



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PONTLLANFRAITH
ON WEDNESDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY 2008 AT 4.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor L. Gardiner - Chairman

Together with:

I. MacVicar (Business Development Manager), A. Highway (Town Centre Development Manager), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), S. Smith (Senior Assistant Engineer), A. Dallimore (Team Leader – Urban Renewal), R. Campbell (Senior Assistant Engineer), J. Elliot (Research Officer) and D. Phillips (Partnership Support Officer).

Together with:

Messrs. C. Sharp and J. Organ and Ms. D. Davies (Local Residents)
Mrs. E.D. Mantle and Mr. D. Jones (Blackwood Town Council) and Mr. J. Hold (Clerk - Blackwood Town Council)
Mrs. B. Edwards (Blackwood Chamber of Trade)
Mr. C. Cook (Caerphilly Access Group)
Inspector Doidge and Sergeant Muirhead

APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Mr. P. Lambert (Chamber of Trade).

1. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Hold and Mrs. Edwards to the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

3. MINUTES

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

Blackwood Town Centre Management Group held on 15th November 2007.

Matters Arising

4. Chartist Fair (minute 9)

A question was raised regarding the Chartist Fair and if the event would be repeated. Mr. Highway responded that unfortunately funding had not been secured through the council's event budget when a report was presented to Cabinet. In addition, the adverse comments received from many of the retailers after the event (e.g. comments regarding the positioning of the larger fairground rides) had meant that the substantial sponsorship money from the company who supplied these rides would not be available.

It was suggested that the rides could be positioned in another location although it was noted that this would not be feasible as they had been positioned where the High Street was widest to allow emergency vehicles to access if necessary.

5. BLACKWOOD INTERCHANGE USER SATISFACTION

Mr. Smith outlined a report giving details on user satisfaction before and after the Blackwood Interchange development. The report gave an indication of how users and operators of the bus interchange view the facility.

Mr Smith gave details from the report and made reference to the present works at the Interchange. Work to replace defective manhole covers is currently being progressed by the contractor and until the work is completed the area is protected. It is hoped that the work will be completed shortly.

A concern raised by the representative of the access group was regarding the colour of the pillars at the interchange. The present colour is unsuitable for partially sighted people as they blend in with the background colour. It was suggested that the architect may have chosen this colour for aesthetics but that Mr Smith would meet with the Access Group to discuss the concern.

A concern was also raised regarding the public conveniences. Members of the Group also expressed concern and gave examples of when the toilets were closed during the day. Mr. Smith reported that he would report the concerns to the department responsible (Public Services) and Mr. MacVicar also indicated that although problems regarding the disabled toilet had been included on the Town Centre Improvement Audit he would also ensure that the other concerns were included. During the discussion concern was expressed on the lack of toilet facilities in the town for shoppers and a number of schemes including shops offering their toilet facilities in return for some financial reward and also the introduction of a card for shoppers to explain their needs on health grounds was reported. It was confirmed that a letter had been received from the Town Council regarding the former public conveniences at High Street and this had also been included on the Town Centre Improvement Audit.

6. EXPERIMENTAL CLOSURE PROPOSAL FOR HIGH STREET, BLACKWOOD

Mr. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager) reported that a he had prepared a report to give a background and to seek views on a temporary experimental Traffic Regulation Order which will be used to assist the Police in dealing with the ongoing 'Car Cruiser' problem on the High Street of Blackwood.

Two representatives from Gwent Police were also present to outline the present situation. Sergeant Muirhead reported that although the situation had recently improved during the winter there may be further problems again in the summer months. The ability to enforce a temporary closure of High Street would be an additional measure but would be used only when necessary.

The Traffic Regulation Order would propose the closure of High Street on a temporary experimental basis from 7pm until 4am between the junction of Bridge Street and the access of the KFC restaurant and although the problems have mainly been on a Thursday the Traffic Order would cover every day as the Police would need the flexibility should there be problems on another day.

It was agreed that although the Group supported the proposal in principle, widespread public consultation on the proposal should be considered as there may be a potential impact on the side streets and nearby businesses such as the Blackwood Miners Institute if the High Street was closed. There would also need to be an assurance that the Police would have enough resources to deal with any issues arising from the closure.

Mr. Campbell reported that he had been contacted by Councillor Etheridge regarding the proposal. Councillor Etheridge had stated that residents must be fully consulted and not only via a public meeting. He considered that a questionnaire should be delivered to all the surrounding streets that may be affected. Traders should also be consulted.

He would seek an assurance that the car cruisers will not attempt to use other routes off the High Street and that an adequate police presence would be provided.

The Police reported that there would be a 'pull down' sign on the highway and that barriers could be used if necessary. They were confident that adequate resources would be available if the Order was imposed and confirmed that the intention of the Order was not to disperse the cars to other areas. It was noted that the proposal was the last of 19 action points used to prevent the High Street being used by car cruisers.

Regarding the consultation it was proposed by the Group that a public meeting should be considered - notices could possibly be placed in many of the retail shops, the library and the Customer First Centre and leaflets delivered to local residents.

It was confirmed that the Town Council would be consulted as a statutory body for the Road Traffic Order.

An article in Newline would inform the majority of households of the proposal and it was suggested that an insert for Blackwood residents only could give further details. Mr. Campbell confirmed that although the article would be brief and was mainly to raise awareness he would investigate this suggestion of the insert for Blackwood residents.

The Group therefore supported the proposal providing that adequate consultation would be held with all parties.

INFORMATION ITEMS

7. Retail Job Creation Blackwood 2007

The report gave information on the number of jobs created and lost in Blackwood Town Centre throughout 2007. It was noted that 42 jobs were gained and only 26 lost during this period.

The Group thanked Mr Highway for the interesting and positive report and suggested that some publicity should be gained from the positive report. Mr MacVicar indicated that he would liaise with the communications section to arrange this.

8. Blackwood TCIG – Audit – January 2008

The following points were raised from the Town Centre Improvement Group Audit:-

- (a) Northern Retail Park – noted that this item had previously been closed but would again be added to the Audit as the problems had reappeared.
- (b) River of Light Parade – Congratulations given to the organisers – event successful although poor weather – question raised on number of schools involved in lantern workshops – will be checked.

(The Town Council indicated that they may be able to help with sponsorship of the event).

9. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 29th May at 4.30 p.m.
