

# Gilestone Farm Stakeholder Meeting

17 March 2023

Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon

## Attendees:

- Welsh Government (4 representatives)
- Powys County Council (2 representatives)
- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (2 representatives)
- County Council Elected Representative (1 representative)
- Community Council Elected Representative (1 representative)
- Green Man (2 representatives)

Powys County Council wished to note that two neighbouring Powys County Councillors and one neighbouring Community Council had also requested being able to attend this meeting. However, attendance for this meeting had been limited for practical reasons to those who may play a formal role in any processes linked to the future of Gilestone Farm.

It was also noted that James Evans MS had also requested to attend the meeting, which was also declined, with the same reasoning provided.

## **Welcome and introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to Theatr Brycheiniog and thanked them for their time and attendance. A round table exercise was undertaken for all attendees to introduce themselves.

## **Background**

The Chair provided some background to the acquisition to the site at Gilestone Farm. It was noted that officials had been in discussions with representatives from Green Man since 2019 to secure a suitable site to expand the brand. This project did not include a consideration to move the Green Man Festival from its current home at Glanusk Estate to Gilestone Farm. Representatives of Green Man noted that the site at Gilestone Farm is simply not big enough to accommodate any event of the scale of the current Green Man Festival and as such, moving the Green Man Festival or hosting similar scale events is not a consideration at the site.

The Chair noted that economic development projects in Powys had traditionally been challenging due to the unique geography and environment of the county. This project sought to work with an internationally recognised creative brand, with environmental sustainability at its core, to deliver an economic development project in a rural community.

The Chair provided an overview of the levels of correspondence and government business that had been involved with this project. Nearly 50% of all government business allocated to Creative Wales over the past 12 months was connected to Gilestone Farm. BBNPA and Powys County Council had also received significant volumes of correspondence and enquiries.

It was noted that there had been a number of instances where representatives of Green Man and elected local members had been individually targeted by opponents of the proposed scheme. It was also noted that this had become increasingly personal over the past number of months and it was agreed that such behaviour was not acceptable.

In conclusion, it was noted that this meeting had been called specifically with stakeholders who would play a formal role of the project should it progress. It was hoped that this meeting would seek to agree a way forward and to ensure that the locals are provided with accurate and timely information on the project.

It was confirmed that there was a current Farm Business Tenancy in place at Gilestone Farm until October 2023. It was noted that no decisions would be taken at this meeting on the future of the site and that a decision would be taken by Welsh Government Ministers. It is intended that advice will shortly be submitted to the Minister for Economy for a decision on the next stages of the process.

Several attendees noted the importance of a strong Communications Strategy to accurately communicate with the local community and to allow for open and honest discussion. This was unanimously agreed.

### **Presentation by Green Man**

A presentation was made by representatives of Green Man summarising the main activities proposed for the site.

### **Questions and Discussion**

The Community Council representative and the County Councillor noted the need for more information on how these plans would affect the community day to day. The plan needed to be placed in the context of the village and individual villagers, for example information provided on the potential increased traffic and noise. It was noted that this work would form part of the licensing assessment with the local authority and would be undertaken before relevant activities were allowed to proceed.

The County Councillor noted the current traffic issues in Talybont-on-Usk and highlighted the previous discussions around a car park for the village and the lack of pavement. The County Councillor felt strongly that these issues would need to be discussed and form part of a wider support package for the community from the relevant stakeholders if agreement for the lease of the site is reached.

It was queried whether a full environmental assessment would be undertaken before any activities proceeded. Representatives of Green Man confirmed that all necessary assessments would be undertaken prior to the commencement of any activities.

The Community Council representative observed that at the Green Man Festival, the attendees leave the site and travel into Crickhowell and noted that this could cause issues in the village. Representatives from Green Man noted that this is encouraged as the local business community in Crickhowell want the attendees to contribute to the local economy. It was noted that this can be tailored to individual projects and if the local community want attendees for the smaller scale events planned for Gilestone to remain on site, then this can be controlled.

The Leader of Powys County Council noted that the current challenges faced by the county were extremely serious. The demographics of the county had changed significantly towards an economically inactive demographic over a number of years and that change was accelerating. The level of challenges faced by local infrastructure such as the school system and the health system were huge and unfortunately getting worse. The Leader noted that it was imperative that proposals such as this were given due consideration in order to try and provide economic opportunities to ensure that the county was able to retain and maintain families and economic activity.

The official from Powys County Council noted that the local authority were in principle open to considering developments such as the one proposed here, subject to all the necessary detail being provided and properly considered. It was also noted that the local authority was not really in a position to formally engage on the project until a decision had been made by a Welsh Government Minister on the next stage of the process.

An official from Brecon Beacons National Park Authority agreed with the views of Powys County Council and the importance of giving due consideration to developments such as proposed. It was noted that Brecon Beacons National Park Authority would also be open to the production of a holistic plan which could properly consider this proposal with its significant opportunities within the wider place and public policy setting and which would coincide with the consideration of this proposal. This would need to be independently facilitated given the differing views within the community.

A further discussion was held around the potential for noise at the small scale events proposed for the site. Representatives of Green Man noted that an initial noise levels assessment had been undertaken by an external expert however more assessment would be needed on being granted access to the site. It would be intended that noise sensors would be placed all around the valley to live monitor the noise escaping from the site to ensure compliance.

More information was requested on the jobs proposed to be created. Representatives from Green Man noted that these would be attractive skilled jobs across a range of different areas within the Green Man brand and in addition, the proposed Creative Hub would also create jobs, promote entrepreneurship and offering business mentoring to emerging businesses.

Representatives from Green Man asked what they could do to work with the community to help aid their concerns. They noted that this proposal is an attempt to develop economic activity in an area of Wales that had traditionally been difficult to develop. It was noted that environmental issues were at the heart of everything that Green Man does and the last thing that they want to do is undertake any activity that will go against those core issues. It was noted by locally elected members that communication is key and the community deserves to know the detail of what is planned. Representatives of Green Man noted that they understand and are happy to provide that information however they also noted that there had been a major breakdown of trust with individuals being unfairly targeted in public.

## **Next Steps**

The Chair noted that representatives of Green Man had been requesting a communications plan be agreed for the proposal for some time however Welsh Government had been unable to agree to this request until a decision had been taken by the Minister. It was unanimously agreed that a joint Communications Strategy should be devised if the Ministerial decision is made to proceed to formal lease negotiations. Creative Wales will contact all representatives to advise once the decision had been taken. It was agreed that this Communications Strategy would include community feedback.

Discussions were held about potential options to allow the local community to learn more about the proposals and provide their views. The representative from the Community Council and the County Councillor were asked to discuss this with the Community Council at their meeting of 20 March and provide feedback to Creative Wales officials on how this could be achieved.

It was agreed that a formal note of this meeting would be drafted by Creative Wales officials and shared with all attendees for accuracy before being finalised.