

**MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING  
HELD REMOTELY ON 9<sup>TH</sup>. NOVEMBER 2020**

**Present :** Councillor G James ( Mayor )

Councillors R Mills, Z Hammond, A Farina-Childs, J Edwards, D Davies, T Evans, D Jones,  
A Davies & M Gwynne

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor A Short  
Late apologies received from Councillors P Cook & C Erasmus

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest at this point

**3. Mayoral Announcements**

The Mayor announced he had attended the Blackwood War Memorial on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November to lay a wreath on behalf of Town Council

**4. County Borough Report**

Councillor A Farina-Childs gave a brief report on the following –

Boundary Commission Report - The Final Recommendations Report acknowledges the high volume of representations of opposition to the proposed changes to the Blackwood & Cefn Fforest electoral wards and agrees to retain the existing arrangements for Blackwood Ward, whilst also agreeing with the alternative provided by Town Councillor Gerwyn James that the communities of Cefn Fforest & Pengam come together to form an electoral ward. The electoral ward of Blackwood is to be given the Welsh language name of Coed-duon and the English language name of Blackwood

The Commission also recommends that Caerphilly C.B.C. conducts a community review to address the issue of the name of the Cefn Fforest East ward of the town of Blackwood.

Planning Appeal by Persimmon Homes – Julie James A.M., The Minister for Housing & Local Government acknowledged the benefits of the scheme, as described in the Inspector's report. However, in this case, for the reasons she outlined, she considered the conflict with LDP policies outweighs all other material considerations identified in the Inspector's report. Subsequently, in exercise of the power referred to in paragraph 2 of the decision letter, she dismissed this appeal and refused planning permission for LPA planning application ref: 17/0681/OUT as the appeal site is located outside the defined settlement boundaries of the LDP and, therefore, the proposal fails to accord with parts B and D of LDP Policy SP5 and criterion C of LDP Policy CW15.

Proposed one way order in the lane between junction of Gordon Road and the north east corner of the plot of land adjacent to 3 Fairfield Close - Ongoing consultation with residents living nearby

Members welcomed the decisions regarding Boundary changes and the planning appeal and were relieved common sense had at last prevailed.

## 5. Correspondence

The Clerk presented his report on correspondence received -

### **Local Government Pay Award 2020-21**

The National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) has agreed new pay scales for 2020-21 to be implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. The pay award is for a 2.75% increase. Application of the pay award will result in an increase in the annual salary cost for the Town Clerk of £373 ( plus potentially an additional £60 increased Employers N.I. contributions ) . Provision was made in the budget approved by the Town Council for 2020-21 for a pay award of up to 2%.

It is was **unanimously agreed** that the Town Council approve the pay award, including the backdating to April 2020.

The Clerk had declared an interest in this agenda item.

### **Payroll Administration**

The payroll for the Town Council is undertaken by Playworks. The arrangement was established some years ago, and has been low cost at £5 per month. A comprehensive service is provided including the payment summary, payslips, and the HMRC PAYE payment. The Town Council receives a monthly invoice to cover all the bank transfers and the administration fee.

Playworks has notified the Town Council that due to restructuring within the company brought about in response to the impact of the coronavirus epidemic on the business it will no longer be possible to make the salary and HMRC payments. In addition, the monthly administration charge will increase to £20 per month.

As a consequence of these changes there is an opportunity to review the payroll arrangements especially as there has been no review for several years. There are the basic options:

- 1 Continue with Playworks who will provide the monthly payment summaries and payslip, but the Town Council will then be responsible for paying the salaries direct to the employees and to HMRC. This will incur an increase in the monthly administration charge to £20. It will be necessary to continue with this arrangement until such as time as any alternative is put in place.
- 2 Move the payroll to another provider. It is anticipated that this will involve a higher administration cost to that charged by Playworks. Discussions with CCBC are ongoing as an alternative
- 3 Bring the service in house. This will only be possible if appropriate payroll software is purchased. This is necessary to meet HMRC requirements for electronic processing. There are a variety of HMRC approved payroll software packages on the market. This may be a cheaper option than the Playworks fee, but all the administration would then fall on the Clerk

After some discussion it was **agreed** we continue with Playworks in the interim, in the hope that a possible alternative provider can be identified over the coming months, possibly a neighbouring town/community council who takes in house responsibility.

The Clerk reported verbally on additional correspondence received since preparation of his report –

Application for Financial Assistance - Libanus Lifestyle Centre – Christmas tree and decorations to be placed on new outside decking area.

The Clerk reported that he had e-mailed copies of the application to members for their consideration.

After some discussion it was **agreed** a grant of £250 be awarded.

The Clerk reported that he had forwarded the Mayors request that consideration be given to granting financial assistance to an animal charity, bearing in mind we would not be sponsoring the Annual Blackwood RFC Firework Display this year, due to its cancellation as a result of the Pandemic. This would undoubtedly lead to an increase in the number of fireworks let off in peoples gardens and subsequently have an increased detrimental effect on household pets. He reported that a majority of members had responded supporting this suggestion.

After some further discussion it was **agreed** that a grant of £200 be awarded. Members **agreed** that the actual charity be identified by the Mayor, who would contact local vets for their recommendation.

He also reported on an e-mail received from Boverton Nurseries notifying of a proposed increase from £1,089 to £1,201 for the provision of hanging baskets in the High Street for next year. It also highlighted that a no deal Brexit might attract additional tariffs, as the majority of compost and plants are sourced in Europe.

Councillor D Jones queried why we were using Boverton Nurseries, and whether we should approach potential local suppliers The Clerk responded that these were the suppliers when we took over responsibility from Caerphilly C.B.C. for provision of hanging baskets back in 2017, and that they had provided an excellent service to date. Sunningdale Nurseries had been approached in the interim, but had not expressed an interest. After some discussion, it was proposed quotations be sought locally. The Clerk identified that a response to the e-mail was requested as a matter of urgency, and that seeking quotations at this stage might mean no baskets for next year. After further discussion, and recognising the apparent urgency, it was **agreed** the Clerk make contact again with Sunningdale to see if they might be interested in quoting for the job, and reporting back to Councillors G James & R Mills before confirming acceptance of the Boverton Nurseries increase in prices. It was also **agreed** to revisit this in early summer, with a view to inviting tenders for 2022/23

## 6. *Payments Schedule*

The Clerk presented his report on payments made/ due for payment, and all were **agreed** –

		£. p
John Hold	October Salary/ Reimbursements	967.98
HMRC	Tax/N.I. October Salary	280.99
Playworks	Payroll Admin Fee	20.00
Andrew Jervis	Internal Audit Fee	120.00
RBL Poppy Appeal	Poppy wreath	20.00

## 7. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup>. October 2020 on a remote basis*

It was **unanimously resolved** the minutes be approved as a true record

## 8. *Matters Arising*

### 7. Other Issues requiring Formal Agreement

#### *Planned Events*

The Clerk reported that Jenna Curtis ( Studio 54 ) had things well in hand with the tree and lights and would be erected week commencing 22<sup>nd</sup> November with planned switch on for Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> to coincide with High Street Lights. He informed members that all Christmas lights across the Borough were on a time switch and programmed to come on at 4.00pm in the absence of any formal switch on.

The Clerk then updated members on his discussions with Elsburys and C.C.B.C. regarding the feasibility of lighting the conifer at the southern end of town, adjacent to Absolutely Fabulous. Elsburys say the tree is too far from a lamp post to run power to it, and the size of the tree would require more power than one could supply anyway, and advised to organise same via C.C.B.C. Once power was sorted they estimated 150 to 200 metres of lights would be required at an approximate cost of £2,000, plus cost of dressing and removing same (annually by cherry picker)

Having contacted C.C.B.C. they have advised that a power supply could cost approx. £2,000 but would unlikely to be undertaken until early/ mid December, realistically too late for this year's festivities, but suggested perhaps contact be made with Absolutely Fabulous for a possible supply from their premises. The Clerk also reported that Jonathan Davies, Borough Parks & Countryside Operations Manager had no issue with Town Council using the conifer.

Members were concerned at the estimates given by both Elsburys and C.C.B.C., and after some discussion **agreed** this initiative be put on hold until next year, when more time can be given to sourcing other possible alternatives

#### *C.C.T.V. Review*

Councillor M Gwynne asked if there was any progress on the previously reported possible addition cameras at the Bus Station. Councillor Z Hammond responded by stating that no progress had been made, due to the Pandemic. The Clerk offered to make contact and report back to the next meeting.

#### *Civic Awards*

The Clerk reported that he had sourced a possible planter to recognise/commemorate Blackwood Primary Schools role as a Childcare Hub during the Pandemic, and was liaising with the Head Teacher. The costs including plaque and delivery would be £500 - £520, and then obviously the cost of compost and plants are additional.

After some discussion it was **agreed** the Clerk continue to liaise with the school, and if they were in agreement with the proposal to progress to placing an order.

## 9. *Training Opportunities for Members*

The Clerk presented his report outlining the remote training courses being provided by One Voice Wales. The information had been forwarded to members previously for their attention, and the Clerk had asked any members interested to contact him identifying the courses they were interested in. He reiterated his request that members contact him as soon as possible so he could make the relevant bookings on their behalf.

## **10. Budget Monitoring Report to Period 7 - 31<sup>st</sup>. October 2020**

The Clerk presented his Budget Monitoring Report to 31<sup>st</sup>. October 2020, and he explained he projected out turn did not differ substantially to that reported to the last meeting ( to 31<sup>st</sup>. July 2020 ).

The Estimated Reserves totalled £88,610, with potentially some £22,000 available to invest in potential projects to benefit the town.

It was **agreed** the report be accepted

## **11. To Consider setting up a Working Group to determine Town Council priorities**

The Clerk presented his report.

It had been **agreed** at the last meeting that since the current COVID Pandemic has totally devastated the Council's events programme throughout the summer and over the forthcoming Christmas period we invite residents to forward suggestions /ideas as to how this might best be invested to benefit the town.

It was **agreed** that Town Council consider setting up a working group, to deliberate on any suggestions/ideas received from the public, together with any identified by members, and to set ourselves **SMART** objectives covering both the young and old in our community as to our priorities for the future.

<b>S</b>	<b>Specific</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>Measureable</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Achievable</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>Realistic</b>
<b>T</b>	<b>Time Bound</b>

The Clerk pointed out that it could be argued that this responsibility should rest with the Policy & Finance Committee whose current TERMS OF REFERENCE were as follows -

- a) To consider issues affecting policies of the Community Council.
- b) To revise existing Council policies and to devise new policies as and when required.
- c) To consider aspects of management of resources including the consideration of budget monitoring reports and the preparation of the draft annual budget.
- d) To review financial regulations and to undertake an annual risk assessment review.
- e) To consider applications for Financial Assistance from organisations/individuals
- f) To be responsible for all personnel matters affecting the Council.
- g) To make recommendations to the full Council.

Current membership consisted of Councillors P Cook, Z Hammond, D Davies, J Edwards, T Evans, A Short & R Mills.

After some discussion it was **agreed** that the Policy & Finance Committee meet to consider how the available reserves might best be utilised to benefit the town.

## ***12. Planning Applications***

Councillor Z Hammond presented the report on the planning applications received since the last meeting -

Case Ref. 20/0841/FULL

Location: Llwynellyn Cwmgelli Villas Cwmgelli Blackwood NP12 1BU

Proposal: Erect two storey rear extension, external alterations and detached garage/workshop

Case Ref. 20/0858/RET

Location: 1 Coronation Road Blackwood NP12 1EA

Proposal: Retain and complete the change of use from C3 to C4 including replacement of conservatory structure with fibreglass roof & timber framed walls

She reported that 20/0841/FULL was indeed a second application, but nevertheless there were no issues of concern

20/0858/RET was an application for change of use to become a multiple occupancy dwelling with bedsit accommodation. There appeared to be no issues from a planning perspective to warrant an objection.

Members ***accepted*** the report.

## ***13. To Agree Date of Annual General Meeting***

The Clerk presented his report, and after some deliberation members ***agreed*** the date of our postponed Annual General Meeting now be held remotely on Monday 7<sup>th</sup>. December at 6.30pm.

It was also ***agreed***, that given there are no opportunities for a secret ballot, the Clerk forward details of existing representation on Town Council Committees and various Outside Committees/ Groups so that parties representation can be considered prior to the meeting in the hope many could remain as they are until the 2021 Annual General Meeting

This would essentially mean that the Election of Mayor & Deputy Mayor would be the only positions voted on ( by show of hands ) at the AGM

## ***14. Reports***

Councillor D Davies reported that he had received a message from Blackwood British Legion thanking the Mayor for his attendance and laying of wreath on behalf of Town Council at the War Memorial on Sunday.