

ITEM 6 – QUESTION

(1) Question by Councillor Eurig Wyn –

“What financial community benefits will be afforded to the community of Waunfawr following the damage done to the area as a result of FIRST HYDRO developments to establish a hydro electricity scheme in the area?”

Answer - Councillor Dafydd Meurig, Cabinet Member for Planning

“In terms of the planning regime, the position with regards to community benefit is clear in that such contributions to local communities should not be a consideration when making decisions on planning applications. Furthermore, the provision of community benefit should not be used as a reason to grant planning permission for a development that would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms.

Therefore, the provision of financial community benefit is something that would occur outside the planning regime. Financial community benefit is usually a voluntary arrangement between the developer and the local community in relation to large scale renewable energy schemes in an area.

The First Hydro scheme which relates to the Dinorwig Power Station is a substantial scheme, that would have been dealt with by the Secretary of State for Wales on behalf of central Government at the time. If we consider that the planning position in relation to community benefit back in the seventies when the Dinorwig Power Station was built, is the same as the current planning position, it is unlikely that such benefits would have been part of any planning permission at the time.

We are not aware of any specific financial community benefit that was provided specifically to the Waunfawr community as a result of the development of the Dinorwig Power Station. However, it must be noted that the scheme has provided significant economic benefits to the area during construction and since it has been operational, which in itself provides community benefits.

Furthermore, the information on the First Hydro website shows that they have a community liaison policy and that they support and assist with various activities that are of benefit to the community, education, sports, the arts and the environment in the area. The company sponsors or contributes towards activities in the area and has arrangements in place to administer this.”

Supplementary Question by Councillor Eurig Wyn –

“Will the Council, through the Planning Department, agree to investigate similar developments in Scotland where the County Councils and Parliament have created an effective strategy to fund such schemes ensuring that benefits are provided to the communities?”

Answer - Councillor Dafydd Meurig, Cabinet Member for Planning

“As stated in the response to the above question, the provision of financial community benefit is not a relevant planning consideration when determining planning applications. Furthermore, having inspected the arrangement in Scotland, the Scottish Government guidance also stresses that financial community benefit is a voluntary arrangement that is entirely separate from the planning process.

Preliminary work has been undertaken by Officers from the Property Service and the Economy and Community Department of the Council, to try and scope the economic / community benefit that could be associated with renewable energy schemes. This work has revealed a significant difference in the guidance on community benefit that is available for different types of renewable energy schemes. For example, it was evident that there was a significant amount of information available in relation to wind turbine schemes in relation to community benefit. Furthermore, there have been changes recently in the grant provided by the British Government to help facilitate these schemes, which is likely to have an impact on the viability of business cases for such schemes in future.

In circumstances where renewable energy schemes are proposed for land owned by the Council (for example Glyn Rhonwy), the Council will consider opportunities to negotiate community benefit as part of the arrangements for disposal of the land.”