

## **ITEM 8 - QUESTIONS**

### **(1) Question by Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams**

Will Cyngor Gwynedd be making strong representations to get Transport for Wales to change their minds about withdrawing four trains, two each way between Machynlleth and Pwllheli when their new Cambrian Coast Railway Line Tables are introduced in December 2024?

This will have a serious affect on locals travelling to and from work locally, and on long distance rail travel for locals and visitors.

Did the decision makers take into account that the Cambrian Coast Railway line had been closed for three months in the past three years for work to be undertaken on Barmouth Viaduct with no trains running and the replacement bus service being unreliable?

### **Response – Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Dafydd Meurig**

I would like to thank Cllr Eryl Jones-Williams for his timely question and Cllr. Gwynfor Owen for the notice of motion which has been raised as part of this meeting's agenda regarding this important matter.

The Leader of the Council received correspondence from James Price, the Chief Executive of Transport for Wales on 10 April 2024 regarding the changes to the timetable on the Cambrian Coast Railway Line which would be effective from December 2024.

In response I wrote to James Price on 25 April 2024 seeking confirmation of the changes and their status. I have shared this response with all Cyngor Gwynedd Members whose communities are directly served by the Cambrian Coast Railway Line and which would therefore be affected by any changes, which has also been circulated to all Councillors as part of this response.

As part of the response, I refer specifically to the impacts of the changes on the local communities and the public in general, influencing factors relating to service levels over recent years and the impact on passenger numbers. It also makes the point that such a negative change is in complete divergence with the strategic aims, aspirations and objectives set out at a local, regional, and national level.

We are looking to promote, facilitate and achieve a modal shift to mitigate the impacts of climate change, improving access in general and the quality of life and health of our residents. However, reducing the availability and attractiveness of what are already limited opportunities to travel by public transport in the areas served by this is railway is a significant step in the wrong direction, and I have made this point quite clearly to Transport for Wales.

### **(2) Question by Councillor Llio Elenid Owen**

What is the latest on the Canolfan Lleu project, the health and well-being hub in Penygroes? When will there be any development and information for the public?

### **Response - Cabinet Member for Adults Services, Councillor Dilwyn Morgan**

Canolfan Lleu is a project that brings partners together in order to develop a health and wellbeing hub in Penygroes. The project is led by Grŵp Cynefin, with close collaboration taking place through the Project Board with the Council, the Health Board and Theatr Bara Caws. The intention is that the new development will offer a comprehensive mix of health services, housing, community, and cultural spaces that will help people in Dyffryn Nantlle and beyond.

There was a delay at the end of the year due to the decision not to continue with the purchase of the current nursery, however, in January 2024 the Project Board commissioned a feasibility review of the impact of this on the design. Two workshops were held to explore options to make the most of the associated land, and a new Plan was approved by the Project Board on the 1st of May 2024. Work to estimate costs is ongoing, together with an initial assessment of its affordability against the grants that have been recognised to date for the project. The intention is to complete the assessment by June 2024.

The next steps following this will be to develop the design further and then prepare the Outline Business Case in order to present it by the end of the year. Grŵp Cynefin will be looking to hold a series of community engagement events, such as those successfully held last summer, to provide residents and the wider community with an update on the project.

Subject to approval, Grŵp Cynefin hopes construction will begin in 2026.

**(3) Question by Councillor Rhys Tudur**

Considering:

- that this Council has long-term objectives to tackle flooding and climate change problems;
  - that several households, such as one within my ward, have suffered damage to their homes from flash floods and a lack of supply of sandbags;
  - that some individuals are too vulnerable to protect their homes with sandbags;
  - that the Council has a 24-hour helpline but no 24-hour sandbag provision;
  - that some individuals cannot afford to buy sandbags;
- is this Council going to review the public emergency sandbag provision?

**Response - Cabinet Member for Highways and Municipal and Gwynedd Consultancy, Councillor Berwyn Parry Jones**

Flood Risk Management Strategy

The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 requires Local Authorities to produce a local flood risk management strategy. The Department has started this work and undertaken a consultation exercise on the draft document. Our aim is to see the strategy adopted before the Summer.

Flooding Incidents (9 April, 2024)

As regards the background to the particular incident referred to by the Member, I understand from the Officer on duty on the night that he received numerous calls requesting assistance to include sandbags and this from early morning during the storm.

Our workforce at the time were already out dealing with numerous flooding problems on our network in the areas of Penrhos (Carreg y Defaid), Abererch and Chwilog area.

The duty officer made further enquiries for more information relating to the problem and it became clear that the caller lived in a farmhouse down a private track some distance from the highway, with the water flowing from the surrounding fields rather than from the highway itself. As a result, a response was given highlighting that resources were not available, as other priorities required urgent attention.

The Department has provision of sandbags located at our main depots namely Afonwen near Chwilog, Cibyn in Caernarfon and Bala Road in Dolgellau. We aim to keep up to 500 sandbags at any one time per location. Where prolonged severe weather is forecasted, we would ensure more sandbags were prepared and our workforce would remain local and ready to respond to an incident. Outside normal working hours, we have a highways emergency procedure for dealing and responding to incidents of severe weather, problems on the network and responding to accidents/fatal accidents.

During a flood event, Cyngor Gwynedd take all reasonable measures to ensure that their network of county roads remain passable for vehicles, although storm conditions, extent of flooding and availability of resources may dictate that some roads will need to be closed to ensure safety of the public.

The Council will make every effort to distribute sandbags to residents that are at serious risk of flooding. However, the ability of the Council to share sandbags could be severely compromised during periods of adverse weather, accordingly the sandbags resource priority is to protect properties from flooding because of water from the public highway.

The following number of sandbags were distributed over the past winter period:

Arfon - 350  
Dwyfor - 400  
Meirionnydd - 700

#### Property Owners

Ultimately, it is up to homeowners and businesses to look after their home or Business. Residents are strongly advised to source their own flood risk management equipment to manage the risk of flooding. There is information and advice available for property owners at risk of flooding and our Flood Service Team is also available to provide expert advice.

#### The Climate Change Risk in our Area

It is correct to note that the effects of climate change presents periods of storms and extreme weather/floods, and this at much more frequent intervals. There have been 12 named storms over the recent winter season along with a period of several weeks of

rainfall. The demands and pressures on our resources are challenging and at times we are unable to respond to every request, but every effort is made with the resource and budget we have in dealing with specific circumstances.

**(4) Question by Councillor Richard Glyn Roberts**

Bearing in mind that there is a perception among the residents of Llŷn and Eifionydd (and possibly more widely in Gwynedd) that the planning system gives free rein to allow large residential housing developments by housing associations and private developers (where the local need is not very evident in the eyes of local people) and that at the same time it throws every obstacle in the way of small developments (where the local need is crystal clear to all), and given that this perception is, by and large, a true reflection of the operation of the planning system in our area in recent years (where very few large incompatible developments have been rejected but where the burden of providing costly reports is placed on the person who wants to build a house for himself or herself, when he or she has any hope of doing so), is there a will and desire to revolutionise this dismal system?

**Response - Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Dafydd Meurig**

Responsibility for the planning system has been devolved to Wales and it is the Welsh Government that legislates on planning matters. The Government also prepares national planning policy (Planning Policy Wales [Planning Policy Wales | GOV.UK](#)) which sets out the context and framework for local planning authorities to prepare planning policy.

There are now three statutory tiers of development plans for Wales which include the national Future Wales plan ([Future Wales: the national plan 2040 | GOV.WALES](#)) prepared by Welsh Government, the regional Strategic Development Plan which will be prepared by the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (note that work on this Plan has not yet commenced) and the local development plan at a local planning authority level.

Therefore, current development plans form the basis of the planning system and these set out the context for reasonable and consistent planning application decisions in Wales. The local development plan must conform to national planning policy, the Future Wales plan and the Strategic Development Plan.

It is a statutory requirement for planning applications to be determined in accordance with the adopted plan, namely the (Anglesey and Gwynedd) Joint Local Development Plan in the case of Cyngor Gwynedd planning authority area (not including the Eryri National Park authority area)

A statutory process must be followed when preparing a local development plan and the plan must be based on sound evidence when planning for the area's future social, economic and environmental needs, and shall include planning policies to facilitate this.

The Joint Local Development Plan identifies the area's housing needs over the Plan period and includes a number of policies to meet the housing needs of communities in the area including policies that facilitate the provision of affordable housing. This, alongside the Council's Housing Action Plan, contributes to delivering one of the Council Plan's main priorities, to support the people of Gwynedd to live in suitable and affordable homes in their communities. Evidence of the number of houses that have been constructed and permitted by the Joint Local Development Plan can be seen in the Annual Monitoring

Reports ([Joint Local Development Plan \(llyw.cymru\)](http://llyw.cymru)) which have been published in recent years.

The requirements for the type of information and evidence that needs to be submitted with a planning application have increased substantially over recent years, due to the need to satisfy additional requirements deriving from Welsh Government legislation and policies. Unfortunately, these requirements affect all applicants.

The Council's Planning Service provides a pre-application advice service and encourages prospective applicants to use the service, to obtain guidance on the type of information that will be required with an application and to receive informal opinion on the proposal. The aim is to seek to ensure that all the required evidence and information is included, should an application be submitted, in order to expedite a decision. Unfortunately, at times, even though the Planning Service has highlighted the evidence and the information that is required to assess an application during the pre-application advice stage, applications are still submitted without the necessary information. Note also that if an applicant has been assessed by Tai Teg and has received confirmation that they are in need of an affordable house, they will not be required to pay the fee for the pre-application advice service.

Every planning application is determined individually and on its own merits and in accordance with the Joint Local Development Plan and any other relevant planning considerations. In assessing planning applications for housing, there are usually a number of planning matters that need to be considered including evidence of the need. Every planning application for housing (and other developments) needs to include the relevant evidence and information for the Planning Service to appropriately assess the application against the Joint Local Development Plan.

The evidence required to support the planning application may vary depending on the nature and location of the development, the number of houses that have already been constructed or approved during the Plan period, and the relevant policy requirements in the Plan. The policy needs are relevant to whoever the applicant may be and whatever the size of the development may be. Therefore, ensuring there is relevant evidence of the need is an important consideration when assessing housing developments.

As a specific reference is made to Housing Associations, which are of course important partners of the Council, it can be confirmed that the relevant evidence has been submitted with applications that have been approved in recent years.

Given the above, it is believed that it is a perception that the planning system gives free rein to applications from housing associations and that it obstructs smaller development and it is believed there is no sound evidence to support this perception.

The Council is currently in the process of preparing a new Local Development Plan which will be an opportunity to plan for the needs of the area's communities in the future and to revise our planning policies, and every Member will have an opportunity to contribute to this process.