

INFORMAL DISCUSSION

ANGEL HOTEL, ABERGAVENNY

14TH June 2023

GILESTONE FARM – ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Gerwyn Evans – Welsh Government

Colin Parry – Chairman, Talybont-on-Usk Community Council

Geraint James – Vice Chairman

Ellen Walsh-Moorman

John Jones

Clare Preece – Clerk

The meeting was called by Gerwyn Evans to enable a free-flowing and frank sharing of information between the Community Council to re-establish an open channel of co-operation and communication in relation to the Gilestone Farm project.

Gerwyn invited Councillors to put forward their issues as he was well aware that communications had broken down and he and Welsh Government recognized that they had their part to play in the lack of communication and, subsequent damaging speculation which had occurred. He offered his apologies and expressed his concern and stressed that it had never been the intention of Welsh Government to cause any level of distress to the people in Talybont-on-Usk. His hope now is that he can project the positive impact and benefits he believes the development will have and he and his team are available to consider all questions and concerns the Community have.

Cllr Parry expressed the disappointment the Community Council has felt at being used as nothing more than a conduit for information which had been released in the press and that no form of consultation had taken place in respect of the development and local people had not been given the opportunity to have their say despite being those who will be directly impacted by the Gilestone Farm development. It is his intention to conduct an official, and inclusive survey in the community to find out the public consensus of opinion; he especially wants the views of younger people and their families, a demographic whose views are currently not being voiced. Once the data from the survey has been analysed he will be able to lead the Council forward to represent the views of the whole community.

Cllr Jones made some valuable observations. The Gilestone Farm development has been the biggest thing to have happened in the valley in a lifetime. We still do not know the full extent of development and he was dismayed that the Community Council had been made to look rather foolish with public opinion of them being at an all-time low. Now is the time to pull together and work towards a common purpose of openness and transparency with Welsh Government. Gerwyn said that he and John were on the same page and agreed that this must now be the priority. Cllr Parry view was that to enable a survey to take place there will be a need for “more meat on the bone”; the flyer sent out promoting the development does not contain enough information on which to base meaningful survey questions.

The Welsh Government did not consult on their purchase of Gilestone as there is no requirement for them to consult on undertaking economic activity in line with their policy agenda and they have the remit to take risk in delivering policy ambitions. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 is “an act unique to Wales which gives Welsh Government the ambition, permission and legal obligation to improve our social, cultural and economic wellbeing” and it is something this development hopes to achieve backed by the underpinning values laid out in the Joint Supplementary Planning Guidance “Enabling Sustainable Development in Welsh National Parks” to “conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, wildlife and cultural heritage and to “promote opportunities for public understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities”. Gerwyn made assurances that the Welsh Government will not break their own laws and that they are made accountable for all actions by a process of internal audit. It is a well known fact that there is a huge economic crisis nationwide and that the only way to strengthen the economy is by investment and growth which is at the heart of the project and the retaining of the Green Man brand in Wales, a brand which has already generated a large amount of money for the Welsh economy.

Cllr James said he will be especially interested as a business owner with a history stretching back five generations in Talybont, to learn more about plans to generate training and employment opportunities for young people in the area.

Questions were raised concerning the frequency, scale and nature of festivals that will take place at the site as this seemed to be one of the main concerns of groups of people who are opposed to the development. Gerwyn said that the proposal for the staging of live experiences will take place in phases from one in the first year then being increasing to three a year by year five. Through the planning authority the Community council will be consulted in respect of licencing and other planning issues. The Chairman pointed out how it is the wishes of the Council for all planning applications to go to committee instead of the being decided by a planning officer and that how, comments made on planning applications made by the Council have largely been disregarded in the past. Cllr Jones asked how Welsh Government, as landlords at the site, intended to control the activities of Green Man. Gerwyn said that these types of terms and conditions will be written into the lease agreement and it is hoped that the Community Council will have a chance to be consulted on the proposal going forward. There are major concerns that the area is impacted by over tourism as it is and that the roads and other infrastructure will not be able to survive the impact of an increase in footfall and the inevitable increase in traffic on the surrounding rural road network. Gerwyn made assurances that traffic management consultations would take place to ensure events were viable and that there was no intention to move the Green Man festival from it’s current site near Crickhowell. He stressed the importance of keeping the brand in Wales and preventing it from being bought by a large music conglomerate over which there would be no control.

The farming at the site and the plans to develop a brewery and bakery were discussed in principle. Questions were raised as to whether the business plan had been well thought through and well advised. Those with expertise in the fields pointed out the limitations and constraints of these activities due to flooding, phosphate levels in the river Usk, climate unsuitability for the growing of wheat and industrial development more in keeping with an

industrial estate than an area of outstanding natural beauty. Gerwyn said that Welsh Government had no intention of being irresponsible landlords and that he really did not want what they see as a project that could bring opportunities to an area causing so much angst as it has; this has never been Welsh Government's intention. He pointed out that Research and Development is fundamental to the success Gilestone.

Cllr Moorman raised the point that previously asked questions hadn't received a response. Gerwyn responded that FAQ's will be regularly updated but that some questions may remain unanswered due to the confidential nature of the request. Gerwyn also made the point that there is an information email on the website circulated by Green Maan where questions can be asked.

The meeting drew to a close with Gerwyn committing on behalf of Welsh Government to attend an open public meeting in the Community when the time would be right to do so and those present felt positive and hopeful for future discussion surrounding the Gilestone Farm project.

Clare Preece 15/6/2023