



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PONTLLANFRAITH
ON THURSDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER 2006 AT 4.00 PM**

PRESENT:

Councillor L. Gardiner - Chairman

Councillor K. Etheridge

Together with:

I. MacVicar (Business Development Officer), A. Highway (Town Centre Development Manager), S. Smith (Senior Assistant Engineer), A. Dallimore (Team Leader- Urban Renewal), J. Elliot (Policy Officer) and D. Phillips (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Mrs E. Mantle (Blackwood Town Council)

Mr C. Cook (Access Group)

Mrs J. Fletcher (Market Traders)

Mr P. Lambert (Local Business)

PC C. Hughes and PS 263 Muirhead (Heddlu Gwent Police)

Messrs C. Sharpe and J. Organ (Local Residents)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor N. Dix, Mr C. Kearns (Blackwood Shopping Precinct), Mrs P. Thomas (Licensed Trade), Mrs C. Dix (Blackwood Town Council) and J. Rogers (Senior Solicitor – CCBC).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the following minutes be approved as a correct record:-

Blackwood Town Centre Management Group held on 28th September 2006.

3. BLACKWOOD INTERCHANGE

Mr Stuart Smith, Senior Assistant Engineer, introduced a report on the Blackwood Interchange to the Management Group. He explained that the report advised members of the progress to date in relation to the Blackwood interchange and because of a delay outlined proposals for temporary bus stop arrangements from December 2006.

The commencement of the Blackwood interchange project was intentionally delayed until after Christmas 2005 following concerns from local businesses that the project would be detrimental to their trade. During the work buses had been decanted onto the High Street although traders in the market place expressed concern regarding the loss of footfall. It was therefore agreed that the contractor would endeavour to work to partial completion of the bus apron in order that bus services could be re-introduced from the site from 1st December 2006. However at a meeting in October it became apparent that the whole of the proposed bus apron would not be available for all bus services and an urgent meeting was subsequently held with the two main operating companies (Islwyn Borough Transport(IBT) and Stagecoach). It was agreed with these companies that IBT would continue to operate from the High Street and Stagecoach from the partially complete bus station. The decision was considered by officers to be the most reasonable and achievable proposal under the circumstances.

Further progress meetings will be held and although the current contract programme gave a completion date of late March, the project team will still attempt to achieve an earlier completion date.

Mr Smith assured the Management Group that a number of issues including health and safety had been considered in reaching this proposal and the final decision had needed to be agreed and endorsed by the bus companies.

Finally Mr Smith confirmed that publicity for the new arrangements would be given and leaflets could be distributed in the vicinity of the town centre informing the public of any change.

In response to a question on how a particular bus company was allocated to a location, Mr Smith responded that the council could not insist on any new arrangements with the bus companies. The proposal outlined in the report was agreed following discussions with the two main companies.

Mr Lambert, a local businessman, considered that the proposal in the report could cause confusion to the public if further temporary bus sites are agreed and that it may be prudent to keep to the present temporary arrangements. There may also be problems in notifying all passengers within a short period of time. Mr Smith responded that regrettably due to a constraint on timescales alternative arrangements were needed to be considered quickly. He would however ensure that any change would be conveyed to the public as soon as possible.

Mr Lambert also questioned if the proposals in the report would be implemented regardless of consultation and Mr Smith assured him that bringing the report to this Management Group was part of the consultation and that he would convey all the comments from the meeting to the Chief Engineer.

Councillor Etheridge referred to recent email correspondence on this matter with a member of the highways department, when he had asked a number of questions regarding the scheme. Mr Smith suggested that he arrange a meeting with Councillor Etheridge and the Chief Engineer to respond to the questions.

A representative of the Police indicated that because traffic wardens are very pro-active in the main street the present situation of buses picking up passengers there was not causing major difficulties.

Mrs Fletcher, a local market trader, expressed concern at the proposed arrangements and suggested that changing the locations of the two main bus companies (IBT to the new bus station and Stagecoach remain on the High Street) would be more beneficial to the market traders who were presently experiencing a very quiet period without passing trade from the local bus passengers.

Mr Highway, the Town Centre Development Manager, reminded the Management Group that the pre Christmas period was crucial to the retailers in the town centre. He explained that the Town Centre Management Group could make a recommendation for officers to consider, either to accept the proposal outlined in the report or an alternative proposal to keep all buses temporary on the High Street.

Mr Smith indicated that although the proposed arrangements were an attempt to accommodate the traders, bus operators, shoppers and passengers, he would immediately convey the comments from the meeting to appropriate officers for further consideration.

4. BLACKWOOD PUBLIC ARTWORK STRATEGY – INSTALLATION OF TIMELINE

Mr Dallimore, Team Leader- Urban Renewal, introduced a report giving details of Phase 2 of the artwork strategy for the town of Blackwood. The Blackwood Arts Sub Group have commissioned Michael Fairfax to develop and install a "time line" through the town to delineate the main historical events in the development of Blackwood. Local groups and school children have been involved in developing a series of 9 bronze reliefs to be set into the pavements throughout the High Street. Photographs illustrating 8 of the 9 pieces were included in the report and Mr Dallimore gave details of the significance of each. The Council's DDA Officer will ensure that the location and design will not constitute a hazard for pedestrians.

It is anticipated that the work will commence and the end of February 2007.

Members noted the report.

5. UPDATE ON WORK OF MULTI AGENCY PROBLEM SOLVING GROUP

PC Hughes gave a verbal update on measures being taken by the Police within the Blackwood Centre on anti social behaviour. He reported that during the last 6 weeks over 200 fixed penalty notices had been issued in the town centre. There is presently a policy of zero tolerance for anti social behaviour. He also reported that no complaints had been received in the last few weeks regarding anti social behaviour at the rear of the Blackwood Food and Wine store. A representative reported that there had been a recent incident of damage to a market stall and PC Hughes indicated that CCTV cameras may have recorded the vandalism. He referred to the Shop Alert System which gives premises a direct telephone line with the CCTV control room.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT

The October Environmental Audit for Blackwood Town Centre was received and noted.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled meeting of the Management Group had been arranged for March 2007. However following concerns the Chairman agreed that another earlier date may be arranged for the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 4.55pm

CHAIRMAN