



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE CHAMBER, PONTLLANFRAITH ON THURSDAY 22ND MARCH 2012 AT 4:30PM

PRESENT:

Councillor K. Smallman - Chairman

Councillors:

Mrs K. Preseley

Together with:

Inspector Mark Smith (Gwent Police), M. Franklin (Blackwood Town Council), J. Hold (Blackwood Town Council), C. Parry (Blackwood Shopping Precinct), C. Sharp (Local Resident), D. Davies (Local Resident), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), J. Bennett (Group Manager – Business Enterprise Support), A. Dallimore (Team Leader - Urban Renewal & Conservation), P. Hudson (Marketing and Events Manager), S. Wilcox (Assistant Town Centre Manager), J. Elliott (Research Officer), J. Dix (Policy & Research Manager).

APOLOGIES

Cllr. N. Dix, D. Davies (Blackwood Town Council), Mr & Mrs Edwards, Blackwood Chamber of Trade, L. Brown (Asda Stores), C. Parry (Blackwood Shopping Precinct), J. Organ (Local Resident), A. Highway (Town Centre Management), A. Jones (Complaints Officer).

The Chair welcome all to the meeting, and in particular Mr. Chris Parry to his first meeting as shop manager at the Blackwood Shopping Precinct.

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 13th December 2011. There were no matters arising.

3. BLACKWOOD JOBS REPORT

In Mr Andrew Highway (Town Centre Manager) absence this report was tabled by Ms Jan Bennett (Group Manager – Business Enterprise Support) with any queries to be referred to Mr. Highway.

4. NORTH HIGH STREET

Mr. Allan Dallimore (Team Leader - Urban Renewal & Conservation) noted that councillors had raised concerns over the unkempt appearance of the northern part of Blackwood town. A site meeting was held with councillors. The appearance of the TA Public House in the north of the town was discussed in the Blackwood town centre meeting (13th December 2011). To recap the premises owner wishes to bring the premises back into commercial usage. The owner is now considering applying for a grant from Caerphilly County Borough Council up to £15,000 to improve the external appearance of the building. Mr. Dallimore informed the brewery may pay for internal works if a new tenant is appointed, and agrees to sell the brewery products. There is a potential tenant in mind.

A problem with the premises appearance is exacerbated by the toilet block, which is landlocked by the former public house. At the site meeting with councillors the feasibility of the demolition of the toilet block was discussed, with a commemorative garden proposed to utilise the space caused by the demolition. The Cabinet Member has requested a financial profile for the works.

At the Red Lion site Mr. Dallimore informed that there has been no activity there for 12 months. The owners are to be informed that a 215 planning notice will be served if no further work is commenced immediately to tidy up the site.

Barclays Bank, which is adjacent to the Red Lion site, have agreed with their owner to instruct joint works with Caerphilly County Borough Council. The Chair noted the eyesore and problems with litter for the flats behind the Bank.

A planning application has been received to develop a training centre within the empty former Job Centre building in Blackwood. The application has been made by Rathborne Training and will bring an empty building into use and provide much needed footfall within the northern part of the town centre.

The next round of European funding will hopefully see a bid made for resources to implement the proposals included within the Powell Dobson Master Plan for Blackwood, which would see major public realm improvement and carriageway re-alignment in the northern part of the town.

It was noted that the old school site (the current Fast Forward office) was up for sale. Mr. Dallimore agreed to make further enquiries and bring back to the next town centre management meeting on 14th June 2012.

5. BLACKWOOD SOUTHERN RETAIL PARK

Mr. Dallimore informed a planning application had been submitted, but refused as contrary to the local development plan requirements to protect independent town centre retailers. Members of the committee raised concern that nothing other than 'Focus' has a main presence in the park, with many businesses lettings vacant. Mr. Dallimore informed he had recently received an expression of interest from a retailer over business lets at the park.

The Chair thanked Mr. Dallimore for all his hard work in improving the town centre, and especially over his work over the proposed demolition of the toilet block, with the development of the area into a memorial site.

6. LITTER BINS

Mr. Dallimore informed that the bin behind the 'Square Café' has been removed to be treated with anti graffiti paint on a trial basis. If the trial is a success, one bin at a time will be removed for painting. A committee member commented on the attractive black bins outside 'Whetherspoons' and asked if they could be rolled out in preference to the silver bins. Mr. Dallimore responded that the Council wanted to avoid a mishmash of coloured bins, and would be sticking with the stainless steel bins as a matter of policy.

7. NEW TRAFFIC ORDER/ZEBRA CROSSING REMOVAL/20MPH REQUEST

Mr. Clive Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager) introduced the report commenting it was largely for information, noting the theme of the report as about the environment of the high street. Mr. Campbell informed the traffic order was now completed for Cefn Fforest with few comments made. Following the consultation period some minor changes were made to the order. By the end of April 2012 road signs should be completed. The committee raised no questions over the traffic regulation order.

On the zebra crossing section of the report Mr. John Hold (Blackwood Town Council), raised his concerns over pelican crossings being phased out. Mr. Hold referred to a UK report on the decommissioning of zebra crossings, which highlighted safety issues over their removal. Mr. Campbell responded that zebra crossings afforded pedestrians the ability to cross the road safely when they want to, and not having to wait for lights to change. Without zebra crossing pedestrians may be motivated to jay walk with potential consequences of collision. Mr. Campbell noted that the high street was subject to a lot of through traffic as many motorists were still not electing to use the faster SEW route by passing Blackwood town centre. The traffic calming devices have not so far been a deterrent to using this route, and it is hoped that the presence of zebra crossing would provide more of an incentive for motorists to use an alternate route. Mr. Campbell stated that Caerphilly County Borough Council was supporting the replacement of pelican crossing when they became in disrepair with zebras crossing as they gave greater priority to pedestrians than to motorists. The timing systems with pelican crossings unable an immediate change of lights for pedestrians at the press of a button.

A member of the committee noted that she had bad experiences with zebra crossings, with traffic not stopping, and feels safer with a traffic lights system to stop the traffic.

Mr. Hold commented that until the Powell Dobson Master Plan for Blackwood is in place, he believed that pelican crossings were best in this busy high street.

In conclusion the Chair confirmed that pelican crossings 'are likely to be replaced with zebra crossings when they break down' in Blackwood.

On the question of imposing a 20mph speed Mr. Campbell noted nothing would be gained as traffic surveys showed the speed through the high street was already slow, and all that would be gained would be additional signage clutter, when the policy is to declutter signage in town centres.

8. SUMMER EVENT BUDGET REQUEST

Mr. Paul Hudson (Marketing and Events Manager) informed the summer event for Blackwood town centre would largely replicate the event held last year. Fireman Sam and Buzz Lightyear have already been booked along with a beach, Punch & Judy, a stream train, and falcons, as well as other attractions.

Mr. Hold (Blackwood Town Council) comment the summer event had proved successful last year, with the only drawback being its close timing with the carnival. Mr. Hudson commented the summer event would be brought forward by 2 weeks, which Mr. Hold supported.

Increasing publicity is being undertaken on the summer events in the Caerphilly borough to attract people in from neighbouring authority areas.

Mr. Hudson asked to access £2,000 for the Blackwood summer event from the area forum. This request was unaminiously agreed by the committee.

9. BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE AUDIT

Raised for information only. No comments made.

The meeting closed at 5:25pm.

For information

Date of next meeting 14th June 2012 at 4:30pm in the Chamber, Pontllanfraith House.