

STATE OF THE AREA DEBATE 2005

REPORT of the State of the Area Debate held on 13th April, 2005, in the Paget Rooms, Penarth.

Present:

Councillor E.T. Williams	(Mayor, The Vale of Glamorgan Council)
Councillor H.J.W. James	(Leader, The Vale of Glamorgan Council)
Councillor G.A. Cox	(Cabinet Member, Visible Services)
Councillor M.R. Harvey	(Cabinet Member, Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure)
Councillor J.W. Thomas	(Cabinet Member, Housing, Building Services and Community Safety)

In attendance

Councillor A.M. Ernest	(Cabinet Member, Improvement)
Councillor A.D. Hampton	(Cabinet Member, Education and Lifelong Learning)
Councillor T.H. Jarvie	(Cabinet Member, Legal and Regulatory)
Councillor A. Clive Williams	(Cabinet Member, Social and Care Services)

The Mayor welcomed all present to the Debate which would focus on the Council's key achievements and ongoing major projects. The planned series of presentations would be followed by a question and answer session on the content. Members of the audience would also be offered an opportunity to ask general questions in an open forum before the end of the Debate.

The Mayor then invited the Leader to give his opening address. The Leader referred to the key topics which would form the basis of Cabinet Members' presentations:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| - Penarth Heights | - Councillor M.R. Harvey |
| - Penarth Headland Link | - Councillor G.A. Cox |
| - Penarth Renewal Area | - Councillor J.W. Thomas. |

The Leader gave an overview of the Council, and referred to the changes that had occurred within it over recent years. The Council now had a clear vision as detailed in its Corporate Plan. Furthermore, each service area had a Service Plan which was, in turn, based on the Corporate Plan.

The Council had adopted the principle of continuous improvement, and most of the Council's services had improved. However, this does not mean that the Council is complacent as future planned initiatives would transform the Council and the way in which it interacted with the public.

Modernisation of local government had reformed the decision-making process. The Cabinet comprised ten Conservative members. Labour and Plaid Cymru Councillors had been appointed as Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Scrutiny, Planning and Licensing Committees of the Council. It was explained that the Scrutiny Committees examine and review decisions made by the Cabinet as well as initiating improvement reviews.

The new Cabinet style of decision-making had not only produced more open and accountable local government but had also achieved better and quicker decisions which was clearly in the public interest.

The audience were informed that Council services had improved over the past four years, and the Leader suggested that most people had seen some improvement in a range of services, including road resurfacing, grass cutting, litter collection and the free collection of bulky household items. The Council had introduced kerbside recycling and intended to extend the range of recycled materials, including green garden material.

The Leader stated that the Council had an education service which was the envy of most Councils in Wales. Although some of the buildings were not suitable and needed to be replaced, excellent results were achieved. The Council was seeking to provide a Private Funding Initiative through the establishment of a Community Trust which would substantially improve St. Cyres, Llantwit Major and Cowbridge Comprehensive Schools. It was reported that the Council had increased the Education funding by nearly £5 million during the current year. The Leader further stated that he had arranged a meeting with the relevant Welsh Assembly Government Minister to discuss the issue of Community Chest funding, and was confident that the Council would be successful.

These, it was stated, were just a few examples of change and improvement. The Council was determined to continue the improvements and to be innovative, and with the help of the public, the Vale could be a place we can all be proud of.

The Leader ended his address by quoting from the latest District Auditor's Report:

"The Council has continued to demonstrate considerable commitment over the last 12 months to deliver continuous service improvement. The processes and arrangements developed to achieve this objective are now in place and are beginning to deliver real and meaningful improvements. The Council has continued to exercise robust and effective management of its financial affairs."

The Leader then referred to the first of three presentations on key themes for Penarth:

Penarth Heights -

Councillor M.R. Harvey, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure reported on progress with regard to the Penarth Heights development. The site comprises some 16/17 acres, including Harbour View and Royal Close. The site is otherwise known as the 'Billybanks', and offers a unique development opportunity in that it offers the best residential opportunity in the Country. The development, coupled with the Penarth Central Renewal Area and the Headland Link initiatives, represented a significant benefit for Penarth as a whole.

The proposals for the Penarth Heights development included:

- the highest standard of design;
- contemporary development;
- a cohesive and integrated new residential neighbourhood;
- enhanced open spaces;
- the protection and enhancement of nearby woodlands;
- access to a variety of transport modes.

A multi-discipline project team had been established and a planning brief prepared. The site had been marketed and bids were being assessed.

The next steps were to:

- negotiate contracts;
- prepare and submit a planning application;
- hold a public exhibition at the end of April / early May.

Penarth Headland Link -

Councillor G.A. Cox, Cabinet Member for Visible Services, reported that the Penarth Headland Link would be a landmark project of striking appearance which would strengthen the town's identity and would also strengthen tourism in the area.

Councillor Cox provided some background to the proposals, namely:

- The project has arisen as a result of the provisions of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Act 1993, and will involve the construction of a promenade along the foreshore terminating beneath Penarth Head;
- The Headland Link will be available for use by pedestrians, cyclists and (possibly) by road train and also emergency vehicles 365 days per year and will be illuminated;
- Three designs had been considered, but two had been rejected in view of the environmental impact they would cause;

- The structure will be elevated to ensure minimal impact on the foreshore;
- Archaeological investigations have been undertaken;
- The planning application will comprise three elements:
 - Promenade, including car parking
 - Escarpment
 - Main structure;
- The maximum cost of the Headland Link would be £12 million, and would be funded by contributions from the Council, Welsh Assembly Government and Cardiff Harbour Authority.

The Council's Cabinet had recently agreed the management arrangements to take the Project forward and the scheme was to be completed by 31st March, 2008.

Councillor Cox invited members of the audience to view exhibits at the rear of the hall which provided information on the project.

Penarth Renewal Area

Councillor J.W. Thomas, Cabinet Member for Housing, Building Services and Community Safety, provided an overview of the project:

- it is housing-led, but does not relate solely to housing
- it involves housing, environmental and socio-economic issues
- it commenced in November 2000
- the area comprises 544 properties, of which
 - 87% are owner-occupied
 - 80% are in a state of significant disrepair
- key buildings in the area are
 - Albert Church
 - Sea Cadets building.

The aims are to improve and secure good standards of housing stock in the area and also the local environment. The project also aimed to encourage private sector investment. The Project was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

To date, some £2.8million had been invested in the area, and 129 housing units improved through the Group Repair Service. 17 new units had been provided through private finance and the Royal Hotel had been converted into flats. Feedback had been positive.

For the future, the challenge facing the Council was the improvement of a further 300 properties and the further works required to develop the Community Centre.

The following question and answer session then ensued:

<u>Question</u>	<u>Answer</u>
<p>A resident of Penarth enquired as to what the Council was doing to provide affordable housing in the area - either low cost to buy, or for rental</p>	<p>Councillor J.W. Thomas replied that the supply of affordable housing in the Vale is difficult as a result of the cost of land in the area. However, the Council is doing everything it can - for example, 20% of the Penarth Heights development will comprise affordable housing. Furthermore, the Council is looking to provide affordable housing in partnership with housing associations.</p>
<p>A local resident asked how people on middle incomes of £14 - £18 per year could afford to buy property in the area</p>	<p>Councillor J.W. Thomas replied that the Council was investigating novel ways of helping people in this situation. The Council wants affordable housing to be <u>affordable</u>. The Council also has to take into account the criteria laid down by the National Assembly of Wales.</p>
<p>A local resident:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How much money will accrue to the Vale of Glamorgan Council from the sale of Penarth Heights? 2. When will the traffic problem in Penarth be addressed? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Councillor M.R. Harvey stated that he could not divulge the final figure as it was not known yet. 2. Councillor Harvey acknowledged that there was a traffic problem in Penarth. This is why the Council is undertaking a traffic survey.
<p>A local resident expressed concerns in relation to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The block of flats that are proposed to replace the Esplanade. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council wish to make the Esplanade a place that will attract people.

<p>2. The Pier.</p> <p>3. The inability to walk as far as Cardiff following completion of the Headland Link.</p>	<p>2. The Pier Pavilion is currently occupied by a gymnastic group. The Pavilion is currently being marketed, with the intention of it becoming a tourist attraction.</p> <p>3. Cardiff Council are responsible for the area of land between the Penarth Headland Link and Cardiff Bay.</p>
<p>A local resident stated that it is impossible to find affordable housing in Penarth. How will the Council ensure that people are able to enjoy a sustainable community?</p>	<p>Councillor J.W. Thomas noted that this question was similar to one asked earlier.</p> <p>Some properties will be socially rented, some will be sold. Hopefully, something will be available for almost everyone.</p> <p>The Council had a policy whereby most housing developments included provision for 20% of the development to be devoted to social housing, and Councillor Thomas referred to the A1 Concrete Site as an example of this policy.</p>
<p>A resident asked if a community centre could be included within the Penarth Heights development.</p>	<p>Councillor Thomas recognised the need for a community centre, but stated that it was too early in the process to make any final decisions at present as the land and finance for the project had yet to be identified.</p>
<p>A resident referred to the trial traffic scheme at Glebe Street which had seemed to be successful. The day after the trial had ended, traffic congestion had returned.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox advised that a traffic study was being undertaken across the whole of the Vale. An undertaking was given that the comments made would be taken on board.</p>
<p>A local resident - suggested that the community centre be located on an area of land at the Billybanks.</p>	<p>Councillor Harvey acknowledged that this was a potential site, but reminded the questioner that the site in question was within a proposed development area and may therefore not be appropriate.</p>

<p>A local resident stated that the provision of a car park in Penarth would improve the town centre dramatically.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James agreed with the resident. Car parking is an ongoing problem, but there is no obvious area to locate a car park. The experimental traffic trials in Glebe Street resulted in many protests from the traders in the area. A fundamental review of car parking in the Vale is taking place.</p>
<p>A resident claimed that Penarth would benefit from an all-inclusive Town Plan.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James advised that the Council intended reviewing parking and social issues in the town. We had already heard of plans for the Penarth Headland Link and about the Penarth Renewal Area.</p>
<p>A resident enquired if the streets of Penarth could be upgraded.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James commented that the Council has an ongoing problem with road maintenance. The Council had inherited an agreement following local government reorganisation in 1996 whereby road maintenance funding in the former South Glamorgan Council area was split 30% (Vale), 70% (Cardiff). However, 55% of the road network fell within the Vale.</p> <p>Nevertheless, funding had been increased over recent years and would continue to increase.</p>
<p>A local resident stated that a Town Plan was required. The fabric of Penarth had declined over the past 20 years. He supported the larger schemes but felt there was a need to halt to decline of Penarth.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox stated that the Council recognised the problem.</p>
<p>A local resident referred to the management of trees.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox stated that it was not just a matter of planting trees, but planting the right type of trees.</p>

<p>A local resident referred to the increasing difficulties in finding off-road parking and stated that he had written to the Council about this 2 years ago. When will something be done?</p>	<p>Councillor Cox advised that the issue of resident's parking would form part of the study being undertaken for the Council.</p>
<p>A local resident complained about litter - especially Windsor Road on a Sunday morning. He requested the siting of litter bins in the area.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox thanked the gentleman for his comments and agreed to pass the suggestion to the appropriate officer.</p>
<p>A local resident asked if a closing time could be introduced at Alexandra Park in order to reduce the incidences of vandalism.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox stated that he was well aware of the problem and agreed that the Park be closed at night.</p>
<p>A local resident asked what the Council intended to do about the broken glass in the gutters.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox replied that this was a national problem. The Council was extremely concerned about the hazards caused by broken glass. Councillor Cox offered to provide her with a more detailed reply if she left her address with one of the officers present.</p> <p>Councillor H.J.W. James added that the Council's Regulatory Services Department was considering the implementation of a policy which prevented drinking in public. The proposals were subject to public consultation at present following which the Cabinet would consider the introduction of a policy.</p>
<p>A resident enquired as to the criteria used when Council Tax re-banding was being introduced.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James advised that the re-banding exercise had been undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government, and that he was unaware of the criteria used. Councillor James urged any resident who was dissatisfied with his Council Tax Band to appeal to the Assembly.</p>

<p>A resident stated that he could not sell his house because of the poor stated of the back lane.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James described the Alleygates initiative being undertaken in Barry and advised that the initiative is being expanded as finance becomes available.</p>
<p>A local resident referred to the state of the building on the seafront: "There seems to be an agenda to make the buildings look as dilapidated as possible.</p> <p>He also congratulated the Council for holding the State of the Area Debate.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James gave as assurance that he would ask officers to investigate any netting/boards that were on any of the seafront buildings.</p>
<p>A local resident referred to litter and the poor state of the pavements. There is only 1 litter bin in Alexandra Park.</p>	
<p>A resident referred to the absence of a Town Plan and also referred to "Planning applications being changed to deny the public access to where they did have access".</p>	<p>Councillor James agreed that the time was right for the production of a Town Plan but advised that this would not prevent such planning applications as each application was considered on its merits. The Council could, however, "list" certain key buildings that would then be protected.</p> <p>The Council's Unitary Development Plan had recently been submitted to the Welsh Assembly.</p> <p>The next step is the production of a local plan, work on which will commence soon. All the relevant issues, i.e. key buildings/Town Centres will form part of the plan.</p> <p>Councillor James referred to a recent study entitled "County Treasures" which comprised a fundamental listing of buildings in the area of special architectural interest.</p>

<p>A local resident referred to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The difficulty of crossing the Arcot Street/Windsor Road/ Hickman Road junction. 2. The need to enhance the area around Cogan Leisure Centre in view of the litter. 	<p>In reply to the first point, Councillor Cox asked Mr. Burtenshaw to leave his address so that a more substantial reply could be made.</p> <p>With regard to Cogan Leisure Centre, Councillor Cox acknowledged that this is a problem. Arrangements will be made to sort out the problem.</p>
<p>A local resident stated that she had moved to Penarth some 3 years ago. If she had intended moving into the area now, she would not be able to afford to. Couldn't the Council insist in a higher percentage that 20% for social housing in new developments.</p> <p>Also, please make Glebe Street a nicer area.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James advised that the traffic arrangements in Glebe Street were experimental. To have spent more money in the area would have been a waste in view of the traffic scheme being rescinded.</p> <p>With regard to the issue of social housing, Councillor J.W. Thomas advised that any developments about the 20% would have to be funded by the Council and the Council had no monies available for this.</p> <p>However, the Council feels that it has done well in securing a figure of 20%.</p> <p>Councillor Thomas also pointed out that the A1 site would be 100% social housing.</p>
<p>A local resident stated that following the experimental traffic arrangements in Glebe Street, a traffic survey had been promised and asked how long it would take to produce the survey.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox advised that the traffic survey had been completed but the parking element was still underway.</p>
<p>A local resident referred to the Headland Link and asked if the Vale Council could speak to Cardiff Council about opening the final part of the link.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James gave an undertaking to speak to the Leader of Cardiff Council on this matter.</p>
<p>A local resident referred to car drivers using streets in Penarth as "rat runs" and requested the introduction of 20 mph speed limits.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox agreed to take on board Mr. Salter's comments.</p>

<p>A resident enquired why the Salvation Army band had been refused a licence to play in Central Square on Christmas Eve.</p>	<p>The resident was advised that there was no requirement for a licence to be granted.</p>
<p>A local resident asked if there was a hotline that could be used in respect of graffiti.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox replied that there was indeed such a hotline, to the Council's Visible Services Directorate - it was listed in the telephone directory.</p> <p>Councillor H.J.W. James advised of the attempts by the Police to identify the perpetrators of graffiti.</p>
<p>A local resident referred to the parking problems that are experienced, and asked if the various civic offices' car parks could be opened to the public on weekends.</p>	<p>Councillor Cox agreed that the Council could consult with the Penarth Chamber of Trade on this matter.</p> <p>In Barry, the Vale of Glamorgan Council opened its car park to the public on the weekends.</p>
<p>A local resident referred to the growth in traffic travelling through Dinas Powys, especially since the opening of the A4232. Every attempt to provide a Dinas Powys by-pass had not found favour with the Assembly. Can the Vale of Glamorgan Council do something?</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James agreed, and added that submissions have been made to the Assembly many times. The Assembly had finally advised the Council not to submit another application.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Council was committed to two major road schemes: Culverhouse Cross and the Dinas Powys by-pass.</p> <p>The developments at Ferry Road had impacted on Cogan.</p> <p>The Council had opposed some of these developments in view of their impact on the Vale.</p> <p>The Council will continue to seek funding for a Dinas Powys by-pass.</p>
<p>A local resident referred to the disused Church in Wales School in Plessey Street which was being used as a dumping ground for rubbish.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James advised that the land in question was privately owned which limited the actions that the Council could take. Nevertheless, Councillor James provided an</p>

	assurance that the Council would approach the Church in Wales about the problem.
<p>A local resident referred to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The inadequacy of youth provision in Penarth. 2. The damage caused to properties by the roots of trees. 	<p>In reply, Councillor H.J.W. James stated:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council is looking for facilities for youth provision in Penarth, including consideration of the use of the former Church in Wales School, Plessey Street. 2. The Council has established a team whose responsibility is to deal with such matters and who are currently working in the worst-affected areas. It was acknowledged that Penarth was the worst-affected area and that the whole process will take some time.
<p>A resident of Penarth congratulated the Council for the redevelopment scheme in Plessey Street and asked if similar schemes were planned for the Cogan area.</p>	<p>Councillor J.W. Thomas advised that one of the aims of the Penarth Renewal Area Scheme was to extend the benefits to other areas.</p>
<p>A resident complained about the condition of a house next to the Town Centre, which was in private ownership and asked if something could be done.</p>	<p>Councillor J.W. Thomas stated that the Penarth Renewal Area Scheme was voluntary, although he felt it strange that not all people took advantage of the offer.</p>
<p>A resident expressed concern about the growth of mobile phone telephone masts. The Planning Committee will be considering such an application soon, and the resident expressed a wish that the planning application be refused.</p>	<p>Councillor H.J.W. James advised that all planning applications are looked at very carefully.</p>
<p>A local resident raised the following points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She supported the comments made earlier regarding the difficulties experienced by pedestrians crossing the Arcot Street/Windsor Road/Hickman Road junction. 	<p>Councillor Cox replied that some of these comments were outside of his Cabinet responsibilities, but pointed out that the Penarth Headland Link would drive improvements to the area and would be a catalyst for change.</p>

<p>2. Is it thought that the issues concerning the Pavilion will be resolved by the time of the opening of the Penarth Headland Link.</p>	
<p>3. Supported the concerns made earlier relating to the condition of the house (on corner of Wyndham Street and Arcot Street) - the knock on effect of which was the devaluation of nearby properties.</p>	

Councillor A. Clive Williams, Cabinet Member for Social and Care Services addressed the audience from the floor, and asked all present to bear in mind that certain matters were outside the Council's control, such as the price of houses.

Furthermore, if people were prepared to walk or use public transport to travel to and from work, there would be less traffic congestion on the roads.

The Mayor invited Councillor James to sum-up the evening's proceedings.

Councillor James recognised that each individual persons concerns was important to the Council, but also expressed the view that money was often the solution.

It was important to remember that three of the Council's largest current schemes were located within the Penarth area.

The Council is aware of the public's concerns at the state of the pavements and roads and was seeking creative ways of solving the problems.

For anyone who had experienced difficulty in contacting the Council in the past, Councillor James advised that the Council was in the process of establishing a Contact Centre which would overcome the problem of contacting the correct person within the Council Offices.

Councillor James thanked all present for attending the Debate. The Council has to make difficult decisions and in doing so, it was helpful to know what issues were of most concern to residents.

It was hoped that all present had enjoyed the question and answer session and that it was appreciated that the Council was doing its best to improve things.

The Mayor concluded the meeting by thanking the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Members and members of the public for attending, and wished all present a safe journey home.