



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY PANEL

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN,
ON THURSDAY, 7TH MARCH 2013 AT 4.45 PM**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

M. Adams, Mrs P. Cook, Mrs D. Ellis, S. Kent, J.A. Pritchard.

Also in attendance: Councillor T.J. Williams (Cabinet Member for Highways, Transportation and Engineering).

Together with:

N. Liversuch (Manager Countryside and Landscape Services), P. Cooke (Team Leader, Sustainable Development & Living Environment), P. Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer), K. Silcox (RDP Sustainable Energy Officer), D. Lloyd (Engineering Projects Group Manager), M. Powell (Fleet Manager), S.M. Kauczok (Committee Services Officer).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs A. Blackman, K. Dawson, C. Elsbury, D. Havard and Mr M. Williams (Building Consultancy Manager).

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 17th January 2013 (minute nos. 1-5; page nos. 1-3) were approved and signed as a correct record.

The Chairman advised that future meetings of SDAP would be held on a twelve weekly basis.

3. FEASIBILITY OF HYDROELECTRIC SCHEME AT GIBBS WEIR

The report considers the viability of a hydroelectric scheme at Gibbs Weir, Pontllanfraith. It compares the consultant's estimated costs with those validated by the Council's Engineering Services Division, which has determined that the project is not financially viable and will not deliver the proposed non-financial benefits.

As part of the Rural Development Plan Sustainable Energy Project a desktop study was undertaken in March 2012 to identify the opportunities for hydroelectric schemes within the county borough. The study identified a number of potential sites and recommended Gibbs Weir on the Sirhowy River, which has an existing weir arrangement, as having the best characteristics for electricity generation, using an Archimedean screw system. The benefits of the proposed scheme are set out under paragraph 4.2 of the report.

It was noted that the existing weir prevents the upstream migration of salmon and is a hotspot for salmon poaching. It has been established that the existing weir is the responsibility of the Authority in terms of maintenance. Whilst the weir visibly appears to be structurally sound it is approximately 40 years old and is situated in a very aggressive environment. The Environment Agency has confirmed that should the hydro-electric project, which would have incorporated a fish pass, not proceed, subject to the approval of the Authority, they have secured European funding to remove the whole of the existing structure in order to resolve the issue related to salmon migration and poaching. This would be at no cost to the Authority and would eliminate a long-term liability.

Officers recommended that the Authority does not proceed with the hydro-electric scheme at Gibbs Weir for the following reasons: The business case is not financially viable, due to its relative remoteness and poor accessibility, Gibbs Weir does not lend itself to use as an educational tool for local schools and will therefore not realise the desire of visibly demonstrating the Authority's commitment to sustainable development; there are concerns due to the remoteness of the site that vandalism and theft would be a major issue, as not all of the equipment can be fully enclosed for operational reasons. (The adjacent civic amenity site is prone to regular occurrences of theft despite the provision of security fencing and operational CCTV); the salmon migration and poaching problem posed by the weir will be resolved by its removal by the Environment Agency.

Following a full discussion on the matters raised within the report, Members endorsed the officers' recommendations as follows:-

1. That the Gibbs Weir hydroelectric project is not taken forward.
2. The Environment Agency be given approval to remove the existing weir structure.
3. The feasibility of providing a hydroelectric scheme near Cwmcarn visitors centre be explored further and be the subject of a future report.

4. FLEET MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The Panel received an update on progress made in relation to sustainability within the Authority's Transport Department. Members were advised that Fleet Management is doing all it can to demonstrate a more efficient, cost effective and environmentally friendly fleet and with the support of its users research, demonstrate and evaluate any new technologies that are available and suitable for Local Authority use.

In order to reduce vehicle downtime, reduce maintenance costs and ensure that front line services are maintained, the Authority endeavours to keep the majority of its front line vehicles less than 5 years old. In addition to demonstrating sustainability by a Vehicle Replacement Policy, the Authority continues to research and demonstrate electric and hybrid vehicles.

Legislative and policy changes have also led to improving standards and sustainability through driver awareness. The two main areas being Graduated Fixed Penalties for specific defects found around the vehicle and the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence CPC. The Driver CPC is a legislative requirement for all drivers who use vehicles in excess of 3.5 tonnes. The legislation requires them to undertake 35 hours of training by September 2014. This affects approximately 300 drivers within the Authority.

The Authority continues to submit fuel usage data into the Carbon Reduction Group, which is run by the Freight Transport Association. Following a peak in 2009 the Authority is beginning to notice a decrease in the fuel being consumed. This is as a result of an improved age profile of the fleet and the new technologies and improved engine efficiencies on new vehicles. The Authority is also currently trialling two Vehicle Tracking Systems. Both systems are able to identify driver behaviour and highlight areas where training could be beneficial to improve fuel efficiency.

In addition to the above a fuel efficiency trial has been taking place since July 2012 and in December 2011 the Authority accepted the opportunity of a Green Fleet Review initiated by the Energy Savings Trust. Many of the recommendations arising from the review have been implemented and others are ongoing.

Every effort is made to ensure fit for purpose, environmentally friendly vehicles are procured, and there remains a commitment to improving the age profile of the fleet, which enhances sustainability and service delivery. The Authority continues to actively research ways in which it can contribute to its sustainability and efficiency and every effort is made by both Fleet Management and the end users to ensure this continues.

Following a full discussion on the content of the report, the Chairman thanked the Officer for the informative report and it was agreed that a further progress report would be brought back to the Panel in due course.

The Sustainable Development Advisory Panel noted the contents of the report.

5. CAERPHILLY SOLAR SCHOOLS PHASE 2

The report provided an update on the Caerphilly Solar Schools Project. Following on from Phase 1 of the project, UWHA have confirmed that they have approximately £71,000 funding remaining to install solar photovoltaic systems on the remaining schools in the Heads of the Valley area, subject to suitability. The expected cost of the ten installations is approximately £78,000 leaving a shortfall of approximately £7,000. The cost of asbestos surveys and any other work identified in the structural survey is not included.

The main aim of the installations is educational, with the schools also benefiting from savings on their energy bills. The suitability of each school for the installation will be subject to structural surveys and asbestos surveys at each site. Account will also need to be taken of other issues, for example, Ysgol Y Lawnt is a listed building and Gilfach Fargoed Primary School is on the proposed schedule to have a new roof in 2014.

UWHA have contracted Gibson Specialist Technical Services to install the solar photovoltaic systems. As part of the work they will provide a presentation to the school children explaining how the solar photovoltaic system operates and provide educational tools for the teachers to use in class. They will also aim to install the panels in visible locations to support the educational benefits of the project and to ensure the school community are aware of the panels and can easily view them.

The Panel endorsed the recommendations in the report as follows: -

1. To note the achievements of the phase 1 project and the proposal for phase 2 of the project.
2. To note that £71,000 has been secured to undertake installations of solar photovoltaic systems on schools in the Heads of the Valley area, as part of phase 2 of the project.

The meeting closed at 5.45 p.m.

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 next meeting.

CHAIRMAN