Appendix 3 -Draft Minutes Planning Policy Working Group (23/10/26)

Item 5

KEY ISSUES, VISION, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND THE SPATIAL GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS

Planning Policy Service officers presented Item 5 to the Working Group. At the start of the discussion, the Chair reminded Members that the meeting focused on the issues presented to the Working Group on that day, rather than previous discussions.

In introducing the item, the officer outlined the status of the document and an update on the current stage in the preparation of the new Local Development Plan. It was explained that the work presented focused on the main issues, strategic objectives and potential growth options. It was noted that the purpose of the presentation was to provide an opportunity for Members to discuss and comment on the options that had been developed to date in order to inform the further work.

The officers emphasised that no decisions had been made regarding the direction of the Local Development Plan at this time. It was explained that the options presented had been identified as the most appropriate and realistic based on the evidence currently available, and that the purpose of the process was to gather views before proceeding to the next stages of preparing the LDP.

Issues raised

1. A Member asked for clarification as to the meaning of the column which refers to jobs and how the information presented in it should be interpreted.

2. A Member asked for an explanation of the difference between the figures presented as headline figures and those given in brackets. It was also asked why the difference between these figures is not consistent across the various options.

3. A Member noted that it was not entirely clear how the employment figures had been compiled or how they related to factors such as developments at Wylfa, working from home and other changes in the labour market. It was questioned whether consideration had been given to the rapid change in working patterns, including the impact of artificial intelligence on future employment opportunities.

4. A Member asked whether the figures in brackets referred to developments that have already been completed or have already taken place, and for an explanation as to why the figures do not appear consistent between the various options.

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5. A Member asked for clarification as to which option is considered most realistic in relation to employment and economic growth prospects. It was suggested that it would be beneficial to have more information explaining why some options are considered less acceptable than others. It was also noted that while national forecasts are a valuable source of information, there is a need to reflect the local circumstances and requirements of Gwynedd and rural communities more specifically.

6. A Member asked for clarification as to why some developments in Anglesey were referred to as speculative developments.

7. Referring to previous comments in relation to nuclear developments, a Member noted that the discussion was about the Small Modular Reactor rather than the Wylfa B development. He asked whether this had been reflected in the assessments, as the number of jobs created could be significantly different, and it was also asked whether consideration had been given to infrastructure implications, including transport and links over the Menai Strait.

8. A Member raised a point about the previous Local Development Plan, noting that some growth forecasts envisaged at that time had not been realised. It was questioned why current forecasts include projects that have not yet received consent and emphasised the need to be careful when basing the plan on uncertain developments.

9. A Member expressed the view that the possibility of development at Wylfa should not be ruled out as circumstances can change over time. It was suggested that, that option should be kept under consideration, and it was noted that a number of other Members were supportive of this view.

10. A Member asked for clarification regarding Option 4, noting that it refers to the whole of Gwynedd, whereas the Local Development Plan only covers a specific part of the county.

11. A Member asked for clarification regarding the geographical divide between the areas of Bangor and Caernarfon.

12. A member noted that none of the options appeared to give specific attention to Bangor's role as a city. Asked whether an option that focuses specifically on Bangor city centre should be considered. The Member also referred to the lack of match between some previous forecasts and the results seen in practice, noting that housing has been provided on the basis of employment expectations that have not been realised.

13. A Member questioned about the relationship between the growth prospects of the Local Development Plan and the growth plans of the Eryri National Park Authority. It was asked whether formal discussions and joint working were taking place to ensure that the visions of the two authorities were aligned.

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14. A Member asked for clarification as to the core purpose of the Local Development Plan, namely whether it primarily responds to current trends or seeks to influence future growth patterns. It was noted that the population of Gwynedd faces challenges such as lower birth rates, emigration of young people and an ageing population. Questions were asked where future population growth is projected to come from, and whether it is appropriate to provide housing in some areas based on assumptions about employment opportunities that are not certain. The Member expressed a preference towards Option 4 and suggested that the needs of each area should be considered individually.

15. Referring to previous comments regarding population and growth, a Member asked through what lens the options should be assessed. It was suggested that it would be beneficial to receive further evidence as to which options would be most supportive of the Welsh language. It was asked what combination of growth options would offer the best outcome for the sustainability of Welsh-speaking communities, and it was proposed that further work should be undertaken to assess the impact of the options in relation to the Welsh language.

16. Following on from previous comments made by other Members, a Member noted support for the development of economic opportunities but expressed concern that less emphasis was being placed on developments and opportunities that already exist within the Eryri National Park compared to more uncertain developments. It was questioned whether more consideration needed to be given to the potential for growth in Meirionnydd and the implications of this for the area.

17. A Member asked whether the housing prospects, particularly in the Arfon area, included full consideration of immigration and population emigration. He emphasised the importance of understanding the migration patterns of young people and also asked when maps would be available to show the locations of the developments under consideration.

18. A Member questioned the extent of the collaboration between the Council and the Eryri National Park Authority in the development of the growth options. It was noted that there were significant differences between some of the forecasts, and asked why the work did not appear more co-ordinated. It was also suggested that an additional local growth option should be considered based on lower demographic projections.

19. Member agreed with the need to receive reports and evidence on linguistic issues where appropriate. Clarification was sought regarding the process used to filter the original list from eleven options down to five options. It was also asked to what extent public comments will influence the final decision process and how much weight is placed on the evidence presented.

20. Referring to paragraph 6.0.5 of the report, a Member asked for clarification regarding the terms of reference given to the consultants commissioned to carry out

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the work. They were asked what factors and objectives they had set in carrying out the relevant research and assessments.

21. A Member asked for clarification regarding the use of five-year trends rather than trends over a longer fifteen-year period. It was noted that events such as Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on demographics and population patterns, and the extent to which modelling had taken this into account was questioned. It was also asked whether local initiatives and skills developments in progress had been included in the assessment.

22. A Member asked for clarification regarding the timing and significance of the Impact Assessment on the Welsh Language. The view was expressed that this work should be commissioned before strategic decisions were made regarding the growth options. The Member noted that it was not clear why the existing five options were chosen out of all the original options, and emphasised the need for a more transparent justification for that choice. This position was supported by another Member.

23. A Member seconded the previous point stating concern that the wording and definitions of some of the questions proposed for public consultation did not provide sufficient clarity or provide a solid basis for gathering public opinion.

Responses

1. The Officer explained that the column relates to the number of jobs that would be needed to support the number of housing units envisaged. It was noted that each option is based on the same housing need, but uses different assumptions in terms of growth and employment.

2. The Officer explained that the difference between the figures stems from the way they are calculated over the period of the Plan. The higher the overall figure, the more likely it is that there will be a gap between the main figure and the figure in brackets. On re-checking the data, the Officer confirmed that a minor error had been found in the figures presented, and it was noted that the information would be corrected.

3. The Officer explained that Option 5 places greater emphasis on employment forecasts and includes consideration of potential developments at Wylfa newydd. That is the reason for the difference in figures between the options. It was emphasised that this does not mean that development at Wylfa is assumed to be developed, but that it is one of the factors considered in the preparation of that option. It was also noted that not all options contain the same assumptions regarding Wylfa.

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4. The Officer explained that the figures in brackets are lower as they don't include the houses which have been completed and those which are in the land bank.

5. The Officer noted that all options need to be considered in a realistic and open manner. It was emphasised that all options will be subject to consultation and allow an opportunity for stakeholders and the public to submit comments. It was explained that the options are based on a range of low, medium and high growth assumptions, whilst also taking into account factors such as employment, potential developments in Wylfa and the need for housing.

6. The Officer noted that potential developments in Anglesey could not be ignored. It was accepted that the term "speculative" may not be entirely appropriate as no consent has been granted to date, however the evidence shows that it is likely that some form of development will take place. As a result, it was considered appropriate to include the relevant option as part of the consultation. It was reiterated that no preference had been given to any option at this time.

7. The Officer stated that the point raised was acknowledged.

8. The Officer emphasised that no decision had been made regarding the adoption of any of the options. It was explained that this was an initial discussion in order to consider a range of possible options, and that the options themselves did not represent the final strategy of the Local Development Plan.

9. The Officer noted that the comment was acknowledged.

10. The Officer explained that local areas continue to be considered while preparing the plan, including those extending into the Eryri National Park. However, only those areas that fall within the Gwynedd LPA can be included within the Gwynedd LDP.

11. The Officer noted that it was not easy to define the differences in detail between the areas referred to. It was stressed, however, that it was necessary to ensure that any developments were sustainable.

12. The Officer stated that the point raised was acknowledged.

13. The Officer confirmed that the role and work of the Eryri National Park Authority was not being overlooked. It was explained that regular discussions were being held at a sub-regional level in order to discuss issues of common ground and cross boundary issues and ensure as much collaboration as possible.

14. The Officer noted that the Local Development Plan provided the most appropriate approach to respond to the issues raised. It was recognised that the points made were fair and relevant to the process.

15. The Officer confirmed that all of the options will be assessed in relation to the Welsh language, and that the additional work suggested will be carried out as part of the process, but not at this stage. It was emphasised that consideration of the Welsh language and all other considerations and evidence will be undertaken in the next stage as part of the process of developing the preferred strategy. It was also noted

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that the purpose of the stage was not to reach a conclusion as to which option was preferred. It was explained that the purpose of the current phase was to gather information and evidence to inform the next steps.

16. The Officer shared his views on the importance of working closely with Eryri National Park Authority to ensure a clear understanding of the plans of the two organisations and how they can support each other to achieve the strategic objectives.

17. The Officer noted that there would be further opportunities for the working group to contribute as work progresses towards identifying a preferred strategy.

18. The Officer explained that a further report will be submitted to the working group after the consultation period, together with relevant background papers. This would provide an opportunity for Members to consider the evidence and comment on the report presented by the Planning Policy Service . The comment on the adoption of a growth option that would use Welsh Government forecasts along with local development adjustments, similar to the approach used in some other authorities, was also acknowledged.

19. The Officer noted that further information and clarification could be considered in future work. It was emphasised that there was a need to plan for some level of growth, and that the five options presented were the ones considered most realistic based on the available evidence and forecasts. It was explained that this was the reason for the inclusion of low, medium and high growth options in order to ensure a wide range of choice and discussion.

20. The Officer confirmed that the necessary research and technical work had been commissioned to support the preparation of the Local Development Plan. It was suggested, however, that the specific issues raised would be more relevant to the later stages of the process.

21. The Officer explained that the forecasts take into account the number of people in employment or looking for work, as well as those travelling in and out of the county for employment purposes. It was also noted that local initiatives and developments that can influence the labour market are considered as part of the modelling work. In relation to the time period used, it was emphasised that circumstances had changed significantly in recent years, and therefore the use of a shorter period was considered to provide a more realistic picture of the current situation.

22. The Officer stated that the point raised was acknowledged.

23. The Officer explained that it would not be practical to include questions that could be interpreted as leading questions. It was emphasised that there was no intention to influence the responses of the public, and that the purpose of the consultation was to gather objective and impartial opinions.

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