



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PONTLLANFRAITH
ON THURSDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER 2008 AT 4.30 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor K. Smallman – Chairman

Councillor:

R. Davies – Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Countryside

Together with:

A. Dallimore (Team Leader – Urban Renewal), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), J. Jones (Scrutiny Co-ordinator), R. Campbell (Senior Assistant Engineer), A. Highway (Town Centre Development Manager), J. Elliott (Research Officer), D. Phillips (Partnership Support Officer) and S. Slocombe (Welsh Assembly Government)

Also Present:

Messrs C. Sharp and Ms D. Davies (Local Residents), C. Cook (Access Group), Mr. P. Lambert (Local Business), Mrs B. Edwards (Blackwood Chamber of Trade), A. Farina-Childs (Blackwood Town Council) and J. Hold (Clerk- Blackwood Town Council).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K. Etheridge and Mrs K. Presley, I.G. MacVicar (Business Development Officer), D. Jones (Blackwood Town Councillor) and J. Organ (Local Resident).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES

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

Blackwood Town Centre Management Group held on 4th June 2008.

3. BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE AUDIT

The following comments were raised on the Audit:

Page 2- Southern Pedestrian Linkages – Noted that the sewage leak at this location is now being discussed between Welsh Water and the developer.

Page 4- Library Works, Blackwood Road – Artwork called 'The Lantern' now in place outside the library. Information sheets explaining the work available from the library. Blackwood Art Sub-Group to be re-formed and names of any interested parties to be submitted to the Clerk of the Management Group.

Page 5 Former Public Convenience Site – High Street

Jonathan Jones (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) was attending the meeting to report on this item. It was noted that at the previous meeting a request be submitted to the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee to reconsider the closure of the public toilets on High Street. The Cabinet Member for the Environment and Housing considered the matter and was not prepared for the issue to be reconsidered by Cabinet and referred onto the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee.

A further request was received by the Chief Executive for the matter to be considered by the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee and this was refused after consultation with the Head of Legal Services.

Mr. Jones explained that the constitution provided that reports to scrutiny committees could be requested by members of the committee or put on the agenda by senior officers. Following Cllr Etheridge's request, this position had been reconsidered but it had been decided that allowing reports to be put on a scrutiny committees' agenda by a third party could result in overloading a committee's workload.

The Council have now received a Notice of Motion from Councillor Etheridge.

The Management Group requested however that the property be not offered for sale at the present time and Mr. Highway indicated that he would make this request on their behalf.

Page 7 – Busker Annoyance

Officers were asked to examine if the 'Big Issue' vendors or insurance claim vendors in the town centre require a permit or licence from the authority and if there are any powers to regulate the number.

4. BLACKWOOD STUDY – THE WAY FORWARD

A presentation from Jenny Heal and Martin Sullivan (Powell Dobson Consultants) on Blackwood Town Centre – The Way Forward, was given to the Management Group.

The development and proposals from the study were outlined and it was reported that preliminary discussions to the study had been held with a number of officers from the council, the Welsh Assembly Government, local ward members and the Town Council.

The aim of the study was to try and create a climate of confidence in the town. Blackwood town is facing severe challenges and these need to be addressed in a constructive way; it is important to differentiate from the town's competitors. The nature of shopping has changed with the introduction of internet shopping and the proximity of local city shopping and free car parking at Cwmbran all mean there is high competition for trade.

In order to re-design High street case studies from Europe have been looked at which indicated that vehicles are more aware of pedestrians if the clutter of signs, guard rails and bollards in the town centre are reduced. Examples of the removal of road markings (in Holland) and kerbs (Newcastle) were outlined.

The aim of the study will be to re-design High Street as a memorable sense of place to visit, to establish the High Street as a design which sets a standard for the rest of Wales and to make a welcoming and accessible area for pedestrians to shop.

A further aim will also be to try and achieve ease of movement throughout the High Street with vehicles and pedestrians areas marked by different materials (which should be robust, cost effective, local and sustainable). A median strip in the centre would allow for cycles, benches etc.

The Management Group made a number of comments on the Study:-

- Would buses still use the High Street? – *response was yes*
- It was confirmed that any work would be completed on a phased basis.
- Would lower profile brick kerbing cause flooding problems? – *it was confirmed that drainage would be incorporated in any new scheme and also the introduction of more trees would be a positive contribution towards this concern.*

The Chairman thanked the consultants for their presentations and invited members of the Group to view the display boards and discuss the proposals immediately after the meeting. He also reported that future consultation on the proposals would be held with all stakeholders.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following items were reported:

- a) the poor appearance of the local buses, especially one company;
- b) A request was made for litter to be removed around the St Margaret's Church area, especially on weekends.

The Group were disappointed that a representative from the Police was again unable to attend.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 20th November at 4.30pm – Pontllanfraith Council Chamber

The meeting closed at 5.35pm.