

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 2ND.MARCH 2020

Present : Councillor G James (Mayor)

Councillors Z Hammond, C Erasmus, J Edwards, D Davies, A Farina-Childs, R Mills, A Short,
A Davies M Gwynne & N Turner

Also present County Councillor K Etheridge

Russell Allen & Bruce Penfold of Blackwood Rugby Club

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors J. Griffiths, R Weeks, P Cook & T Evans

The Clerk reported that he had received an email from Councillor Janet Griffiths tendering her resignation from Town Council. She had hoped to continue with time off, but following another problem with ill health and ongoing family commitments, has decided she should leave now. She thanked members for their support and friendship, and wished all the very best for the future.

Members were disappointed that she had taken the decision, but fully understood. Members wished to place on record their thanks for her hard work and commitment and it was **agreed** the Clerk convey these sentiments and to organise flowers to be delivered.

This obviously means we have no Deputy Mayor in the interim, but it was **agreed** to carry on until the Annual General Meeting in May.

It was also **agreed** that the vacancy be discussed at the next meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were made by Councillors R Mills, Z Hammond, C Erasmus, A Short, A Davies & N Turner as members of Plaid Cymru who hold their meetings at Blackwood Rugby Club. Similarly Councillor D Davies as a member of the Old Comrades who also meet at the Club.

As there was no pecuniary interest involved, these members were advised they could take part in the discussion and decision making.

At this point it was **unanimously agreed** to bring forward Item 13 Blackwood RFC Flooding for discussion

3. Blackwood R.F.C. - Flooding

The Mayor welcomed both Russell Allen & Bruce Penfold to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

The Clerk reported that he had been contacted by several members requesting Town Council consider the significant damage caused to the ground and clubhouse during the recent storms, and he in turn had contacted the Club to ask if there was maybe any specific youth team matter that Town Council might look to contribute towards, hence their attendance this evening.

Both officers of the Club updated members on the devastating damage caused by the flooding, and the amazing support received from the community in the clean up operation.

Both officers identified that the Club had hoped it could be a venue for some Bi-Centenary events and were hoping to organise a Mini Rugby tournament as part of the celebrations.

After some discussion, it was ***unanimously agreed*** that £1,000 be granted to the Club to assist in the clean up operation, and it was also ***unanimously agreed*** that an Interest Free Loan be agreed in principle if that was something the Club wished to pursue.

The Officers thanked members for their very generous grant, and agreed to make contact with the Clerk if they wished to proceed with the Interest Free Loan offer.
Mr Allen & Mr Penfold then left the meeting.

4. County Borough Report

County Councillor K Etheridge gave a brief update on the following matters –

Boundary Review - he reported that he had had several meetings regarding same, and that original purported proposals had changed, with the Cefn Fforest Ward of Town Council now being planned to move into the Cefn Fforest County Borough Ward from the Blackwood Ward. The consultation period ends April 15th. and he urged individual members to object to the proposals as they were. The Clerk reminded members they had, at the last meeting, agreed to hold a meeting with Blackwood & Cefn Fforest Ward C.C.B.C. members to prepare a joint response, whilst also urging individual members to respond as individuals also.

Notification had been received identifying that the Persimmon Development decision was to be delayed, but that he and others would continue to lobby Julie James, Minister for Housing & Local Government.

After much local opposition, which was visibly transparent at a recent meeting on site, the planning application for 3 Tree Tops Avenue (House of Multiple Occupation) had been withdrawn. Members were pleased common sense had seemed to prevail.

5. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor reported that he had visited Blackwood R.F.C. to see for himself the damage caused during the storms and to offer Town Council's support.

He had also attended Blackwood Library to visit their Lego Club who have tried to reproduce Shops in the High Street and he also took part in a recent Litter Pick

6. Correspondence

The Clerk presented his report on the following items of correspondence received since the last Meeting and all were ***noted*** –

Wales Audit Office Press release – only 66% of councils meet statutory deadline for publishing audited accounts, with 218 having their audits qualified

Consultation on proposed new audit arrangements – Whilst Annual Return, including accounting statement annual governance statement and Internal Audit report is required, for 2 out of 3 years limited supporting information will be required, and for the 3rd. year full working papers will be required

Request for documentation regarding loan to Studio 54 (copy of agreement, copy of minutes and evidence of first two payments having been received) following contact by member of the public questioning legality of same.

Caerphilly C.B.C. Website Training change of date now Wednesday 4th. March

Community Asset Transfer – Draft Policy & Process document Consultation

Notification of Waunborfa Road Closure 9th – 12th. March (Forwarded by e-Mail to members)

Notification of £1,100 transfer – Entertainment at Xmas Market

Aneurin Bevan UHB Reports from Community Champions Event held 21st Nov. (Forwarded by e-mail to members)

One Voice Wales Membership Fee for 2020/2021 - £1,225 (compared with £1,164 for current financial year) – based on 3,648 chargeable dwellings @ 33.6p per dwelling + 5.2%

Zurich Insurance Renewal Quote for 2020/21 - £1,380.80 (compared with £1,246.17 current financial Year – 10.8% increase which includes additional defibrillators)
If Town Council enter into 3 year agreement £1,318.05
5 year agreement £1,256.12

Safer Communities Invitation to Blackwood Community Assist Meeting 3.00pm.Thursday 27th
Caerphilly February at Blackwood Police Station

Keep Wales Tidy Green Growth Funding opportunity- Keep Wales Tidy's Green Growth programme that will offer both development and starter packages for Community and Town Councils to create, restore and enhance local places for nature, that can be sustained in future years. All packages MUST be delivered and installed in 2020-21. The deadline for first round funding is 6th March

Welsh Govt. Local Places for Nature funding

In respect of the One Voice Wales Membership Fee, it was *agreed* to renew for 2020/21 in the sum of £1,225 and in respect of the Zurich Insurance, it was *agreed* to renew with a 3 year agreement at £1,318.05 per annum

With regard the Keep Wales Tidy starter packages, it was *agreed* to pursue the Butterfly Garden pack, but that would be dependant upon identifying a specific site. The area at Cwmgelli, adjacent to the main road, was suggested as a possibility.

7. Schedule of Payments

The Clerk presented his report on payments made/ to be made, and the following were *agreed* –

		£. p
Playworks	Tax/ N.I. February	287.79
John Hold	Feb Salary plus reimbursements	941.00
Blackwood Action on Litter	Financial Assistance	410.00
Wales Air Ambulance	Financial Assistance	200.00

8. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 3rd. February 2020

It was resolved the minutes be *agreed* as a true record

9. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

10. To Receive the Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting held on 17th. February 2020

It was *agreed* the minutes be received

11. To Receive the Minutes of the Bi Centenary Committee Meeting held on 24th. February 2020

It was *agreed* the minutes be received

12. To Receive the Minutes of the Town & Community Councils Liaison Committee Meeting held 16th. October 2019

It was *agreed* the minutes be received

13. To Receive the Minutes of the One Voice Wales Caerphilly/Merthyr/RCT Area Committee Meeting held on 9th. October 2019

It was *agreed* the minutes be received

14. Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre – Update

The Clerk presented his report, which consisted correspondence with the Chief Executive Officer querying the future of the Leisure Centre Site, and she confirmed that the Authority is currently developing a placemaking plan for the whole leisure centre/3G pitch/former school site (which will be subject to consultation). Consideration of this placemaking plan will, therefore, form the basis of any decisions relating to the long term future of the leisure centre,3G pitch and former school site.

Furthermore, the Clerk had queried a report on Community Asset Transfers recently presented to Environment & Sustainability Scrutiny Committee which outlined the Guiding Principles to be used. One of the principles in particular, gave cause for concern and on the face of it gave the Authority the opportunity to cherry pick which assets they would wish to transfer.

- The approach of the authority will be robust but flexible. Community assets have been funded and sustained by public sector funds for the benefit of the whole community. As guardians of these assets the authority will aim to support continued community use. ***However, there will be circumstances where alternative disposal, possibly through commercial sale, will be in the best interests of the county borough as a whole, including ensuring the sustainability of essential services that can only be delivered by the authority. Those assets which have the potential to generate significant capital receipts are not likely to be considered as suitable for transfer.***

The Chief Executive confirmed the views of Town & Community Councils would be sought prior to Cabinet deciding if they wished to adopt the policy.

Councillor Rhys Mills gave a brief report on the Court of Appeal hearing held on February 20th., the outcome decision being imminent.

15. Bus Station Toilets - Update

The Clerk reported that CCTV cameras had now been installed and the toilets were operational again. The significant damage caused since they opened had warranted a very high spec system, and following an invitation to members to meet on site to inspect same on Friday 28th. February, Councillors A Farina-Childs, D Davies, R Mills, A Davies & County Councillors K Etheridge & N Dix attended and were impressed with what they saw.

We can but hope these measures are successful, otherwise the mindless wanton vandalism of a few individuals brings the viability of these vital facilities to the town into question and risks permanent closure in the future.

Members wished to place on record their thanks to Dr George Edwards and the Caerphilly Taxi Association for their sterling efforts in ensuring the continued provision of these facilities

16. Review of Internal Controls

The Clerk presented his report, which highlighted the following –

Members are required to Review the adequacy of Internal Controls

Current practice -

Schedule of Payments to each meeting highlighting the Payee/ Reason for Payment/ Amount.

Payments are currently made via Bank Transfer albeit cheques require the signature of the Clerk together with two other signatories (currently Councillors A Farina-Childs, A Short & P Cook)

Meetings of Policy & Finance Committee

To further strengthen Internal Control any payment in excess of £1,000 must also receive written confirmation by two of the three signatories referred to earlier. Furthermore, budget monitoring reports should also be accompanied by bank statements for members perusal.

After some discussion it was *agreed* the Internal Controls are considered adequate

17. Review of Risk Management

The Clerk presented his report, which highlighted the following –

Members are required to review the adequacy of Risk Management

The misappropriation of funds by the Clerk (as the only employee is an obvious risk, but hopefully the Internal Controls highlighted above would greatly negate that risk.

Little of the rest of the work of the Town Council, other than the Organisation of Events is considered to carry much of a risk.

Regular meetings of the Events Committee highlight any risk areas.

We are required to submit a Risk Assessment in respect of the Carnival Parade and the Site Activities each year to Caerphilly County Borough, and attend the ESAG Events Organisers Forum to discuss same with members of C.C.B.C. and the Emergency Services prior to event.

After some discussion it was *agreed* Risk Management was considered adequate and proportional given the risks identified

18. Review of Insurance Provision

The Clerk presented his report, which highlighted the following –

Currently Mandatory Cover in respect of Public Liability & Employer's Liability stands at £10 million each, whilst Fidelity Guarantee, Official's Indemnity, Crossed Cheques (and other non-negotiable money) & Libel & Slander are £250,000 each.

Christmas Lighting, Chains of Office are also insured, at reported costs, whilst any equipment hired for a specific event is insured separately if required.

After some discussion it was *agreed* that current cover is considered adequate

19. Review of Reserves Position/Policy

The Clerk presented his report, which highlighted the following –

It is a requirement that the Town Council determine and review the level of reserves and how they are to be used. Local Government Legislation requires Town/Community Councils to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure, when calculating their budget. However, there is no specified minimum or maximum level of reserves that an authority should hold, and it is the responsibility of the Responsible Financial Officer to advise the Council about the level of reserves, and to ensure that there are key protocols for their establishment and use.

Reserves can be categorised as General (held to cushion the impact of uneven cash flows or unexpected events) and Earmarked (held for specific purpose)

General reserves is a sum of money not earmarked for a specific purpose, but rather set aside to deal with unexpected events or emergencies, and to provide a working capital cushion to deal with cash flow problems.

Whilst there is no amount specified, it is considered an amount equivalent to approx 25% of the Precept to be acceptable ie. approx £15,000.

Earmarked reserves are those held for specific purposes, or to meet known or projected liabilities. In the past Town Council has identified a sum of £10,000 in respect of Coed Duon and a further approx £13,000 to support other Environmental projects.

Town Council took the decision earlier this year to utilise £8,900 of these reserves to purchase paddle gates for the Bus Station toilets, and work with the Caerphilly Taxi Drivers Association, in an attempt to negate the potential loss of these facilities when Caerphilly C.B.C. took the decision to close them. Furthermore, Town Council have also over the past few years identified and invested approx £25,000 in respect of Renewal of Christmas lighting. It is thought prudent to budget an amount of £2,000 per annum to ensure a reasonable sum is available to replace/renew in the future.

With the upcoming Bi-Centenary of the town and the significant celebrations being planned it was thought prudent to set aside reserves to assist the funding of same. An amount of £1,000 was proposed from potential savings for 2018/2019 with a further £4,250 from event under spends for the current year, and with the sponsorship of the Velvet Coalmine no longer being required it is proposed to earmark the existing £7,500 allocated for 2019/20 & 2020/21 to the Bi-Centenary Celebrations also – resulting in £20,250 being readily available.

Additional Reserves will be accrued via the Community Infrastructure Levy, with £303 being received during this financial year. There are restrictions on the use of these funds, and further discussions with C.C.B.C. officers will be required to ensure plans meet the required criteria.

After some discussion it was **agreed** that the Reserves position as outlined are considered adequate

20. Planning Applications

Councillor Z Hammond (Chair of Planning) presented the report on Applications received since the last meeting -

Case Ref. 20/0083/FULL

Location: 27 Clos Coed Duon Blackwood NP12 1FP

Proposal: Erect a single storey rear extension

Case Ref. 20/0086/ADV

Location: McDonalds Cliff Road Blackwood NP12 0NT

Proposal: Install 5 No. new digital freestanding signs and 1 No. 15" digital booth screen

Case Ref. 20/0092/NCC

Location: Land At 94-96 High Street Blackwood

Proposal: Vary conditions 4 (Sound insulation), 5 (Plant and Machinery), 6 (Odour), 7 (Waste) of planning consent 19/0972/FULL (Erect a two storey building with A3 (Food And Drink)/A2 (Financial Services) use at ground floor and first floor flat) so that they relate to the A3 use only

Case Ref. 20/0093/FULL

Location: 38 Y Cedrwydden Blackwood NP12 1FD

Proposal: Convert garage into sitting room and erect detached shed

Case Ref. 20/0145/FULL

Location: 25 Lilian Road Blackwood NP12 1DN

Proposal: Demolish existing single garage and replace with a double garage, new retaining wall and steps

After some discussion it was **agreed** no objections be raised, albeit in respect of Case Ref. 20/0092/NCC, members were concerned that adequate off street parking was available

21. Reports

Councillor Z Hammond reported that a series of public meetings organised by the Safer Community Partnership will be held in town in an effort to tackle the anti social behaviour problems being experienced.

The meetings will be held late March/early April, and will look to address the issues highlighted at recent multi agency meetings between Council, Police and other community services whilst also seeking residents views, opinions and ideas relating to the anti social behaviour.

Wednesday – Friday March 25th.- 27th. at Foyer at ASDA between 11.0am – 3.00pm

Saturday 28th. March at Blackwood Comprehensive School

Friday 3rd. April at Blackwood Miners' Institute

She asked that members show their support at these events if at all possible.