



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, PONTLLANFRAITH ON WEDNESDAY 13TH DECEMBER AT 4:30 PM

PRESENT:

Councillor K. Smallman - Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs K. Presley

Together with:

Police Constable A. Lang (Gwent Police), Mr J. Organ (local resident), Ms D. Davies (local resident), Mr A. Highway (Town Centre Manager), Mr S. Wilcox (Assistant Town Centre Manager), A, Dallimore (Team Leader - Urban Renewal & Conservation), Bob Campbell (Senior Assistant Engineer) and Ms J. Dix (Policy & Research Manager).

APOLOGIES

D. Davies (Blackwood Town Council), A Farina-Childs (Blackwood Town Council), J. Hold (Clerk, Blackwood Town Council), P. Hudson (Marketing and Events Manager), Insp Mark Smith (Gwent Police), Ms L. Hughes (Communities First Co-ordinator), John Elliott (Research Officer) and Ms J. Bennett (Group Manager Advisory Services).

Police Constable Adam Lang was welcomed to his first meeting.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the following minutes be approved as correct records:-

Blackwood Town Centre Management Group held on 21st July 2011. There were no matters arising.

3. RETAILS SURVEY RESULTS

Mr Andrew Highway (Town Centre Manager) introduced this item, and circulated a report on the 'Town Centre Management Survey 2011'. This is the third year that the survey has been carried out, and for the first time this year included Risca town centre. While the number of people responding by town centre are broken down, the other statistics are not disaggregated at town level. The purpose of the survey is to give an indication of the level of optimism among retailers and to see if perceptions are improving.

Across the town centres the highest response rate came from Caerphilly at 33%. The other town centres surveyed were Risca (24% of respondents), Blackwood (22% of respondents) and Bargoed (21% of respondents). Overall the survey found:

- Retail sales are falling less than in 2010, with many businesses seeing steady sales;
- Business optimism continues to grow for the second year in a row;
- Town Centre Management circulars continued to be valued by retailers;
- More businesses have an online presence, but only 30% trade online.

Mr Highway commenting on 70% of businesses not trading on line, it was suggested that many businesses simply do not know how to gear up to trading on line, such as using Pay Pall, and dealing with returns etc. It was noted that consumers have more rights of return when trading on line.

4. BLACKWOOD CHRISTMAS EVENT

In Mr Paul Hudson's absence (Marketing and Events Manager) the item was taken by Mr Highway, who circulated flyers for the Christmas events taking place in the borough. Mr Highway commented that the Christmas Fayre in Blackwood, which took place 3rd – 4th December was focused on young families. Retailers were surveyed post the event, and positive feedback has been received. However, there were some concerns raised by the public that the costs of the rides were high. It was noted that the funfair operators hired space from the Council, but were free to determine their own charges for the fair rides.

Mr John Hold (Clerk, Blackwood Town Council) sent his apologies for this meeting, but wanted his thanks and congratulations to all involved in the Christmas Market Event to be noted.

5. TA PUBLIC HOUSE UPDATE

The item was taken by Mr Allan Dallimore (Team Leader - Urban Renewal & Conservation). Mr Dallimore circulated a paper on the key issues, which noted the scheme to convert the TA Public House and adjacent toilet block into a restaurant/pub has been delayed because:-

- Small pieces of land outside their ownership and need to be purchased to take scheme forward
- Car parking issues
- Dispute between the two co owners.

It was noted that the frontage of the TA Public House is becoming run down, and a Section 215 has been issued to start legal proceedings to improve the appearance and deal with any safety issues. To date the owner of the TA Public House has been cooperative, but has now put the premises up for sale.

In the current economic climate it was noted that the scheme is unlikely to be developed in the short term. Two options were given for the committee to consider:-

Option1 - Hold out for a larger scheme that delivers the best regeneration package for the town centre, but that the Council keeps the sites clean in the interim.

Option 2 - To remove covenant stipulating 'No developments can be carried out on the site of the toilet block except as part of a comprehensive development with the adjoining site', to allow piecemeal development to bring either of the sites back into beneficial use.

The chair noted the meeting was not in quorum to make a decision. However, members present favoured option 2, as the more realistic option, in these current economic times. It was agreed Mr Dallimore would liaise with town councillors and ward councillors to elicit their views on the two options. Mr Dallimore to update members at the next Blackwood Town Centre group meeting.

6. CROSSING SURVEY RESULTS

Mr Steve Wilcox (Assistant Town Centre Manager) circulated a report on the 'Blackwood Town Centre Pedestrian Crossing Survey'. Following the introduction of a zebra crossing within Blackwood Town Centre a proposal was put forward to change the three additional crossings within the town centre from pelican to zebra. To gauge views a survey of 185 businesses within the town was undertaken, with 32 responding. 20 respondents were in favour of changing the crossings, while 12 were against. The results of the survey will be passed to transportation colleagues, and will form part of the decision making process.

Members of the committee were concerned that some people responded to the survey were against zebra crossing because they thought they were more dangerous for pedestrians to cross. The Chair requested for Mr Clive Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager) to attend the next Blackwood Town Centre group meeting to give his response to concerns over safety.

7. BUSINESS CLOSURES IN BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE

Mr Highway circulated a paper, which showed between January 2011 to October 11, 37 jobs had been created, and 32 jobs had been lost in the town centre. A member commented that businesses are struggling because business rates are so high. Mr Highway informed that the Council could do nothing about this, as the rates are set by the Welsh Government. He noted that Mary Portas has set out a series of recommendations to halt the decline of town centres, which included prioritise action on business rates to the Westminster Government. Mr Highway stated he saw a key issue as being one of lack of consumer confidence, and people not spending.

8. AREA FORUM FUNDING APPLICATION 'NEW LITTERBINS'

Mr Dallimore informed that the twenty bins located in the town centre had been covered with anti fly posting paint, which unfortunately over time had deteriorated the colour of the bins. At a cost of £80 per bin they could be dipped, cleaned, and rebranded with the Caerphilly County Borough Council logo. He noted the bins could not be power washed. Members present were happy to endorse the request to be submitted into the area forum funding to pay for the dipping of the bins.

The Chair asked if some of the area forum funding could be put towards upgrading the town's Christmas decorations for next year. Mr Highway agreed to follow this up with the Events Manager.

9. PROGRESS ON THE TOWN'S TRAFFIC ORDER REVIEW

A verbal update was given by Bob Campbell (Senior Assistant Engineer) on pursuing the traffic regulations review of Blackwood and Cefn Fforest. A legal press advert will be placed in January advising of the review and seeking views.

10. BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE AUDIT SEPTEMBER 2011

The audit as an item of information was noted.

The Chair wished all a Happy Christmas and New Year 2012, and thanked the committee members and officers for all their contributions over the year.

The meeting closed at 5:40pm

For information - Meeting Dates 2012

Thursday 22nd March at 4:30pm in the Chamber Pontllanfraith

Thursday 14th June at 4:30pm in the Chamber Pontllanfraith