



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PONTLLANFRAITH ON THURSDAY 21ST OCTOBER 2010 AT 4.30 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor K. Smallman – Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs K. Presley and N. Dix

Messrs C. Sharp and J. Organ and Ms D. Davies (Local Residents), J. Hold (Blackwood Town Council) Mr P. Lambert (Local Business) and PC N. Jones.

Together with:

J. Bennett (Group Manager – Advisory Services), A. Dallimore (Urban Renewal Manager), A. Highway (Town Centre Development Manager), J. Elliott (Research Officer), P. Hudson (Senior Events and Marketing Officer), R. Lloyd (Special Projects Officer), T. White (Waste Strategy and Operations Manager) and D. Phillips (Partnership Support Officer).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R. Davies (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Countryside) and Town Councillors A. Farina-Childs and D. Davies.

WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Dix to his first meeting of the Blackwood Town Centre Management Group since he was recently elected as a local councillor.

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

2. MINUTES

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

Blackwood Town Centre Management Group held on 22nd April 2010.

MATTERS ARISING

3. Freedom of the Borough for Royal Welsh (Minute no 3)

Congratulations were recorded to all involved in the arrangements and it was reported that there was a very good attendance in the town to welcome the Royal Welsh on the day.

4. Flyposting – Former Woolworths Store (Minute 8)

Noted that flyposters had been removed from the building.

5. NEW ARTWORK IN BLACKWOOD

Mr Dallimore circulated illustrations of horse brass designs from 3 local schools which will be judged at the end of the month and the winners displayed with the tram workhorses. It was reported that Blackwood Town Council would be presenting each child who participated with a certificate and cheques to the 3 finalists.

It was suggested by the Clerk of the Town Council that an unveiling ceremony with local schools involved be held and Mr Dallimore indicated that he would discuss the feasibility of arranging an event with the clerk.

6. UPDATE ON GREEN CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

Mr Hudson was attending the meeting to give an update on arrangements for the Christmas Dickensian Fayre at Blackwood on 4th and 5th December.

The event will be in conjunction with Environmental Services and be themed around Dickensian entertainment and a Green Christmas. The event will use previous centre event experience and lessons learnt from the Blackwood Chartist Fayre held in 2007.

The event will consist of craft and food stalls, street entertainment, Santa's Grotto, musical entertainment and historical characters.

Mr Hudson reported that all retailers have been contacted regarding contributing to a discount book to encourage shoppers to spend in the shops on that weekend and a good response has been received.

There are also 100,000 promotion leaflets to circulate across South Wales and radio, press, email and a social media campaign will be taking place to promote the event.

A map was circulated illustrating the proposed layout for the Christmas Fayre.

Mr Hudson requested a contribution of £2,000 from the Area Forum Budget towards the event.

Mr Lloyd added that the event will promote a 'green' message and a range of activities and free samples promoting this will be given out.

Members endorsed the proposals and hoped that the event would be a success with visitors returning to visit the town regularly after the event.

A number of comments/questions were made from the Group regarding the event –

- There will be a need to provide extra toilets for the event;
- The layout will be important – visitors need to be able to walk laterally as well as parallel along the High Street in order to cross to other stores;
- Working to promote the event with the local schools will probably increase visitor numbers;
- Could a park and ride facility be considered?

Finally a suggestion was made that free parking should be provided on that weekend to encourage visitors to spend longer in the town. (It was noted that a concession had been given to free parking across the county borough for 2 weeks prior to Christmas but that unfortunately this event would not be included in that period).

It was agreed by officers that the suggestion on free parking for the weekend be reported to the appropriate officer and Cabinet Member for Transportation and Planning to consider.

It was agreed that a contribution of £2,000 be given to the funding of the 2010 Dickensian Christmas Fayre from the Area Forum Budget.

7. EXPERIMENTAL PROHIBITION OF DRIVING, TRAFFIC ORDER UPDATE AND STREET CLUTTER

A report had been circulated and comments invited.

The representative from Gwent Police reported that the Blackwood High Street closure on a Thursday evening had been a success with very few incidents especially in the last few months.

The Group supported the order for the overnight closure to be made permanent and were reassured by the Police representative that the Order can be used with their discretion and that the road does not need to be closed every Thursday.

The review of on-street parking in the High Street was also discussed and it was noted that the only adverse comments to the new orders were from the Taxi Driver's Association as they had lost some of their on-street parking provision. Concern was raised however that a part-time traffic warden was not adequate to enforce the new orders and it was suggested that the feasibility of the council employing traffic wardens (as in Cardiff) be explored.

It was agreed that appropriate officers and Gwent Police be requested to discuss this proposal.

The report on street clutter and the two proposals were discussed.

The removal of the extensive guard railing on High Street around the pedestrian crossings was supported but the replacement of pelican crossings with zebra crossings was not supported.

During discussion it was noted that since the opening of the Sirhowy Enterprise Way the High Street had been downgraded and it was requested that statistical evidence on the traffic flow since the by-pass had been opened be provided. It was also suggested that a 20 mph speed restriction should be imposed on the High Street.

8. PUBLIC SERVICES EFFICIENCY SAVINGS – PUBLIC CONVENIENCE PROVISION

Mr White was attending the meeting for this item. He outlined the report and explained the efficiency savings that needed to be found within the Public Services Division. The removal of full and part time staffing to all the public conveniences is anticipated to save the Authority £130,000 per annum.

All public conveniences are cleansed after closing in readiness for the following morning and the Blackwood facility is now also cleansed midday, which has resulted in a reduction of the number of complaints. There has been a limited amount of vandalism since the changes were made and it was reported that incidents did also occur when the toilets were staffed on a full time basis.

Finally Mr White reported that in the current economic climate there is no budget available from the council to reinstate the previous level of staffing in the facilities.

Concern was expressed from the Group that a lack of good toilet facilities might deter shoppers from visiting the town. The feasibility of encouraging shops or a private company to provide toilet facilities was discussed although it was accepted that these suggestions had previously been explored.

It was agreed therefore that the Group express concern on inadequate public conveniences in the Blackwood Town Centre to Public Services.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

9. Retail Survey Presentation

Copies of the results of a recent Retail Survey had been compiled and the results available at the meeting or from Mr Highway.

10. Blackwood Town Centre Improvement Group – Audit – September 2010

The Improvement Group Audit for September was noted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

11. Future of Cashiering Functions

The Chairman, Councillor Smallman raised concern on a report that had been presented to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the 5th October regarding the future of cashiering functions and in particular the Blackwood Customer First facility. At that meeting the report had been deferred to the next meeting in order for further consultations to take place.

The report stated that over 67,000 transactions are processed each year from that office and it was felt that should the facility close it would have a devastating effect on trade in the town centre. There was concern also that a much needed facility would be withdrawn and that elderly and disabled residents would suffer from not having a local facility. The trade in the town may also suffer if the cash office closed as many customers also visit the local shops when visiting the cash office.

It was agreed that the comments from this meeting on this item be conveyed to the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

12. Damage to Aldi and St Margaret's Church, High Street / Cycling on Pavements

The issue of vandalism at the above locations and youths cycling on pavements in the town centre was raised. It was agreed that these concerns would be noted by the representative from Gwent Police and included on the Town Centre Audit.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 27th January 2010 at 4.30 pm – Pontllanfraith Council Chamber

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.