



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PONTLLANFRAITH ON THURSDAY 27TH JANUARY 2011 AT 4.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor K. Smallman – Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs K. Presley and N. Dix

Mr C. Sharp and Ms D. Davies (Local Residents), J. Hold (Blackwood Town Council)
Mr D. Davies and Ms M. Franklin (Bargoed Town Councillors), Mr P. Lambert (Local
Business) and Inspector K. Childs and PC. C Hughes (Gwent Police).

Together with:

A. Dallimore (Urban Renewal Manager), A. Highway (Town Centre Development Manager),
C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manger), D. Smith (Principal Engineer), J. Elliott
(Research Officer), P. Hudson (Senior Events and Marketing Officer), and D. Phillips
(Partnership Support Officer).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R. Davies (Cabinet Member for
Regeneration and Countryside), Town Councillor A. Farina-Childs, Mr J. Organ (Local
Resident) and J. Bennett (Group Manager – Advisory Services).

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was made at the meeting.

2. MINUTES

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

Blackwood Town Centre Management Group held on 21st October 2010.

3. UPDATE ON DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS FAYRE

Mr Hudson (Senior Events and Marketing Officer) was attending the meeting to present an
update on the Dickensian Christmas Fayre held on the 4th and 5th December. Mr Hudson
reported that the event was extremely successful and attracted over 50 stalls to the town
centre. The main aim of the event was to increase footfall to the town and retailers were
encouraged to offer shoppers a discount for the week-end to increase their trade (24 retailers

participated).

The funding for the event was from the Welsh Assembly Government (Tidy Towns), Blackwood Town Council, Area forum Budget, the Events Budget and revenue received from the fairground rides. This funding from all these sources may not however be available in the future.

The estimate increase in visitors to the town was 5,500 on the Saturday and 3 times as many visitors on the Sunday. The Dickensian theme was encouraged and a number of artists were booked to compliment this. There was also a green theme to the market with trees , fruit and mulled wine being given out to shoppers. There was also an antiques fayre.

Mr Hudson circulated a paper with feed back comments from stallholders and retailers which overall was very positive.

It was agreed that a themed event would usually attract more visitors although it is difficult to encourage stallholders to participate in a theme and to dress in appropriate costumes. It was suggested that a small discount on the stall hire might encourage them to participate in future events.

It was noted that a number of minor issues had occurred and the snow and ice had also made it difficult to prepare for the event on the Friday evening.

Mr Hold (Clerk to Blackwood Town Council) was disappointed that although there were a good number of stalls the majority were not selling Christmas goods. It was suggested however that if the event grows it may be possible to be more selective. The Town Council is conscious of a lack of having a Chamber of Trade and would be discussing any future events with a selection of retailers.

A future lack of funding for future events was discussed and the Chairman requested that the Town Council notify Mr Hudson as soon as possible if they are able to contribute to this years event. The council's budgets would shortly be allocated when it will be known if funding for future events or a Town Centre Area Forum Budget would be available.

Mr Lambert (a local retailer) considered that the Christmas Fayre was an excellent event for the town. A number of minor issues such as signage not being removed after the event had been reported.

Inspector Childs reported that his only concern was the large fairground ride with loud music near J.D. Wetherspoon's.

Mr Hudson reported that the smaller rides seemed to do a better trade and the larger rides would probably not return.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hudson for attending and all his work in organising the event. It was agreed that all funding sources be explored in order that the successful event continue.

4. INCLEMENT WEATHER OVER THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD

A report had been circulated giving information on the Winter Maintenance Plan and outlining priorities when a serious weather event occurs. Side roads are gritted after the priorities. Salt bins are also strategically placed around the authority, predominantly on steep inclines that are not on the main gritting route.

This winter the authority has trialled placing additional grit bins within the main strategic town centres, Caerphilly, Blackwood and Bargoed to ensure that trade would not be disrupted in the approach to Christmas.

The Highway Operations Group Manager was unable to attend the meeting but members can contact him for any further information on the telephone or e-mail him (contact details given on the circulated report).

Mr Highway gave a general update on retail trading prior to Christmas. He explained that the general opinion was that spending was short of expectations with no major increase in spending to avoid the increase in VAT and that there were fewer impulse buys. There were also distribution issues due to bad weather disruption which did however benefit local retailers.

Mr Lambert (a local trader) reported that the efforts made by the council during the severe weather were excellent. The car parks and pavements were quickly cleared. Members requested that these comments be conveyed to Mr Lloyd and his team.

It was recognised that the severe weather was difficult to predict and there were problems with ice outside the Institute on one occasion. Also the grit bin had not been replaced near the new artwork outside the bus station.

5. TRAFFIC FLOW IN THE HIGH STREET

Mr Smith (Principal Engineer) circulated a plan illustrating traffic flow on Blackwood High Street and surrounding roads following the opening of the alternative route via the Sirhowy Enterprise Way. It was reported that a significant decrease had been shown in vehicle numbers on the High Street from 16,000 to 11,000. A speed survey on the High Street had also recorded an average speed of 16/20 m.p.h.

A high number of vehicles are still using the High Street in preference to the Sirhowy Enterprise Way and Mr Campbell reported that there may be further measures to try and discourage this. Following a concern regarding trade for the town if more vehicles were discouraged from this route, Mr Campbell confirmed that he was referring to discouraging through traffic with appropriate signage.

It was suggested that a speed restriction of 20m.p.h be considered for the High Street and Mr Campbell indicated that this would be investigated although the 20.m.p.h restriction is at present being focused near school sites. If a reduction in speed were considered for Blackwood Town Centre it would also need to be introduced in the other town centres. It was agreed that the recent removal of the railings had been welcomed in the town although the change from pelican crossings to all zebra crossings was still a concern to the Group. The Police representative reported however that there had been no reported pedestrian accidents at the zebra crossing in the High Street.

It was agreed that a future report on traffic flows be presented when appropriate.

6. POLICE PRESENCE IN CUSTOMER FIRST CENTRE

Inspector Childs gave a verbal report on the new initiative for a Police presence in the Customer First Offices in the town Centre. He reported that a three week pilot scheme had been introduced with a Police Officer available at the centre from 10.00am –4.00pm. The pilot was unfortunately hindered by bad weather and the pre Christmas period when traditionally fewer customers visit the centre. There was however good feed back for the service and discussions are being held to continue the service on a regular basis.

The Chairman was pleased to report that at a recent Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee it had been recommended that following extensive consultation the customer Services facility at Blackwood would remain.

A concern was raised on possible cuts to police numbers in the future and on the lack of a traffic warden during the last few weeks.

Inspector Childs reported that there were no plans for a reduction in officers in the foreseeable future and that the PCSO officers will be enforcing parking and issuing tickets as the traffic warden is presently on sick leave.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

7. Blackwood Town Centre Report 2010

Members noted the information report and recorded thanks to Mr Highway for all his work.

A concern was raised regarding the lack of toilet facilities in the town centre on a Sunday.

8. Blackwood Town Centre Improvement Group – Audit – January 2011

The Improvement Group Audit for January 2011 was noted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 21st April 2011 at 4.30 pm – Pontllanfraith Council Chamber

The meeting closed at 5.55 pm.