2011. A total of 1347 employees have registered on the Tusker Direct website and to date 243 vehicles have been requested.

The scheme, which has proved to be very popular, is currently only available to all non-teaching staff. The current statutory agreement in place will only allow teachers to participate in national salary sacrifice schemes, which includes childcare vouchers and cycles. Therefore teachers are not eligible employees. Members of staff on temporary contracts can only participate if they have an employment contract with the Authority for a fixed period of time equal to or greater than the lease period of three years.

The development of the local supply chain is vitally important to the Authority and by using a Pan Government Framework Arrangement there is a risk of excluding local providers. Tusker Direct has taken on board these concerns and the need to encourage local supply and has undertaken marketing exercises to ensure as many local providers as possible are included part of the scheme.

It is envisaged that the estimated savings over the life of the contract (36 months) for all employees who are part of the Local Government Pension Scheme will be £241,011.36. All Employees will encounter a savings on National Insurance with a sum of £197,403.48 over the period of the life of the contract. As the Authority is making a saving on the employee's reduced gross salary, Caerphilly CBC is giving back the saving as a monthly GASS payment to each employee at £70.00 gross, which is cost neutral to the Authority.

The Panel noted the implementation of the scheme and its success to date.

The meeting closed at 3.50 pm.

Approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman of the Sustainable Development Advisory Panel subject to any amendments being recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 7th March 2013.

CHAIRMAN