
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 04-12-12

PRESENT (Committee Members) - Councillor Eric M. Jones (Chairman);
Councillor Angela Russell (Vice-chair).

Councillors:- Craig ab Iago, Stephen Churchman, Gwynfor Edwards, Annwen Hughes, Louise Hughes, Dilwyn Morgan, Linda Morgan, Tudor Owen, Caerwyn Roberts, Mike Stevens, Mandy Williams-Davies, Gethin Glyn Williams, Robert J. Wright and Eurig Wyn.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Sion Wyn Jones (in relation to item 5 on the agenda – Bypass), Councillor W. Gareth Roberts, Cabinet Member – Environment, (in relation to items 5, 6 and 7 on the agenda, namely: Bypass, Waste Strategy and Transport).
Councillor John Wyn Williams (Cabinet Member – Planning, in relation to item 8 on the agenda – Wind Energy).

OFFICERS: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service, for item 5 on the agenda – Bypass), Dilys Phillips (Head of Democracy and Legal Department, for item 5 on the agenda – Bypass), Aled Davies (Head of Regulatory Department), Dafydd Wyn Williams (Chief Engineer – Transportation and Street Care), Gerwyn Jones (Integrated Transport Unit Manager), Gareth James (Member Support and Scrutiny Manager) and Ioan Hughes (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

GOOD WISHES

It was noted that Councillor Nigel Pickavance could not be present as his daughter had suffered a period of illhealth and that she was continuing to receive treatment in Alder Hey Hospital. Best wishes were extended to the family.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Nigel Pickavance and Selwyn Griffiths.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The Member Support and Scrutiny Manager declared a personal interest in item 5 on the agenda - Bypass, because he lived in Bethel.

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 4 September 2012, as a true record, subject to the following addition:

Page 1: To note that Councillor Craig ab Iago was present.

3. THE DECISION OF THE REGULATORY DEPARTMENT'S TRANSPORT SERVICE TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT'S ASSESSMENT OF THE ROUTE OF THE CAERNARFON AND BONTNEWYDD BYPASS.

(i) The report of the Cabinet Member – Environment was submitted and the Chair outlined the background to the matter.

(ii) The Head of Democracy and Legal Department explained:

a) that this was an Assembly Government plan under consideration, and that officers had responded to the Plan purely on a technical basis thus far;

b) that there was therefore an opportunity for the Committee to scrutinise that technical response and scrutinise the Assembly Government's process;

c) that any other observations relating to land use and visual amenities etc. would be matters considered in a public inquiry;

ch) that the Scrutiny Committee was authorised to make recommendations to the Council's Cabinet with regard to any matter it was dissatisfied with, but it would need to provide clear reasons for the recommendations.

(iii) Councillor Sion Jones, representing Bethel Ward, gave a presentation, objecting to the opinion of the Transportation Service of the Council's Regulatory Department, which had expressed support to the outcome of the Government's assessment which, on technical grounds, favoured the **purple** route.

The member underlined his support to the **yellow** route for the bypass, namely the Bontnewydd and Caernarfon bypass up to Plas Menai.

He made the following main points:

- the purple route would run through the Garreg Goch farm and would split it between two homes;
- that some of the members of the Communities Scrutiny Committee as well as Assembly members from North Wales, including the local member, Alun Ffred Jones, had visited the site and were shocked by the impact of the purple route;
- that the Council's Deputy Leader, namely the member representing the Felinheli Ward, Councillor Sian Gwenllian, also supported the campaign in favour of the yellow route;
- that the communities of Bethel and Felinheli were in support of having a bypass, but they favoured the yellow route, as it would safeguard good agricultural land and businesses;
- that owners were willing to sell land in order to adopt the yellow route;
- the yellow route would mean a financial saving of £8.5 million;
- the yellow route would spare five fatal accidents, 23 serious accidents and 105 other accidents;
- the purple route would cause problems in respect of flood risks.

(iv) These observations were endorsed in presentations by two representatives of the community of Felinheli, namely Kenneth Brown, Chairman of the Community Council and Nerys Mair, who was also a member of the Community Council.

They noted further that the purple route would impair the environment and the area's beauty, and public footpaths would also be lost. They emphasised that one could not ignore the detrimental impact of the purple route and the advantages of the yellow route in various respects, including local industry, now and in the long term.

(v) Gareth Graham from the Bethel Ward gave a Powerpoint presentation and he noted that the aim was to draw attention to the technical matters of the yellow route.

He elaborated on the following main issues:

- save lives;
- save money;
- save livelihoods since there were many employers in the area;
- avoid flooding in two villages;
- retain quality of life;
- save agricultural land.

(vi) The Cabinet Member - Environment noted that the engineers had only considered technical matters to date, and this had led to the purple route being favoured. He therefore believed that the matters referred to in the presentations would be considered in a public inquiry.

(vii) The Head of the Regulatory Department referred to one correction required in the written report, which was in paragraph 3.15, so that it read as follows:

*“One thing is clear, and it has been considered by the Transport Service engineers as part of their considerations, is that the Plas Menai roundabout and the number of accidents occurring there have not been considered **in full** in this assessment”.*

However, the Manager noted that the correction did not affect the assessment made by the engineers.

(viii) The Chief Engineer – Transportation and Street Care, responded appropriately to the observations made in the presentations, and specifically addressed the following main points:

- that estimating the number of accidents on any scheme was assessed based on the average number of accidents that happened per kilometre on similar roads. Consequently, the figures for accidents appeared higher on the purple route because the distance of the road was longer;
- that the Plas Menai roundabout was a five branch roundabout where several accidents occurred, and the purple route would reduce traffic flow problems there;
- that engineers would design the road so as to avoid the danger of flooding once a route had been chosen;
- that the benefit extended beyond construction costs, with several matters such as the environment and heritage being considered;
- that different communities preferred different routes, and that the yellow and purple routes were not the only ones that had been considered;
- that the purple route was a completely separate line which would not impact on the existing local network;
- that 7.5 decibels was noted as the noise level for the purple route, which was very little;
- that the yellow route would have a greater archaeological impact than the purple route.

(ix) The Cabinet Member - Environment warned that a delay, and stepping beyond the recognised procedure, could jeopardise the Plan at a time when there was considerable pressure on the Welsh Government’s resources, and competition for them.

(x) Members of the Committee expressed varying opinions.

(a) Some members expressed their views that the Assembly Government insisted on savings, and there was no sense therefore in favouring the purple route. It was emphasised that the purple route would pass within 12 metres of one house. Due to such issues, they wished for a site visit to be arranged so that any impact on local residents would receive fair consideration.

It was added that there was a need to consider the benefits as a whole, with the financial savings in respect of accidents included in these figures. Furthermore, it was noted that the impact on Caernarfon should be considered, and concern was expressed regarding the impact the purple route could have on traffic flow in the vicinity of Ciblyn.

(xi) On the other hand, it was noted that the development would be an enormous investment that would benefit Gwynedd's economy. It was added that this would be evident in respect of workers in the south of the county, as the bypass would eliminate travelling difficulties if jobs were available in other parts of Gwynedd or on Anglesey, and it would form an easy connection to the A55.

Because of such matters, there was concern that the money would be lost, and it was noted that people could voice their opinions regarding the impacts on communities in a public inquiry.

Reference was made to an e-mail received from the Council Leader, expressing concern regarding the risk that a delay could lead the Welsh Government to question the development, and the entire plan could be lost.

The member also referred to a letter received from the Minister for Local Government and Communities, which referred to the steps that would be taken before a final decision was made on the development.

(xii) The following was proposed and seconded – *that a recommendation is made to the Council's Cabinet that it should be declared that this Council is not satisfied that the concerns of local residents and communities have been considered, and that consideration should be given to the alternative yellow route in order to safeguard communities around the Caernarfon area during the provision of a bypass which enables the rest of the County to connect with the A55 expressway.* The proposal fell.

(xiii) Some members noted that local residents could be supported in a public inquiry.

RESOLVED to recommend to the Council's Cabinet that the Council should request confirmation from the Minister that he and his officers have given due weight and attention to all relevant aspects in selecting the favoured route, and that local residents and communities who have expressed objections to specific aspects will have a fair opportunity to submit those objections and prepare for a public inquiry.

4. WASTE STRATEGY

i) The report of the Cabinet Member – Environment, Councillor W. Gareth Roberts was submitted, providing an update on the Waste Strategy.

ii) The Cabinet Member and the Head of Highways and Municipal Department responded appropriately to the members' comments, and they made the following main points:-

- That Gwynedd Council had slipped from the 14th to the 20th position, (out of 22 counties), in relation to the percentage of waste sent to landfill, but the officers and Cabinet Member were confident that the Council would keep within the landfill allowance and avoid fines;
- That some other counties had chosen to follow a commingled system of collecting recycling materials which meant that everything was collected in one box. The residents sorted the materials in the Gwynedd system, which is favoured by the Government. In light of this, Gwynedd could go a step further with the recycling system so that an improvement would be more noticeable in the future;
- That a campaign was in the pipeline to encourage more Gwynedd residents to use brown bins to recycle food waste;
- That the system of collecting food waste was hygienic as the contents were in a bin liner;
- Enquiries would be made regarding dripping liquids from the garden waste collection vehicles;
- That waste collection vehicles had been improved but further work was needed and this again could reduce any difficulties with spillages;
- That better machines had been purchased to collect waste from the blue boxes to ensure that less waste would be blown away from the vehicles;
- That the blue box system had been operational in the County's primary schools for some time and that it had recently been extended to the secondary schools;
- That each school in Gwynedd was providing the food waste separately and that this was very encouraging;
- That it was possible for residents to make an application to receive up to four blue boxes;
- A scheme would be introduced in February to broaden the range of recyclates that could be collected so that it included poor quality soft plastics and cartons;
- That attention was given to cases when workers who collected waste rushed excessively, although this also reflected busyness;
- That a programme was in the pipeline to deal with waste collection from flats;
- That food waste collection needed to be substantially increased in order for the new site being developed at Llwyn Isaf, Clynog Fawr to be efficient;
- That it was important to ensure that there were provisions in order to recycle as much as possible;
- Gwynedd residents should be encouraged to seriously commit to the work of recycling as many materials as possible;
- That the relatively low percentage of 30% had been set for waste to be burned as this meant that more materials, such as poor quality plastics, would be recycled;
- That returned broken bins and boxes were recycled.

RESOLVED to accept the report noting the observations made.

5. TRANSPORT

i) The report of the Cabinet Member – Environment was submitted, addressing the latest situation regarding the process of re-tendering and learner travel costs. It was noted that the information had already been considered in the Dwyfor and Meirionnydd Area Committees and that it was intended to submit it before the Arfon Area Committee in the near future.

ii) Members were given an opportunity to submit observations and to ask questions. The officers and Cabinet Member responded appropriately and the following main points were made:-

- That the difference between making journeys between two locations attractive in terms of time, and the possibility of diverting from the main route in order to pick up passengers, should be evaluated;
- That a substantial number of services were being run on a commercial basis by the companies. The Council's role was to try and fill the gaps considering the financial restrictions and other factors in the network;
- That the situation was different when services were being run on behalf of the authority, but that the importance of having a viable network had to be considered;
- That several of the public services were being provided in accordance with the demands of buses transporting children to school and then, in other periods during the day, vehicles were used for public service;
- The possibility of using community transport could be considered rather than substantially extending and changing the bus service;
- That consideration was being given to the use made of some bus routes and that some could be abolished, or rationalised, if there was no demand for them; In terms of this possibility, the taxi service should be considered;
- That a 'Dial-a-Bus' service was running in some areas, such as Penllyn, Bala, but consideration was needed as to whether this type of service was sustainable or not when only a few individuals were using it.

iii) Members noted that the elderly, especially, needed an effective and reliable bus service and that they faced huge costs when using other services. It was emphasised further that more advertising was needed for services in such circumstances.

iv) In response, it was noted that it had to be asked if it was the Council's duty to provide a service for every individual case of this type. It was added that it was possible to provide the service, but that it would certainly be difficult to achieve, with the costs also demanding attention.

v) In response to further comments, it was confirmed that discussions would be held regarding transport from the vicinity of Barmouth to Ysgol y Gader, Dolgellau.

RESOLVED to accept the report noting the observations made.

6. WIND ENERGY

i) A report was submitted by the Cabinet Member – Planning, Councillor John Wyn Williams in response to questions relating to wind turbines near the Llŷn AONB and a letter received from Cyfeillion Llŷn expressing concern regarding what they considered was an exceptional threat to the beauty of Llŷn as a result of the development of the wind energy industry.

ii) Specific reference was made to Policy C26 of the Gwynedd Unitary Plan, which deals with wind energy, and it was noted that the Planning Committee's role was to consider each planning application on its own merits, and consider the impact of any development.

iii) It was confirmed that Council officers had answered Cyfeillion Llŷn's letter and had arranged to meet them to consider the Policy.

Reference was made to the Supplementary Planning Guidance, that would be going out to consultation in the near future, and it was explained that the intention of the Guidance was to provide more detail so that it would be easier for everyone to interpret the Policy.

iv) When considering a planning application, the Head of Regulatory Department elaborated that the Unitary Development Plan must be considered as a whole, rather than restricting consideration to one policy. Also, it needed to be borne in mind that National Policies were part of the assessment context of every planning application.

v) He added that members of the Planning Committee had visited sites prior to making a decision on applications for specific sized wind turbines and that this gave them valuable guidance.

vi) In response to an enquiry, it was explained that the Crown Estate and the Government had the authority to deal with wind turbine developments beyond the lowest tide line. The Planning Authority would deal with any ancillary development or impact on the land.

vii) A call was made for the Policy to be strengthened in relation to wind farms, and in response, it was indicated that the existing Policy noted that renewable energy / wind turbine schemes on a small scale or community based schemes up to 5MW were supported in the Local Development Plan. The Supplementary Planning Guidance was expected to provide a more detailed explanation on this.

RESOLVED to accept the report noting the observations.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 1.40pm.