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County Council

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Dyddiad
Date

09.05.2023

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Dear Mr. Robinson,

Thank you for your e-mailed letter of 13 March and supplementary response of 17 April.

I have liaised with officers within the service in order to provide you with a comprehensive response to the various points raised, and these are provided in numerical order below:

1. Why was the January 2022 LCC grant application. (a simple inexpensive oven ready solution) discarded out of hand unilaterally by CCC without discussion or consultation with LCC?

Having reviewed the application provided by the Community Council, I can confirm that the application was not disregarded 'out of hand' but rather the valuable information was expanded and strengthened where needed as part of the Council's grant application which was prepared at short notice having only been received some 4 working days prior to the submission date, at a time when numerous other applications were being prepared and submitted by officers. In its original format, the view of officers experienced in preparing grant applications over many years was that unfortunately as it stood, the application was unlikely to have been capable of achieving a successful outcome. The application was therefore adjusted to ensure that it maximised the opportunity to access the grant. Officers were grateful for the work that had gone into the draft and which was included in support of the application. I have included the final version of the grant application for reference.

2. Why is CCC claiming reasons were given when all the evidence demonstrates they were not?

Further to the response above, a copy of the original application provided to the County Council is attached for reference. Officers were able to expand on this document and complete the information required for it to be included for submission to the Welsh Government. It should be noted that following submission of the application, the Welsh Government specifically requested that the parameters of the study area be widened to include the proposed provision of a footway link to the Petrol Station Shop adjacent to the A487 Trunk Road towards the southern extent of the village and this was accepted as it appeared to support the wider options study approach undertaken by the County Council.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Cewch ateb Cymraeg i bob gohebiaeth Gymraeg ac ateb Saesneg i bob gohebiaeth Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English. Correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and correspondence in English will be answered in English. Corresponding in Welsh will not involve any delay.

Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive :
Cyfarwyddwyr Corfforaethol / Corporate Directors :

Eifion Evans
Barry Rees
James Starbuck

3. On what basis did CCC believe that a number of alternatives would be found, when they had previously not been able to identify even a single route? NB a feasibility study increases the time exposure to the hazards.

A report stating that alternatives are investigated - whether they ultimately are deemed viable or not – is required by the Welsh Government as part of the scheme development process and this is demonstrated by reference to the WeTAG process within the Welsh Government application Guidance and Scheme Appraisal Criteria. Having identified the transport planning objectives (road safety, opportunities for more active travel, traffic flow etc), various potential options/ solutions must be considered ahead of demonstrating the case for change and a preferred option(s) for further development with a view to construction once any necessary statutory or other permissions and agreements are secured and a scheme is fully costed.

Experience has shown that land negotiations and acquisition are often 'high risk' and can be protracted and complicated. To date, this Authority has only received copies of 'Agreements in Principle' via Mr Tudor Jones from three out of four landowners to accommodate a proposed footway link on their private land despite Llanrhystud Community Council confirming that it holds such agreements for all four landowners. It should also be noted that this is not a guaranteed land dedication allowing the scheme to proceed, especially as they have not yet been presented with any draft / detailed designs showing the land take required in order to satisfy the Welsh Governments Active Travel Guidance. Welsh Government would expect any application for construction funding to be accompanied by evidence of agreement in principle to dedicate land based on designed/costed proposals, and not an agreement to consider dedication of land for an as yet undesigned proposal.

4. Why did CCC embark on this course of action knowing that they do not have the resources required for resourcing a large feasibility study? As indeed has proved to be the case by their own self admission.

The lack of internal resources and capacity has been due to staffing vacancies which have occurred and which could not reasonably have been foreseen at the time of the original funding application.

5. Why did it take 7 months for CCC to admit the in house project had disappointingly limited progress?

The Highways Development Service of the County Council has not previously been placed in a position whereby staff posts have remained vacant for such a length of time and unfortunately this remains the case. The grant funding for the 2022/23 Financial Year was made available by the Welsh Government for a period of 12 months starting 1st April 2022 and ending on 31st March 2023. To attempt to maximise full spend and deliver the agreed work programme to develop scheme options, a decision was taken that ensured that external consultants were commissioned and I can confirm that the work has therefore been completed within the 12 months as planned.

6. What was the original target date for completion of the feasibility and what is the current status?

The grant funding was for a full financial year ending on 31st March 2023. The current status of the project is that Atkins have now completed the work and will be arranging to share this information with County Council officers shortly so as to progress the further scheme design work in FY2023/24 subject to the outcome of the Council's funding application to the Welsh Government, which is still awaited.

7. Our request for a Gantt chart is no longer worthwhile as it appears the project is out of control

Despite some unforeseen initial delays, the project has proceeded to plan within the 12 months during which the grant funding has been made available. Further progress is subject to the outcome of the grant funding application to the Welsh Government for the new Financial Year and which is currently awaited.

8. Our request for a copy of the terms of reference and objectives of the feasibility study stands

The relevant extract from the brief provided to Atkins reads:

Summary Of Brief:

It is understood that CCC require Atkins to investigate the potential for improving the Active Travel network in Llanrhystud. The scheme will look to build on previous studies, to identify and develop appropriate concept designs for potential route options linking residential areas (mainly located to the South-West of the River Wyre, TRA487 and B4337) to the primary school and Cylch Meithrin located to the North-east of the village. As requested by Welsh Government, Atkins will also consider the wider area of Llanrhystud, to investigate alternative routes for footway and/or other AT improvements from the Texaco garage in the south to the north. It is assumed that Atkins will be the CDM Principal Designer for the duration of the commission.

Objectives:

- *Active Travel Audit of all existing routes;*
- *Undertake high level Linsig model for potential options;*
- *Obtain statutory utility information and assess potential impact of proposals;*
- *Prepare high level cost estimate for concept designs;*
- *Undertake an initial high-level concept study (remaining in line with the WelTAG process) to understand the challenges and constraints associated with the short-listed route options to inform CCC's aspirations to deliver this link moving forward. The outcomes of the initial feasibility report for this scheme should be available by March 2023 to support grant funding applications for further assessments as required.*

9. Please advise how much of the original £40,000 has now been spent (on what) or is committed?

The amount claimed against the grant in FY2022/23 is just under £35k.

10. Will the feasibility study be completed and the installation completed within the 2023 - 24 year and do your replies (which are nebulous) indicate you have WG approval and a funding commitment to proceed to installation?

The study has been completed and is currently being checked for spelling and grammar prior to submission to officers. A grant application has been submitted to the Welsh Government to continue the work to develop a viable, deliverable scheme but not construction during FY2023/24.

11. Will a report be made available upon completion of the study and will LCC be properly consulted?

Yes, the report will be shared with the Community Council and I can confirm that the Community Council will be consulted by Atkins who will be undertaking the next stage this work on our behalf.

12. Why has CCC continued either not answering reasonable questions or taking the stance of obfuscation to us, the community and to its Elected Officers?

No evidence has been provided (despite being requested) to substantiate this claim in relation to the Footpath Feasibility Study, and a review of correspondence on the Council's Corporate Contact System (clic) indicates that timely responses have been provided in accordance with the Council's Customer Charter. The County Council is not therefore aware that it has failed to answer questions and cannot find any evidence to support this. It is not our intention to be obstructive or in any way evasive.

13. May we please have a commitment that CCC staff will provide timely answers to reasonable requests in the future?

As stated above under point 12, Ceredigion County Council always aims to abide by its Customer Charter. Should there be occasions when staffing resources and capacity issues result in failure to do this, then the aim is to provide responses as soon as possible.

14. Will you please instruct CCC to buy in to the CCC Engagement and Participation Policy? If this had been done, we could have avoided all this hassle and clic would become a useful tool for CCC and the community. In addition, if your feasibility team could meet with us (acer supplying the above answers) perhaps an early cost-effective resolution to our long-standing safety problem could result.

County Council service areas will consult when it is appropriate to do so in accordance with its published policies and procedures, engaging with stakeholders including Llanrhystud Community Council at the relevant and appropriate times.

I trust that the answers provided to your queries listed above demonstrate this, and that Council officers have taken appropriate decisions and actions to ensure that the proposed scheme has the best opportunity of success.

From the outset, Ceredigion County Council has been keen to work with Llanrhystud Community Council to develop a deliverable scheme at this location in order to meet the decades long aspirations of the community, and submitted a successful application for development funding for the scheme at extremely short notice in early February 2023.

Whilst I can accept, and indeed agree, that stakeholders may view the requirements and demands placed on Authorities/Organisations in terms of grant applications such as this can appear to be onerous, those requirements must be followed if WG funding and support is to be realised. Submission of an incomplete application, without following guidance would simply have resulted in the application being refused and scheme progress set back by at least a further 12 months.

As things stand, the scheme is progressing in accordance with the funding availability and business case processes required by Welsh Government.

Hopefully having outlined and evidenced the Council's reasoning behind the decisions that have been taken to date, we can look forward together and look to deliver the outcome that both organisations are working towards, and secure the necessary funding and support from Welsh Government.

Yours sincerely,



Rhodri Llwyd

Corporate Lead Officer: Highways and Environmental Services