



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PENALLTA HOUSE ON TUESDAY 28TH FEBRUARY 2017 AT 2:00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Councillors: P. Cook, N. Dix, C. Hawker, K. James, T. Williams

Together with:

Town Councillors: Z. Hammond, J. Hold (Clerk)

Also:

A. Highway (Town Centre Development Manager), A. Dallimore (Team Leader – Urban Renewal & Conservation), P. Hudson (Marketing & Events Manager), S. Wilcox (Assistant Town Centre Manager), G. Richards (Highways Maintenance Manager), Ins. J. White (Gwent Police) & H. Edwards (Blackwood Retail Partnership)

1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors: A. Rees

C. Erasmus (Blackwood Town Council), Andrea Jones (Clerk).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 9TH SEPTEMBER 2016

The minutes were taken as read.

4. BUSINESS REPORT

Mr Highway presented his report to the group, which summarised the number of businesses that opened and closed throughout 2016, along with the footfall information and initiatives carried out by the Town Centre Management Team.

During the beginning of 2016, a large number of businesses closed in the town. However, the opening of Costa bucked the trend and saw a lot of new businesses open throughout the town and on Pentwyn Road.

The largest retail space in the town centre – Store 21 – recently closed and is currently a pop-

up charity shop. Work is being undertaken with the owner and agents to actively promote the store.

A number of initiatives were carried out throughout the year to promote the town centres and maintain footfall. These included the “Choose the High Street” Stories & Christmas Voucher Booklet, the new Go2MyTown website, introduction of the GovDelivery e-mail marketing system and production of the Town Centre Gazette.

Mr. Highway thanked Mr. Hudson and his team for the summer and Christmas events in the town, which were highly regarded by retailers and visitors alike.

It was noted that Blackwood is now the top performing town in terms of footfall figures.

2017 is likely to present several challenges for businesses including the Business Rates Review and Brexit, which is leading to uncertainty amongst consumers and businesses.

Cllr. James noted that the footfall in Blackwood is doing very well and this is a positive sign for the future of the town.

Cllr. Cook asked what effect the Rates Review will have on small businesses. Mr. Highway explained that a brief assessment of the changes in business rates had been undertaken by checking sample addresses in both High Street and the Market Place, although not definitive it appears that many business rateable values on High Street have fallen whilst in the Market Place they appear to have risen. There are several rate relief schemes available to small businesses, many of which will be applied automatically more details are available through the Council’s NNDR section.

Mr. Hold asked if a Business Rates briefing paper could be produced for circulation to Town Councillors. Mr. Highway agreed to send information via e-mail.

The Chair thanked Mr. Highway for his report.

5. ‘CHOOSE THE HIGH STREET’ CHRISTMAS VOUCHER BOOKLET ANALYSIS

Mr. Highway noted that the scheme has now been in operation for several years and 2016 was the most successful to date with a total of 112 offers received.

Mr. Highway extended special thanks to the Graphic Design team for their work designing the booklet and to the Community Safety Wardens for distributing the booklets to the various collection points.

The booklet not only marketed the five managed town centres, but also contained adverts for the various Christmas events across the Borough as well as various CCBC services.

30,000 booklets were produced, which were available in Blackwood Library, The Maxime Cinema, Tidal’s Store, ASDA and Blackwood Miners’ Institute. The supermarkets agreeing to stock the booklets has greatly assisted the distribution of the booklets and Tesco stocked them in other town centres for the first time this year.

A survey was sent out to participating businesses after the Christmas period. Although the response rate was quite poor, it did highlight that feelings towards the scheme are generally positive. However, the bus advertising – used for the first time this year – was not deemed to be successful and this is something to consider for future years.

Mr. Edwards thanked the Council for its support. Independent retailers are keen to make use of all available marketing platforms and a widespread, free opportunity such as the Christmas Voucher Booklet is very much appreciated.

The Chair thanked Mr Highway for the report and the hard work of the team.

6. COBBLED LANE, HIGH STREET (SIDE OF FLOUR MILL)

Mr. Richards informed the group that £10k has been secured internally to carry out work on the lane. Contractors have been on site for 3-weeks. The cobbles are being removed, cleaned and repointed. The work is due to be finished in the next few weeks, with any budgetary shortfall being looked at in the next financial year.

Mr. Dallimore explained that there was a strong local feeling on the historical value of these cobbled sites, which is why Officers persevered to secure internal funding for the scheme.

The Chair thanked Mr. Richards and all other Officers involved.

7. SUMMER EVENTS

Mr. Hudson is currently in the process of planning the 2017 events programme. Blackwood Beach Party is due to return on 1st & 2nd July. There was a welcome addition to the event last year with the Town Council musical event coinciding with it. Mr. Hudson and his team are keen to work with the Town Council this year too.

The beach theme of the event will be extended into the High Street this year with activities such as Punch & Judy and donkey rides. The entertainment programme will also be enhanced this year.

To date, 20 stallholder applications have been received.

Mr. Hold thanked Mr. Hudson and his team on behalf of the Town Council. Blackwood carnival is scheduled to take place on the Sunday of the Beach Party and the activities will be focused in The Market Place so that it links nicely with the town centre event.

8. PROCUREMENT OF FOOTFALL COUNTER PROVIDER

Mr. Wilcox informed the group that the contract for the footfall counter provision has recently expired. Following a tender process, a new supplier has been appointed – PFM Footfall Intelligence. There will be a period of transition where the old supplier's service and equipment is removed and the new supplier installs its equipment. This is likely to take place in early July, but Officers will work with the companies to ensure that any downtime is kept to a minimum.

The Chair thanked Mr. Wilcox for the update.

9. THE MARKET PLACE REDEVELOPMENT

Mr. Highway read out an e-mail from The Market Place Manager on work that will be taking place in the coming months:

“A programme of refurbishment is underway including: cleaning of the canopies and jet washing of the market square itself. During the summer there will be painting works carried out and repairs to the steps.

The former Somerfield unit was subject to a planning application in November last year. Consent was given to subdivide the existing A1 unit into three units with one unit going from

A1 retail to D2 gym. The planning application was subjected to a number of conditions relating to: noise, installation of plant equipment and opening times.”

The Chair thanked Mr. Highway for obtaining the update and noted that since the old Somerfield has been vacant for so long, it's encouraging that somebody is finally investing in it.

10. ALDI REDEVELOPMENT

Mr. Highway noted that the site was subject to a planning application in November last year, permission was granted for a change of use to A2 (Financial Professional Service) Employment Centre.

Mr. Dallimore pointed out that just because planning permission has been granted, it doesn't necessarily mean that a tenant has been secured.

Mr. Hold expressed concern and the incidents of vandalism on the neighbouring St. Margaret's Church and hopes that a new tenant will reduce such occurrences. Ins. White responded by noting that some information has been received on the recent graffiti on the building and an arrest will be made shortly.

11. RED LION UPDATE

Mr. Dallimore has been working with colleagues in Planning Enforcement who are due to serve a S.215 notice on the owner of the site, which means that they must take steps to improve its appearance. In the meantime, there has been a dialogue with Pobl Housing Association for a proposed housing scheme on the site. Some drawings have been produced and these will be brought to a future meeting of the group for information. The scheme will involve all existing buildings being demolished.

Mr. Hold has received copy of the drawings, which were circulated to Town Councillors. The façade of the new buildings is in keeping with Blackwood Miners' Institute and would be as asset for the town. As such, the Town Council is very supportive of the proposal.

10. AUDIT

Mr. Highway presented the Audit and the following items were raised:

Poundstretcher site – No update has been received from the owner or agent. However, the owner has been provided with details of the Town Centre Loan Fund, which could be used to redevelop the building.

Toilet Block Enhancement – Mr. Highway read an e-mail from Mr. Mike Jones in Planning Enforcement:

“Concerning the Former Public Toilets, High Street, Blackwood, I have sought authority to issue a notice under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended, in respect of land in a poor state of amenity. That authority has been granted under delegated powers.

I have written to the joint owners again giving them the opportunity to tidy the site, and asking them to: cut back all the overgrowth present on the land, including grass, weeds and brambles; remove from the land any materials resulting from those works, together with any debris, rubbish or litter that is present on the land; secure shut any doors or windows in the building.

The informal period allowed to carry out the works expires on 8th March 2017. (I checked the site on Friday of last week and nothing appeared to have been done up to that point).

If our request has not been complied with by that date then formal action will be taken.

The owners have a right of appeal against a Sec. 215 Notice, such an appeal would be made to the Welsh Ministers.”

The Chair wished to thank Mr. Jones.

Wesley Road Steps – Parks Services have been leading on the project. The work on the steps is complete and another project will be carried out on the footpath before the end of March.

Antisocial behaviour – Ins. White noted that very low levels of antisocial behaviour have been reported recently. However, the issue does now seem to be concentrated around KFC and McDonald's. A problem-solving group looking at antisocial behaviour throughout the town centre will be set up in due course. Plain-clothed officers have been doing patrols in and around the bus station and Market Place, which seems to have improved problems in that area.

Repainting of parking bays – the work is due to be completed by April.

Proposed amendment of Traffic Order – this is currently out to advert.

Demolition of former Guide Hall – disconnection of one utility is still pending. Demolition can progress rapidly once all utilities are decommissioned.

Letting of former Store 21 – the unit is currently being used as a pop-up charity shop while a long-term tenant is sought.

Spitting on cash machines – all banks in the town centre have been made aware of the issue and agreed to clean their ATMs.

There were no further issues raised.

The meeting closed 15:25.

CHAIR