

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Rural Growth Held on the 14th March 2023 at 12pm in Conference Room 5 Ty Hywel.

The meeting was Chaired by Sam Kurtz MS who welcome all attendees in person and those attending online.

The chair highlighted the background to the CPG and the aim to provide Welsh Government at the end of the process with a report that can be used to drive change in the rural economy.

Present in person: Sam Kurtz MS, Llyr Gryffydd MS, Sam Rowlands MS, Peter Fox MS, Andrew Shirley CLA, Prof Calvin Jones – Cardiff Business School, Ben Francis – Hygrove Homes,

On Zoom: Cllr Liz Burnett, Cllr James Gibson Scott, Jennifer Ramsey (MSS for Paul Davies MS), Ryland Doyle (MSS for Mike Hedges MS), David Bowden BASC, Jonathan Evershed.

Andrew Shirley, CLA

Rural communities need to thrive – they are not just for tourist and visitors. Local Development plans are not in place and most communities don't have a 5-year housing supply. There is a serious need for housing – **market and affordable housing need to be combined as otherwise the market can't deliver in terms of funding.** Essential for a dynamic community. Nutrient neutrality is holding planning back. PDRs for affordable housing would speed up the system. This process could take 10 years for community housing to be delivered which is too long and would be too late. A large problem with housing developments being pushed back is that being held up by local communities – while this is understandable, there is a need for consideration of the bigger picture.

Ben Francis, from Welsh based Hygrove Homes and representing the Federation of Master Builders.

Ben was present in both a professional and private capacity. Ben is a private developer and recognises the importance of housing. The biggest barrier to development is the planning system. – before consider roll-out of a

Resources are being added to the planning depts which they can not deal with, increasing fees and service received is unsatisfactory, the speed of planning applications and the speed of the response to external consultees and internal is slow. There needs to be accountability when mistakes go wrong. Increasing cost of planning regulations against the income from sales of properties.

Role of Welsh Water, Rent Smart Wales, shortage of trades and shortage of professional consultants are all impacting the process of planning.

Ben read out a published document from the Brecon Beacons National Park planning authority which states that it is closed at present due to the high volume of applications and experiencing delays due to staffing shortages. The demand for individual officers remains high, however the officers are only available at dedicated times, meaning its very hard to get in contact with anyone.

Enforcement cases is high

Pre ap advice – still available but will take longer that normal

Authority unable to take payments on card, cash or over phone

Planning surgery not open at present

Basically very hard to get anything done

Professor Calvin Jones - Cardiff Business School

Planning system not here to deliver economic growth or productivity– here to regulate and maintain environmental and other protection.

Given level of resource added to planning – the system can't deliver and support growth.

Don't have an effective spatial plan

Can't add more phosphate to the system as this is highly damaging – recognise the pollution impacts of this.

Economy is hugely unequal – these are the unintended consequences.

Housing policy is increasingly unable to deliver more affordable homes- there is no easy answer to this and it will get more complicated and difficult. If **TAN15** had been implemented to the original timetable, it would have been even more restrictive. This problem will only get worse in the future.

No downplay problems with current planning system but it does a disservice – housing, environmental protection.

How much legislative time is available to transform this? Minister can protect certain areas but can't seem to deliver overall

Cllr Lis Burnett, Vale of Glamorgan

Vale of Glamorgan has towns and semi-rural environments. What is needed more than anything is a place-based planning system. Specific needs of the communities in these areas. Often rural communities are resistant to development which does not help. Do we have the right types of houses in the right places?

Can all communities have access to work? IF lower paid jobs in social care – how can they afford to live there? We need homes that people can afford to live in if they work in shops.

Cllr James Gibson Scott

Crucial issue – lead council in one of the most sparsely populated regions of the UK. Also one of the highest age population. Data is frightening on demographics- if this continues to accelerate in future, the economy and social structure will collapse. Young people are leaving the communities, and this is very worrying.

Housing is the absolute key to addressing this.

Conditions in rural Wales are similar to when historically a specific agency was set up. Half of Powys in a moratorium on planning due to the phosphates issue. Wye and Usk SACs. This really impacts on the young and those who need housing. Most frustrating is that some parts of the Wye are low in terms of phosphates, while recognising others are high – but a blanket approach is not helpful for development.

When Cllr became leader – said planning and economic development are inextricably linked, which had not been heard before. Mid Wales growth deal will require integrated approach to planning. On top of this Welsh Government requires the Council to revise the local plan.

Want the Council to provide small developments but bigger developers want to build larger developments e.g 40 houses. So paradox here. Welsh Government want to encourage more developments in urban areas but there is a serious need for more developments in the rural areas. James also wants SME's to be able to grow e.g. garages, shops etc.

**Every policy over the last few years is away from rural but more towards urban
Have to turn this around – repopulate the countryside is key**

Llyr Gruffyth MS – There is a recalibration of planning and CGCs are emerging –which will feed down into local planning policy . Takes time to get regional dev plans in place LONG SLOW CYCLE TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN – in the meantime collateral damage to communities. What can be done now?

Planning consolidation bill is in the pipeline. Government can only do so much.

Need more housing and to respond to the climate crisis at same time. Pinch point that could last 5 – 10 years.

Ben Francis – national house builders can chose to work in England not Wales – as planning policy is so challenging over this side of the border. This will put Wales at such a disadvantage and the gap between them will wider.

His own scheme has been on hold for 3 years due to the phosphates topic – this is frustrating. Held two summits now and **nothing has happened since last July – so where do we go next? Uncertainty causes the difficulty. Need somebody to grasp the nettle**

Peter Fox MS – if we put phosphates to the side, there is a very clear mismatch to Government aspirations and local needs. Regional thinking is needed. Local authorities have need now and it needs addressing. 3,000 ppl waiting for a house in Monmouthshire. Government is against new settlements. If we don't act soon on SME's in rural areas, we will never be able to rebuild. People will follow and leave these communities empty. We need a joined-up approach and a policy position that's clear that authorities can feed in to.

CJ

In this mess as have over consumed over centuries and created climate pollution. Houses appropriate for 2050 – Climate targets – need to build homes that do not rely on heat. Shouldn't build home that cause phosphate problems. The dog – is housing requirements in UK, tail is WG. EXPAND. In discussion with wood frame and passive housing for 5 years but nothing is happening in relation to this. Highlighted example of homes that are now affected by flooding – shouldn't build homes that are not resilient to climate and future flooding. This kind of environmental building is not mainstream but has to be. Same with SUDs what will not cope with future climate impacts

Ben Francis - Does planning system act as a barrier – absolutely . there is no effective service standards and this is frustrating. Need better service to developers

Speed of response to private developers is dreadful.

Ben – example recently of a 20 week response time to appeal and then another 20-25 to be able to respond to this.

Sam K– see retrospective planning increasing – developers will chance the opportunity to build and then get planning later

Sam Rowlands MS – 'Don't let perfection get in the way of good'

12,000 households in bed and breakfast with no home – need action now and this is not responsible. Often includes children.

Missing the picture here as striving for perfection in the planning system but this will take years to deliver

Big game changer here – need much better broadband connections – now that people work more from home this is an opportunity for more people to make lifestyle changes and move their families into rural areas which will support the local community

Short term injection of cash into local authorities to fast track planning applications would really help to clear backlog and allow more developments to take place. And no more regulation and bureaucracy please!

Lis B, Cllr Vale of Glamorgan – inherited a draft LDP and did a review of this to look at infrastructure and affordable housing. In some areas are using modular developments to support local housing

Permitted development for modular developments for a year – and then this allows planning permission to be applied for – need more of this

Vale are becoming local developers – use local people and companies to drive growth. NB what are the skills requirements around this?

Need more flexibility.

James Gibson Scott, Cllr Powys

People want to live here but can't find somewhere to live, this is going to have a serious impact and it will be regretted in years to come.

Conflict between resilience and need for development

Climate top risk on the register of the corporate plan –

All new developments are passive house or highly carbon neutral – so this can be done

Power grid system is very fragile. Don't have a grid have a series of local development networks. This is something that needs to be addressed. WG is aware of this but how will it be delivered? WG talks a great deal but doesn't deliver on much. NB 2035 targets

Andrew Shirley, CLA – injection of cash into local authorities would be good, but also need injection of skills and expertise.

Future Wellbeing of Gen – important but this shouldn't stagnate growth

Trickle down affect should not be allowed as people would be waiting 10-20 years otherwise.

Need a quick process to make national policy happen at local level. The point is we need more housing !

Ben Francis – WG not addressing issues of affordable housing – and LA prevent local housing needs

Blockers – SUDs, TAN 15 (more flex but how long will this take to implement?) Phosphates – how long will this be addressed- 30 houses in Brecon but no sight in end to address this

Sam Kurtz – technology will address this and water purification.

Welsh water – not for profit organisation but not delivering, aswell as very highly paid directors!

Peter Fox, MS – WW won't be able to upgrade all their sewage treatment plants for many years – it will cost £mils. Private developments can't put their own systems in unless there are concessions. Want 100% mitigation and this is impossible – can there be 99% or less which will allow some developments.

CJ – without some kind of cross Wales and urban vision and plan will always be trying to build 20 + jigsaws

Decisions being made incrementally and need joined up approach

Next meeting 23 May – Tourism