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## STRATEGIC PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2026

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**TITLE:** Strategic Development Plan Position Update and Next Steps

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### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. To provide Members with an update on the position reached with the Strategic Development Plan (SDP); to consider some of the milestones and next steps in the year ahead; and to provide feedback from the workshop session held with this Group in March 2026.

### 2. DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1. That Members note the content of this report and the key milestones in the SDP programme, which will form the forward work programme for this Committee (see separate report on this agenda).

### 3. REASON FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1. To bring Members up to speed with the progress with the SDP given the last workshop took place in March 2026, and the Senedd Elections resulted in the cessation of formal Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) business during the pre-election period.

### 4. BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. This report will provide an update for Members on each of the following matters:

- Welsh Government approval of the SDP Delivery Agreement
- Securing of a £200k Performance Grant from Welsh Government
- Milestones for year 1 of the SDP programme
- Reporting Progress to Members
- Feedback from the SDP workshop held in March 2026

#### **Approval of the Delivery Agreement**

- 4.2. Members may recall that they considered the draft final Delivery Agreement back in September 2025 and made a recommendation to the CJC Board that the draft Delivery Agreement should be approved by the CJC for submission to Welsh Government, pending the outcome of the CJC budget setting process for 2026/27. The CJC agreed this at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2025, with the proviso that submission would only take place once an appropriate budget had been approved for SDP preparation in 2026/27, with a commitment to consider the SDP budget in subsequent years of the five-year programme for plan production.
- 4.3. The budget for the CJC (inclusive of the SDP) was approved by the CJC on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2026 and at the same meeting the CJC also agreed to formally submit the SDP Delivery agreement

for approval to the Welsh Government. The document was formally submitted on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026 and Welsh Government confirmed its agreement to the Delivery Agreement timetable in a letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> February 2026 (see appendix 1).

- 4.4 Whilst this allowed for commencement of work on the SDP, the pre-election period relating to the Senedd elections commenced soon after this date, although the time has been used productively to establish a support contract with consultants Arup to assist the CJC with the first key tasks that relate to the preparation of an evidence base to support preparation of the plan.

#### **Welsh Government Performance Grant**

- 4.5 Members have previously been made aware of the availability of a one-off performance grant offered by Welsh Government to CJs who demonstrated progress towards plan preparation within the 2025/26 financial year. To be able to claim the full grant of £200,000 the CJC needed to have submitted and had its Delivery Agreement agreed by Welsh Government before the end of the financial year.
- 4.6 Given the preceding update, that deadline was achieved and the CJC has both claimed and received the performance grant. There is no information available as yet from the new Welsh Government about the likelihood and/or availability of any future performance or support funding for SDP preparation.

#### **Programme milestones for the year one work programme**

- 4.7 The SDP timetable is divided into eight specific and sequential stages in the production of the plan – see table 1 below.

Table 1: Key SDP preparation stages

<b>Key Stage</b>		<b>Opportunities for involvement</b>
<b>Stage 1</b>	Delivery Agreement Preparation and submission	Stakeholder and informal public consultation
<b>Stage 2</b>	Pre-deposit preparation and recruitment	Updates provided on Ambition North Wales website
<b>Stage 3</b>	Preferred strategy preparation & public consultation	6-week formal public consultation
<b>Stage 4</b>	Deposit Plan preparation & public consultation	6-week formal public consultation
<b>Stage 5</b>	Submission to PEDW & Welsh Government for EIP	Updates provided on Ambition North Wales website
<b>Stage 6</b>	Examination	Opportunity to attend and participate in the examination hearing sessions
<b>Stage 7</b>	Inspector's Report	Updates provided on Ambition North Wales website
<b>Stage 8</b>	Adoption	Updates provided on Ambition North Wales website

- 4.8 Stage one related to the preparation and submission of a Delivery Agreement and this has been completed as per the update above. The work has now moved to stage two – Pre-deposit preparation and recruitment. In relation to recruitment, Members will recall that the estimated costs of producing the SDP included an allowance for the appointment of several planner posts

within the CJC, although this was also caveated on being able to attract suitable candidates without simply attracting people from existing Local Planning Authority Policy teams in North Wales, which would impact on LDP preparation and be counter intuitive.

- 4.9 This is why a support contract with Arup has been signed as this allows their resources to act as a virtual team to support SDP preparation without having the local impact set out above. The CJC has prepared a Principal Planner job description which is currently being evaluated, to provide the Regional Strategic Planning Officer with a level of necessary internal support and assistance. Once evaluated this will go out to advert soon.
- 4.10 In terms of what Pre-deposit preparation involved, this is predominantly the development of a suitable evidence base to inform the vision, strategy, policies and proposals within the plan. In line with the approved timetable stage two should be undertaken between now and the end of 2026, with an overlap to move into stage three which involves the preparation of a Preferred Strategy by September 2027 to then allow a public consultation on that.
- 4.11 The next twelve months therefore will involve a lot of background evidence gathering, visioning and the development of strategic objectives, then preparation of growth and spatial options, to bring together in a Preferred Strategy. The following expands on the list of key tasks in the Delivery Agreement timetable, to give Members a sense of the nature of each task:
- a. **Evidence base preparation** – Work is already underway to prepare an evidence base for the SDP. Initially this primarily involves an audit of the information that already exists in the evidence gathered by Local Planning Authorities for the preparation and review of their LDPs, alongside other relevant housing, employment and transport data and forecasts. A scoping meeting has already been held with officers from each Local Planning Authority and individual meetings are also diarised to review and discuss each authority's evidence in turn. This will include an assessment of how up to date the information is as well as whether gaps exist in the evidence needed. Recommendations including proposed scope, methodologies and programme for additional evidence base work will allow the CJC to focus resources accordingly, for example on the preparation of any new evidence needed to fill these gaps on a regional basis, or work with Local Planning Authorities to co-ordinate updates of local evidence bases. This is likely to be undertaken alongside the corresponding data collection exercise, with the CJC working closely with national and local stakeholders, which will inform development of the SDP and its impact assessments.
  - b. **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) Scoping Report** – This is an integral part of the plan preparation process, and the scope and methodology need to be developed early in the programme for the IIA process to be applied on an iterative basis at key stages in the plan. In essence as key stages of the plan are developed, the IIA process is applied to that stage to assess the level of sustainability and environmental impact the plan may have, using the process to suggest how the plan can be improved to reduce those impacts. This work will be brought forward and carried out by Arup, who have had the experience already of preparing this for the Cardiff Capital Region, thereby presenting economies of time and potentially cost for the CJC. There will also need to be a focused consultation on the scoping document with statutory stakeholders including Natural Resources Wales and Cadw.
  - c. **Main Issues and Growth and Spatial options** - To identify the key issues and drivers of change that will enable a comprehensive and shared vision for the region to be developed, the CJC needs to look ahead to the longer-term and conclude what the region should look like in response to the issues it is seeking to address. This will be informed by the production of a main issues report following the audit of evidence where the key themes from the evidence that have a regional implication will be drawn out and summarised. This will feed into further work with Members and stakeholders to develop the vision and strategic

objectives for the plan, building on the initial workshop held in March, the outcome of which is reported later.

- d. **Call for Sites** - This stage enables all interested parties to submit potential sites and wider strategic locations (areas of search) for inclusion in the plan. It will assist the CJC to identify potential development sites and inform the SDP Spatial Strategy in consultation with the Specific Consultation Bodies. A key part of this will be to determine the scale of what is meant by 'strategic' based on the potential different land uses that sites are sought for – employment, housing etc – and this will form part of the work above on options development. A register of candidate sites will also be created and a methodology to use to assess and select sustainable sites or locations.
- e. **Development and Assessment of Growth and Spatial Options** – A core part of preparing a Preferred Strategy is to firstly develop and assess options for the level of growth the plan should promote (housing, jobs, employment land) and the most sustainable way to locate that future growth via a settlement structure or hierarchy. The SDP needs to take account of these matters as they are identified in existing or emerging Local Development Plans as well as then projecting potential for growth forward over the 25-year plan period. Spatially, this involves looking at growth on a regional perspective but also how this will be distributed to each constituent Local Authority area within the region. Of all of the tasks set out above, it is arguably this element that will require closest working and collaboration with Local Planning Authorities to ensure that a consensus view is reached on overall growth and its dissemination.

#### **Reporting Progress to the Sub-Committee and Corporate Joint Committee**

- 4.12 A calendar of all meetings of the CJC and its sub-committees was approved by the CJC at its meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2026. Future meetings of this sub-committee are programmed within that report and are also set out in a forward work programme that is part of the agenda for this meeting and follows this report. Whilst it is difficult at this stage to assign specific topics to update reports for those meetings, I have nevertheless tried to indicate likely update topics based on the SDP timetable and its alignment to the proposed meeting dates. These may be subject to change, and the forward work programme will be monitored and updated as required, and Members updated. The main request of Members at this stage is to ensure the meeting dates are secured within diaries. Once the CJC approves the Meetings schedule, diary invitations will be sent out as place holders for sub-committee meetings. Sub-committee meetings have been aligned to facilitate the onward reporting of progress to the CJC.
- 4.13 Officers are also aware that Local Government Elections will take place in May 2027, and within the timeframe of this work programme. As much of the work involves evidence gathering and the development of options, much of this is background work that will feed into the development of a Preferred Strategy, which isn't scheduled for publication and consultation until the summer of 2027, and is subject to CJC approval before this takes place. Hopefully this allows for good progress can be maintained, including the cross referencing of work with the position and progress of respective LDPs.
- 4.14 Following the success of the Member workshop in March 2026, consideration will also be given to arranging further sessions, particularly where the development of a vision or growth and spatial options is an iterative approach that necessitates broad discussion, before a formal report is presented to the sub-committee. Members views are invited on this matter, and these can be added into to FWP.

#### **Feedback from the SDP workshop held in March 2026**

- 4.15 Members will recall an informal in-person workshop that was held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at the Welsh Government offices in Llandudno Junction. This was to facilitate getting Members of the sub-committee together in person and to also hear from keynote external speakers (Mark Newey from Welsh Government and Lisa Fairmaner from Arup) on the approach to strategic planning. The session also allowed time for a high-level exercise to gather Members thoughts an insight in relation to the issues for the SDP to tackle, the key drivers for the plan, and what they want the region to look like in 2051.
- 4.16 An online post it notes system was used to record the conversations that took place, and the outcomes have been summarised in appendix 2 to this report. Several clear themes have emerged from the information collated and these provide a very useful starting points for future development work on a vision for the plan and strategic objectives.

## 5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. Costs will be drawn from existing North Wales CJC budgets where provision has been made to support this work, with the necessary support from the CJC's Legal and Finance teams. The CJC will also seek to secure all opportunities for further funding support from Welsh Government.

## 6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The specific requirements and steps to produce a Strategic Development Plan are set out in The Town and Country Planning (Strategic Development Plan) (Wales) Regulations 2021.

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### APPENDICES:

- Appendix 1:** Welsh Government Approval Letter  
**Appendix 2:** SDP Member Workshop Outcomes

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### STATUTORY OFFICERS RESPONSE:

i. **Monitoring Officer:**

“As noted above, the CJC has a statutory duty to prepare a Strategic Development Plan and the statutory framework is identified in the report. The recommendations are for noting only and do not approve any substantive policy position, preferred strategy, site allocation or consultation document.

As the SDP progresses, future reports will need to further identify the relevant statutory stage, consultation requirements, assessment duties, etc. Informal Member workshops may assist the development of the SDP, provided they are used for engagement and discussion only, with any material outputs fed into the formal reporting and decision-making process.”

ii. **Statutory Finance Officer:**

“I have no objection to the decision sought and the estimated costs of delivering the Strategic Development Plan is under continuous consideration. It will be included in our work as part of the regular budget reviews, annual budget process as well as in the medium-term financial plan.”