



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PONTLLANFRAITH
ON THURSDAY 21ST MAY 2009 AT 4.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor K. Smallman – Chairman

Councillors :

Mrs K. Preseley and K. Etheridge

Together with:

I. MacVicar (Business Development Officer), A. Highway (Town Centre Development Manager), B. Campbell (Senior Assistant Engineer), J. Elliott (Research Officer) and D. Phillips (Partnership Support Officer).

Also Present:

Mr P Lambert (Local Business) Mr C. Sharp and Ms D. Davies (Local Residents) and D. Davies (Blackwood Town Council) and J. Hold (Clerk- Blackwood Town Council).

Inspector K. Childs and PC K. Hughes and Sergeant N. Jones

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R. Davies, A. Dallimore (Team Leader – Urban Renewal), Mr J. Organ (Local Resident) and Town Councillor A. Farina-Childs.

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 12th March 2009.

Matters Arising

3. New Artwork – Gravel Lane - minute 5(b)

A report had been prepared from Mr Allan Dallimore outlining the technical and physical difficulties in progressing the original proposed artwork for Gravel Lane. A smaller scheme has therefore been agreed with a replacement pedestrian deflection barrier and handrail to give an element of visual interest to the space. Photographs of the changes were included in the report. Members discussed the project and expressed concern regarding the barriers

which appeared to be detrimental to the traders in the lane although it was explained that they simply replaced existing barriers and were of a higher specification. It was agreed that Mr Dallimore would provide a detailed response at the next meeting.

4. Criminal Damage - minute 5 (a)

Mr Highway reported that he had contacted the Control Room of the CCTV and had been assured that all the cameras in the town centre were in working order. He reminded members that any instances of anti social behaviour should be reported as soon as possible in order for the cameras to be correctly positioned and record any incidents.

5. Car Cruising Problems In Blackwood Town Centre

Inspector Childs outlined the history and the problems associated with the car cruisers in the town centre and his suggestions to try and address these issues.

The problems in the town centre and more recently at the Asda car park has become a major concern for the area and Inspector Childs as a newly appointed Inspector for the area is anxious to try and address the issue for health and safety reasons and to improve the quality of life for the local residents.

Inspector Childs explained that Blackwood High Street has for many years been used by youngsters on a Thursday evening to parade their cars and that recently an additional problem has been large numbers congregating at the Asda car park.

The most successful initiative used in the past to combat the problem was a Dispersal Notice. However, this is the time limited and could not continue endlessly. The most favoured option was a road closure on a Thursday night to run for a trial period of six months. As many of the drivers are not local and travel long distances to Blackwood, a road closure at the end of their journey may deter them from coming.

Inspector Childs reported that there would need to be a partnership approach to be successful and that representatives from Asda would be crucial as a road closure would possibly be ineffective without addressing the problems associated with their car park.

The proposal from the Police is therefore to have a multi agency working group (to include representatives from Asda, local authority, town council, local ward members and the local community) and to close the High Street one evening a week for a six month trial period. A concern in the past has been a possible lack of police resources but with the recent reorganisation neighbourhood policing now with a dedicated section, an assurance was given by Inspector Childs that adequate resources would be made available.

The following points were outlined:-

- The first few weeks would be well staffed but hopefully could be reduced as the numbers of cars visiting would decrease.
- There may be a need to be flexible in the days of the road closure as the car cruisers may attempt to use an alternative evening.
- On the first week they will be dispersed to other surrounding areas – this must be monitored to learn from the pattern and experiences.
- Traffic police would be very involved and speed cameras in use.
- Exemptions from the road closure would be local residents, taxi's and buses and disabled badge holders.

It must be remembered that it is not just a road closure – other initiatives would be implemented and used in conjunction with the closure.

A number of questions and comments were made by the members:-

Why is there a problem in Blackwood and not other local towns ?

Inspector Childs replied that most town centres are pedestrian or restricted access only and it has become a habit over many years which needs to be broken.

If the High Street is closed where will they be dispersed to?

The Police will guide them to an alternative location - exact details of where would be discussed at a multi task working group.

There are other problems such as noise pollution in the town – will anything be done about that?

Mr MacVicar indicated that he would discuss this issue with the Environmental Health Department and if necessary add the item to the Town Centre Audit.

Councillor Etheridge raised a series of points:-

- Police need to get the trust of the public back.
- Time scales for operation.
- There is a need for a communication strategy.
- Dispersal Notice not resourced – what resources will be available?
- Would there be difficulties in the implementation for six months.
- Asda need to communicate with local ward members and there will need to be written guarantees of co-operation.
- Dispersal of traffic to surrounding roads.
- Effective communication with businesses and public houses.
- Need for an Action Plan.
- Previous Business Plan recommendations.

Inspector Childs responded to these points and indicated that the road closure would only be part of a series of measures- local drivers would need to be accommodated with new initiatives as it's the drivers from other towns that need to be discouraged.

Mr Campbell clarified that an experimental regulation traffic order could be granted for a maximum of 18 months and suggested that 6 months would probably be the minimum timescale for a valid experiment. The order would need a considerable amount of consultation and a commitment from all partners.

The Management Group thanked Inspector Childs for all his work and would look forward to working with him for the future of Blackwood Town Centre.

6. Town Centre Improvement Group – Environmental Audit May 2009

The following items were discussed:-

7. Southern Pedestrian Linkages (Page 1)

Thanks were recorded to Councillor Etheridge for his persistence in helping to resolve this issue.

8. Loading Bay Issues (Page 4)

Suggested that the newly appointed traffic warden for Blackwood should be made aware of this situation and provide feedback when appropriate.

9. Dog Fouling & Litter Enforcement (Page 7)

Reported that broken glass and litter had still not been removed from the steps at the lane near the Blackwood Miners Institute.

10. Broken Fence – Cliff Road (Page 7)

Fence repaired.

11. Street Pastor Scheme – Town Centre

It was explained that the scheme offered support to young people involved in the town's night time economy and although it was planned for Christmas did not materialise – Finance required and request for £1,000 from the Area Forum Budget towards expenses to launch the scheme e.g. purchase of high visibility jackets.

Agreed that a contribution of £1,000 from the Area Forum Budget be granted to the Street Pastor Scheme.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A concern was raised on the recent withdrawal of cardboard recycling for retailers in the town centre. Mr MacVicar replied that this was also a concern at the Bargoed Town Centre Management Group and members should express their concerns regarding lack of consultations and the withdrawal of the facility to the Director of the Environment.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 10th September 2009 at 4.30pm – Pontllanfraith Council Chamber

The meeting closed at 5.55pm