



RISCA TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PENALLTA HOUSE ON MONDAY 29TH FEBRUARY 2016 AT 5:00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Councillors: N. George, K. James, P. Leonard, R. Passmore

Together with:

M. Parker (Town Councillor), B. Hancock (Town Councillor)

Also:

A. Highway (Town Centre Manager), S. Wilcox (Assistant Town Centre Manager), A. Dallimore (Team Leader – Urban Renewal & Conservation)

1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor P. Griffiths, Community Councillor M. Jenkins, Community Councillor C. Edwards, R. Campbell (Town Clerk) & A. Jones (Committee Clerk).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 2ND NOVEMBER 2015

The previous minutes were taken as read.

4. BUSINESS REPORT BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE

Mr. Highway presented the report to the group, which outlined the number of businesses that opened and closed throughout the year, footfall data and the Town Centre Management initiatives that operated during 2015.

A discussion took place around developing an events programme for Risca and utilising the Palace Cinema for more evening and weekend economy in the town centre.

Mr. Highway was thanked for the report.

5. 'CHOOSE THE HIGH STREET' CHRISTMAS VOUCHER BOOKLET 2015 – ANALYSIS REPORT

Mr. Highway presented the report to the group. Particular thanks were noted to the council's Graphics Design team for all of their work designing this year's voucher booklet, the Community Safety Wardens for helping to deliver the booklets and to Steve Wilcox for his work on the scheme.

Mr. Highway was thanked for the report.

6. GO2 MY TOWN WEBSITE REPORT

Mr. Highway presented the report to the group, which summarised the revised content being placed on the Go2MyTown website and how members of the group could access the site. However, it was noted that the content is being regularly updated at present, which may mean some sections are not live or out-of-date.

Information hosted on the site includes footfall data, the Retail Property Directory, Town Centre Gazettes and a new news section, which incorporates stories from each of the town centres.

A live demonstration of the site will be brought to a future meeting.

Mr. Hancock stated that the information on the site could be particularly beneficial to potential start-up businesses, but also noted the value to existing businesses within the town. Mr. Hancock also asked if business support information would be held on the site. Mr. Highway noted that the site will run in conjunction with the information on the "Business" section of the Council's website. Go2MyTown will complement the Council's site and signpost visitors and vice versa.

Mr. Highway was thanked for the report.

7. CANAL UPDATE

Mr. Dallimore provided an update to the group on the progress that has been made on the canal project since the last meeting.

The original bid was due to be for around £2.6m, but this has now reduced to circa £1m. This follows a dialogue with WEFO. A decision was expected in December 2015, but this has been pushed back to the end of March 2016.

There may be an opportunity to obtain Lottery funding through the Create Your Space programme, which will complement the European bid. There will be a lot of competition for this funding pot.

In the interim, some maintenance work will be carried out at the Crosskeys/Pontwaun end of the canal to enable it to be filled with water.

The Town Centre Management Group will be involved in projects when officers are in a position to develop them. Any such projects will work collaboratively with neighbouring Authorities, looking at the canal as a whole. Any internal working group will span across several departments.

As part of the canal project, the tourism offer of Risca town will also be developed, working in conjunction with Cwmcarn Forest.

Mr. Dallimore was thanked for the update.

8. LONG BRIDGE BATHS & COMMERCIAL STREET DEVELOPMENT SITES OVERVIEW

Mr. Dallimore informed the group that the Tesco footbridge linking the store to the town centre is now unlikely to be built. As such the S.106 monies are now available for the Authority to use for environmental, transport or security proposals within the town centre action plan boundary. No decisions have yet been made on the proposals to be funded but a full range of options will be discussed with local Members in due course. It is proposed that officers investigate further the possibility of utilising the funding to unlock potential development sites and take forward proposals within the adopted Town Centre Action Plan.

Given the time constraints, there appear to be only two development sites that could be potentially unlocked – Longbridge Baths & the Commercial Street site.

The Longbridge Baths site is an old swimming pool that is in a poor state of repair. The building still accommodates four changing rooms. It is a centrally located site with car parking that is underused.

The site is Council-owned and Seren Group (Registered Social Landlords) are interested in developing it. Any capital receipt from selling the land asset could be used in conjunction with the S.106 monies to build new changing facilities at a new location

Although a detailed package has not been developed yet, discussions have taken place and it is envisaged that the site would accommodate between 24 & 26 new properties, bringing additional footfall and spend to the town centre.

The Commercial Street site consists of the former blue factory building and adjacent CCBC held land. The site may become attractive to developers if some of the costs associated with provision of infrastructure were borne by the S.106 monies This site could accommodate a large housing development, which again would benefit the town centre in the long-term.

Other options for the use of the money include proposals within the adopted Town Centre Action Plan. All proposals will be brought back to this group, but the money needs to be committed by 8th March 2018 and spent within a very specific area (which is essentially the town centre boundary).

Mr. Dallimore was thanked for the information.

9. CUCKOO STATUE RELOCATION

Mr. Dallimore provided an update to the group and outlined the two main issues in relation to the cuckoo statue.

The first issue is the land surrounding the artwork, which has been in a poor condition on occasion. Keep Wales Tidy has been working on the site recently to improve both its appearance and biodiversity. Keep Wales Tidy has now achieved everything it set out to do and it is now Tesco's responsibility to litter pick the site and cut back the vegetation once per year (as per their contractual obligations).

The second issue is that the Risca cuckoo is situated in Pontymister. The original reasoning for this location was due to the artwork being paid for via a S.106 agreement, with the land identified in the same contract. There is also a lot of advertising in the area, which removes focus on the statue.

A dialogue has been ongoing with legal in relation to the potential of moving the statue. It may be that five years after the money has been transferred, the statue is within our gift to do with as we please. The other formal option is a “deed of variation”, which could potentially be a long and costly legal process.

Regardless of the legal position, funding would still need to be identified to move the statue and a suitable alternative location found.

Following a discussion, a motion was proposed for Mr. Dallimore to investigate the possibility of moving the cuckoo statue into Risca. A vote was taken and 6 were in favour, which meant that the motion was carried.

10. RISCA TOWN CENTRE AUDIT – AUGUST 2015

Mr. Highway presented the audit to the group. No issues were raised.

The meeting closed at 18:23.

CHAIR