

## BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT TO COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 JANUARY 2016

#### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

#### VIBRANT AND VIABLE PLACES

##### 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report provides Members with information on the delivery of Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places programme (VVP).

##### 2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1 The VVP programme in Bridgend supports the emerging Corporate Priority: Supporting a successful economy by creating successful town centres.

##### 3. Background

3.1 In March 2013, Welsh Government (WG) announced its new Regeneration Framework for Wales, 'Vibrant and Viable Places' outlining the vision, and defining regeneration as *'an integrated set of activities that seek to reverse economic, social, environmental and physical decline to achieve lasting improvement, in areas where market forces will not do this alone without some support from government'*.

3.2 Bridgend town centre was among the 11 approved bids and a £5.98 million grant was secured towards the £14.97million that was requested from the programme. The original bid contained a number of different schemes in the town centre, which together would have a transformational impact on its functioning and vitality. With the reduced level of grant funding, careful consideration was given as to how to scale back the proposals to fit the funding available, whilst at the same time achieving demonstrable benefits for the town centre. Members should note that the Council's direct match funding (£177k) into the Rhiw scheme represents 1.77% of the overall funding package, a leverage of £56.50 for every £1 spent by the Council. This sits within a wider suite of projects falling under the Bridgend VVP programme, with a total investment expected to exceed £30million (see Appendix 1).

3.3 The focus of the programme in Bridgend has been to support the evolution of Bridgend town centre, bringing more people to live in the centre, to create vibrancy, footfall, innovation and economic growth. We know from the implementation of the Convergence Programme, how public investment can create opportunities and conditions to bring in private investment. There was also a need in Bridgend to deal with historic barriers and eyesores which are no longer fit for purpose in a modern town centre. VVP provides an opportunity to modernise key infrastructure, diversify uses to the town centre, and capitalise on the opportunities presented by the town centre's strategic location, at the intersection of two city-regions.

### 3.4 The VVP programme comprises the following elements:

- **Rhiw Gateway** - development of a mixed use housing, commercial leisure, and new multi-storey car park scheme, together with improvements to Bridgend Market. This scheme complements the recently completed public realm works, creating a greatly improved street scene down to the river, and address the issues associated with an ageing and increasingly unattractive car-park;
- **Homes in Town (HIT)** - conversion of vacant premises above shops in the town centre into housing accommodation. This will bring footfall into the heart of the retail area, potentially encouraging a greater density of use throughout the town, and a more vibrant evening economy;
- Creation of **new parking provision**;
- **Disposal of Council owned land**, within walking distance of the town centre, for new residential development, to consolidate the town centre as a 'living hub', encouraging a combination of new private housing development with affordable housing;
- **Business Improvement District (B.I.D.)** designation – an independent steering group has been set up to work with consultants to explore the potential for a BID to be designated in Bridgend town centre. This would involve greater trader and business involvement in supporting town centre initiatives funded by an annual business levy. The ballot for the BID is currently planned for February 2016, and currently, 4 themes are being proposed, for use of funds: business support; access and parking; marketing and events; and a safer more welcoming town centre (see Appendix 2).
- **Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)** – a partnership scheme with Heritage Lottery, WG (through Cadw) and the Council. Grants are available to owners of key buildings in the town centre for restoration / conservation. The aim of the scheme is to preserve the built heritage of the town centre and encourage sustainable end uses with job creation; and
- **Redevelopment of 11 Nolton St** (former McDonalds) and provision of intermediate housing. This is a reserve scheme and is dependent on resources being available.

## 4. Current Situation / Proposal

### Progress on Implementation

- 4.1 Substantial progress has been made on implementation of the programme. Governance arrangements have been established and are working effectively. A Project Board, chaired by the Corporate Director Communities, is meeting regularly, with representation from Finance, Property, Regeneration, Welsh Government and Coastal Housing Group (see Appendix 3 for the governance structure of the programme). There is a detailed project delivery plan, which identifies critical activities and milestones. A risk register is being maintained. Change control processes have been established and are in use. A Development Agreement has been signed with Coastal Housing Group (CHG), to correctly apportion risks and

responsibilities between the Council and CHG. Within the Regeneration Team, there is an allocated programme manager, but owing to the scale of the overall programme, and WGs monitoring requirements, additional project management resources of 0.75 posts are required to cover all programme management requirements.

- 4.2 As indicated in paragraph 4.1 of the report, within the Regeneration Team there is an allocated programme manager, but owing to the scale of the overall programme, and WGs monitoring requirements, additional project management resources of 0.75 posts are required to cover all programme management requirements. Under the funding agreement with WG, a quarterly report must be submitted to support the financial claim process. This includes information on project progress and financial expenditure, supported by relevant documentation. Outcome and output data is submitted annually to WG, for collation into a national evaluation. The measures used are similar to those in the Council's annual town centre health check, for example pedestrian flows, business confidence, and vacancy rates.
- 4.3 The section below sets out in detail the progress that had been made on each element of the VVP programme. It is to be expected that in a programme of this scale, operational issues and risks will emerge and be dealt with on a continuous basis. These are detailed in the report.

### **Rhiw Gateway**

- 4.4 **Progress:** Substantial progress has been made to progress the Rhiw Gateway scheme. The design of the project at the Rhiw car park is complete, and planning consent was obtained in July 2015. Contractors have been appointed and are on site. Demolition is complete, and the material is being crushed on site to form the base for the new buildings. By re-using the bulk of demolished material and reducing the number of trips needed to transport material off site, the method of working is both cost effective and environmentally sustainable. The year-end grant claim for 2014/15 drew down the full allocation for that year.
- 4.5 A number of alternative car-parking options have been identified for Council staff, in order to maximise the number of spaces available for shoppers and town centre businesses. Survey work was undertaken to obtain up to date information on usage levels in existing car parks, in order to determine how much alternative parking needs to be commissioned on a temporary basis.
- 4.6 The Shopmobility service has been relocated to the Brackla multi-storey car park. Following consultation with service users, interest groups and traders it was concluded that it was not acceptable to suspend the service while the Rhiw was under construction, and that continuity should be maintained. For this reason, the requirement for Shopmobility facilities was taken out of the specification for the new Rhiw car park.
- 4.7 Demolition of the car park commenced on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015. A road closure was in operation between 09/10/15 and 30/10/15 for the removal of the overhead walkway. Demolition of this was completed on time and the road re-opened as planned. The phasing of the demolition works had to be altered, and the removal of the walkway brought forward, to leave the entrance to the Rhiw Shopping Centre and market clear in the run-up to the Christmas trading period.

4.8 **Risks, issues and mitigation measures:** The types of issues that have had to be dealt with on an ongoing basis are:

- Additional flood modelling work to satisfy Natural Resources Wales, following an objection to the planning application;
- new fire evacuation procedures for the indoor market and Rhiw Shopping Centre, as a result of the closure of the rear exits, while the overhead walkway was under demolition;
- negotiations with the owners of the Rhiw Shopping Centre over rights of access;
- the apportionment of risk between CHG and the Council, on the demolition of the walkway;
- negotiations with utility companies to expedite disconnection of services;
- negotiations with contractors over access and parking for works vehicles;
- below ground risks – the method of working for creating the construction base, piling and foundations has been designed to minimise ground risk. A project contingency is also in place;
- programme and spend pressures imposed by Welsh Government due to annual budget allocations; and
- site specific issues including noise and dust abatement, and impact on adjacent landowners.

4.9 At the time of drafting, the most significant risk for which mitigation measures are being developed, is the risk of not drawing down the full WG grant by year end. While CHG had employed a cost consultant throughout the design process, to provide an indication of likely cost of the scheme, when tenders were returned, all were substantially in excess of the funding available, and a value-engineering exercise then had to be carried out, to take out non-priority elements of the project and bring the scheme in line with available funding. The critical factor however, was to ensure that the agreed scheme was not altered to the extent that it would invalidate the planning consent or contravene the basis of the grant approval.

4.10 This was successfully concluded and the necessary amendments proposed and agreed through the Programme Board's change control process.

4.11 However, this process of revising and agreeing an amended scheme resulted in a two month delay to the start on site. As it is not possible to carry forward funding into next year, work is being undertaken with WG officials, to find the most suitable means to ensure there is no underspend at year end. This could be through one or more of the following mechanisms:

- i. WG to manage this at programme level (i.e. Pan Wales), and identify projects in other areas that may be able to bring forward expenditure from next year into this year;
- ii. The Council identify other eligible expenditure within the Bridgend VVP programme against which the grant may be drawn down in this financial year and the capital resources that were to be used are then retained for use next year; and
- iii. CHG to investigate instruments to enable advance payments to be made without incurring financial risk.

- 4.12 WG officials have offered to assist with resolving the issue as indicated in paragraph 4.11. i above. However, a decision on which option(s) to pursue will be made at the next Programme Board, and in the meantime, work is underway on options ii and iii, in order to safeguard the drawdown of grant.
- 4.13 While the project is under construction, there is an ongoing risk of time and cost overruns, as there is with any physical build project. However, by using a 'design and build' contract, a number of cost risks are passed to the developer, with the exception of certain 'below ground' risks, such as the presence of contamination or pollutants from previous uses on the site. There are also cost penalties for the contractor for not completing the scheme in accordance with the delivery schedule.

### **Homes in Town**

- 4.14 **Progress:** to date, 10 properties have been identified for conversion. Of these, 5 have proven to be unsuitable on planning grounds, but the remaining 5 are being pursued, and could deliver a potential of 24 converted town centre homes. However, no grants have been awarded.
- 4.15 **Risks, issues and mitigation measures:** By year end 2015/16, grants of £210,000 should have been awarded, with a further £140,000 in private sector contributions. The funding for the Homes in Town scheme forms part of the overall match funding package for VVP, and under-spend in this area therefore changes the balance of funding from different sources. For this reason, a series of measures have been taken to improve take up:
- i. The eligible area for the scheme has been extended, to include more potential town centre properties;
  - ii. Early pre-application discussion has taken place with the Planning service to identify any impediments that are already known – for example proximity to incompatible uses; and
  - iii. The up-front costs of undertaking noise surveys when there is no guarantee of securing planning approval is a barrier for property owners. By grouping together a set of properties, and procuring single contractor, it may be possible to reduce these costs.
- 4.16 Discussions have also taken place with WG over the potential to use the Council's capital allocation for HIT's against a town centre scheme under the proposed Building for the Future Programme (BFF), should take-up of HIT's remain problematic. In the meantime, alternative sources of match-funding are being successfully identified from, for example, private sector housebuilding on town centre sites.

### **Creation of new parking provision**

- 4.17 **Progress:** the 39 space Lorne Stewart car park became operational on 28<sup>th</sup> September to coincide with the closure date of the Rhiw car park. Its short-term purpose was to ensure that as many spaces as possible would be available for shoppers, in the remaining Council car parks, while the Rhiw was under construction, by redirecting Council staff to this car park. For this reason, it has been built to a basic standard only, with a rough surface, no bay markings and

minimal lighting. It is also being used on Saturdays throughout the Christmas shopping period, as a free car park for shoppers.

- 4.18 **Risks, issues and mitigation measures:** there are no outstanding risks with this project. However, owing to the fixed budget, compromises have had to be made on quality, principally the rough rather than tarmac surface.

#### **Disposal of Council Land**

- 4.19 **Progress:** the sites in question and proposed number of homes are: Waterton Place, Cowbridge Road (56 homes), Coychurch Road (48 affordable homes) and Ysgol Bryn Castell (YBC) (phase 1 - 67 homes, phase 2 – circa 100 homes). Cowbridge Road and YBC Phase 1 have been sold to Taylor Wimpey and Barratts respectively for 123 new homes. The former is well advanced on site. Coychurch Road is in the process of disposal. Phase 2 of Ysgol Bryn Castell is currently being demolished in readiness for marketing to commence.
- 4.20 **Risks, issues and mitigation measures:** while there are no current risks in relation to this element of the programme, it can be affected by market conditions and therefore not entirely within the control of the Council. However, it is subject, as are all aspects of the programme, to regular monitoring.

#### **Business Improvement District (BID)**

- 4.21 **Progress:** a steering group has been set up and consultants appointed to oversee the process leading to a ballot. The boundary for the BID has been agreed and the ballot is scheduled to take place in February 2016.
- 4.22 **Risks, issues and mitigation measures:** there are no direct risks to the Council. The designation of a BID will be subject of the ballot vote involving all business rate payers within the BID boundary, and is therefore outside the control of the Council.

#### **Townscape Heritage Initiative**

- 4.23 **Progress:** Bridgend THI phase 1 has been completed. Three projects have been completed under phase 2 to date (22 Dunraven Place, The War Memorial and Ty Carnegie), and the Victoria Inn is currently undergoing renovation and scheduled to finish in summer 2016.
- 4.24 **Risks, issues and mitigation measures:** the risk in delivery is always associated with owner take-up. To mitigate this, discussions are taking place with Heritage Lottery to establish a long list of pipeline projects, including targeted schemes at Dunraven Place and Wyndham Street.

#### **Redevelopment of 11 Nolton Street**

- 4.25 This is a pipeline scheme, for which there is no funding in the current programme. However, a speculative bid has been made to WG, in the event that additional resources are made available, either in the last quarter of the financial year or through any further WG allocations in 2016/2017.

## **Conclusion**

- 4.26 The VVP programme in Bridgend is well under way. Work is progressing on sites in accordance with the different construction schedule. While there are ongoing risks, these are being addressed on a continuous basis, and governance arrangements are in place to ensure proper oversight of the programme.

## **5. Effect Upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules**

- 5.1 None

## **6. Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 None required for an information report.

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1 In common with other VVP schemes in Wales, managing WG's annual budgets without the ability to move funding between years is proving challenging, on schemes of this scale and complexity. However, the project achieved full spend in 2014/15 and work is underway to ensure that this is also the case for 2015/16, despite the delayed start on site in respect of the Rhiw Gateway project, in full consultation with WG. A combination of measures, are being used to ensure that the Rhiw Gateway project is delivered on budget. The value engineering exercise undertaken earlier this year, was vital to ensuring that the scheme could be delivered within the resources available.

## **8.0 Recommendations**

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Community, Environment and Leisure OVSC note the report.

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**Background documents**

None