

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL HELD
REMOTELY ON DECEMBER 7TH, 2020**

Present : Councillor G James (Mayor)

Councillors A Farina-Childs, J Edwards, D Davies, T Evans, R Mills, C Erasmus
D Jones, A Davies, A Short & P Cook

1. To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors R Weeks, Z Hammond & M Gwynne.

The Clerk reported that Cllr. Mark Gwynne's mother had recently passed away. Members expressed their sympathies and asked the Clerk to send a card of condolence from all his friends and colleagues on Town Council

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations at this point

3. Outgoing Mayoral Report

The Mayor reported on some of his most recent visits, strictly within Covid guidelines, namely VE Day Celebrations, Remembrance Day wreath laying/ Lamp post poppies & Studio 54 Christmas Light switch on.

He stated that the past nine months had been very frustrating, especially regarding all the plans to celebrate the town's Bi Centenary having been put on hold, but hoped that in the coming year there would be a significant improvement in the situation.

He thanked members and the Clerk for their support, and in bestowing him the honour of representing the town.

Members in turn congratulated him for being the public face of the town, and for the all he had done to promote the town during his extended term of office and during such unprecedented times.

The Clerk placed on record his thanks to the Mayor for his support and assistance, especially for his work on the new Town Council web page

4. To Elect a Mayor

Given the unprecedented circumstances, and the fact the next Annual General Meeting was only five months away it was **unanimously agreed** to suspend Standing Orders.

It was then proposed by Councillor R Mills, seconded by Councillor D Davies and **unanimously agreed** that Councillor Gerwyn James remain Mayor until the next A.G.M.

Councillor G James thanked members for their continued confidence and support

5. To Elect a Deputy Mayor

Councillors R Mills & M Gwynne were both nominated for the position of Deputy Mayor. After a show of hands it was **resolved** Councillor Rhys Mills be elected Deputy Mayor

6. To Nominate Members to the following –

Given the ongoing position, with little likelihood of many Committee meetings (other than Policy & Finance) being called, it was **proposed by Councillor R Mills, seconded by Councillor D Davies and unanimously agreed** that committee representation remain as at present until the next Annual General Meeting scheduled for May 2021.

(a) Finance & Policy Committee – 7 members

Current serving members –

Councillors P Cook, Z Hammond, D Davies, J Edwards, T Evans, A Short & R Mills

(b) Planning & Licensing Committee – 5 members

Current serving members –

Councillors D Davies, J Edwards, Z Hammond, R Mills + 1

(c) Environment Committee – 5 members

Current serving members –

Councillors T Evans, J Edwards, C Erasmus, R Mills + 1

(d) Newsletter/ Web Page Committee – 4 members

Current serving members –

Councillors Z Hammond & P Cook + 2

(e) Twinning Committee -

This Committee is open to all members

(f) Events Committee

This is an advisory Committee, that the Town Council has delegated the role of managing the agreed budget. ***It is open to all members of the Council***, but members are requested to nominate a Chair & Vice Chair of the Committee.

7. To Nominate Members to the following –

Similarly, it was proposed by Councillor R Mills, seconded by Councillor D Davies and unanimously agreed that outside body representation remain as at present until the next Annual General Meeting scheduled for May 2021.

(a) *Town & Community Council Joint Liaison Committee - 2 members*

This Committee comprises of delegates from each of the Town & Community Councils within C.C.B.C. It meets quarterly and its main purpose is to discuss matters of mutual interest and to agree topics to be discussed with Caerphilly C.B.C.

Councillors C Erasmus & D Davies

(b) *Caerphilly C.B.C. Community Council Liaison Sub Committee - 1 member*

This Committee is attended by Caerphilly C.B.C. members and also representatives from each of the Town & Community Councils. The Committee which meets quarterly considers matters of a common interest and also topics identified by the Joint Liaison Committee.

Only one member may be nominated, and must be one of the two members nominated above.

Councillor C Erasmus be appointed with Councillor D Davies as Deputy

(c) *Blackwood Town Centre Management Group – 2 Members*

This Group represents a number of interested organisations located in the Blackwood area. These consist of local traders, local residents, Police together with Caerphilly C.B.C. and Town Council members. The Group meets quarterly.

Councillors Z Hammond & G James

(d) *Blackwood Retail Partnership - 2 members*

The Retail Partnership consists of staff from local businesses, Police & Caerphilly C.B.C.

Councillors J Edwards & A Short

(e) *After Hours/ Night time Economy Group/ Bus Station Multi Agency Group – 2 Members*

Councillors Z Hammond & G James

(f) *One Voice Wales Area Committee & Larger Councils Committee – 1 member for each*

One Voice Wales is the single All Wales representative body for Community & Town Councils in Wales, and ensures concerns of such Councils are heard at the Local level

Councillor C Erasmus

(g) *Plas Mawr Community Centre Committee – 1 Members*

One member is elected to serve on the Management Committee of the Community Centre, but currently there is a vacancy (previously Councillor J Griffiths)

Members expressed concern that representatives are not informed of meetings, and asked the Clerk to contact the organisation to ensure proper governance

(h) *Bi- Centenary Committee - 1 Member*

One member currently serves on this newly formed Committee

Councillor Gerwyn James (current Chair)

8. To Confirm Provisional Dates & Times of Future Council Meetings & Method of Notification (E mail)

The Clerk presented hi report, and after some discussion, it was **agreed** the dates of future Town Council meetings are as follows –

11th. January 2021

8th. February 2021

8th. March 2021

12th. April 2021

10th. May 2021 (Annual General Meeting)

It was further **agreed** these meetings be held remotely until it is safe to physically meet, and that meetings start at 6.30 p.m. Furthermore, notification of meetings, Agendas, Minutes and Reports continue to be forwarded via e mail.

9. Correspondence

The Clerk presented his report on correspondence received, and all were noted

Caerphilly C.B.C. Licensing

Given the recent Notice of Application for New Premises Licence at 88 High Street, Blackwood (formerly Rowland's Newsagents) sale of alcohol which was forwarded to Members, I queried as to why Town Council had not been notified.

I have been informed that this is not a legal requirement, but have requested any applications relating to the Town Council area are forwarded in future

Traffic Management

Notice of Road Closures – Bridge Street Monday 23rd. to Friday 27th. November
Bloomfield Road Monday 11th. January 2021

Forwarded to members

Community Cleansing

Requests for suggestions of areas requiring additional cleansing works to public land areas to be undertaken week commencing 25th. January 2021. Enforcement officers will also be in the area concentrating on dog fouling, littering, illicit dumping and disposal of commercial waste, and would welcome contact regarding same.

Forwarded to members

Chief Executive

Back in October, I wrote to the Chief Executive Officer

Given the disappointing news yesterday that permission has been refused for the Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre case be taken to the Supreme Court, can I respectfully request that Town Council together with the Campaign Group are properly consulted on the Authority place making plan for the whole Leisure Centre/ 3G pitch/ former school site you mentioned in previous correspondence.

The loss of public space at the nearby Harold Finch Memorial Park has caused major upset locally, as compared with many other communities in the Borough, Blackwood/ Pontllanfraith residents feel short changed when it comes to somewhere local they can get their regular exercise. I realise there are much more pressing issues at present with the Authorities response to the ongoing Pandemic, but would welcome your commitment to engaging with Town Council as and when able.

Hi John

Many thanks for your email and your request for the Town Council and campaign group be consulted on the Pontllanfraith element of the Placeshaping plan. I can confirm that as soon as we are able to consult and engage on the Placeshaping plan we will be in touch and this will be part of a comprehensive consultation and engagement plan.

Regards

Christina

Welsh Govt. Notification of increase in Appropriate Sum – Section 137 Expenditure Limits for 2021/22 increased from £8.32 to £8.41 per elector.
No real impact for Town Council

George Edwards Notification of significant problem at Bus Station toilets resulting in temporary closure between Saturday 28th / Monday 30th November (cleaning of blood, used needles and faeces)

Messages of Thanks from Libanus Lifestyle & Studio 54 for our financial support/ provision of xmas tree and lights

In respect of the Licensing application for 88 High Street, Councillor A Farina-Childs informed members that whilst not wanting to deny a business opportunity on the High Street he had major concerns regarding the proposed hours for alcohol sales, namely 07.00 to 23.00 Monday to Sunday but 07.00 to 01.00 Friday & Saturday, and had objected quoting potential increase in anti social behaviour, public nuisance and public safety issues.

Members queried whether the police had objected, presumably on similar grounds, and whether there was perhaps need for all other existing outlets in the area to be subject to the same hours with regard sale of alcohol.

It was *agreed* Town Council object to the currently proposed licensing hours

10. Schedule of Payments

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

		£. p
John Hold	Nov. Salary + reimbursements (Xmas tree/ Defib. parts)	1,460.22
Playworks	Nov. Salary	20.00
HMRC	Nov. Tax/N.I. Contributions	364.43
Libanus Lifestyle	Financial Assistance	250.00
A Sheehy	Hire of Cherry picker –Xmas tree Studio 54	105.00
Zelma Services	Supply & install lights for Xmas tree (incl. VAT £97.64)	585.84

11. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held remotely on 9th. November 2020

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

12. Matters Arising

The Clerk presented the following report on responses received in respect of matters arising -

5. Correspondence

Hanging Baskets

Hello John.

It's great to hear from you and thank you for considering us for this project. As the second oldest retail family in the town we are thrilled to be considered.

However with the uncertainty regarding covid and the potential impact this could mean on us as a small businesses we are unable at the moment to undertake any additional work of this nature regarding the on going maintainance installations watering etc required.

However to refill the baskets based on the information supplied would be approximately £35.00 per item.

It's difficult without seeing the baskets but this is based on a sustainably sourced moss lining a selection of plants suitable. And a three month feed as well as delivery during May 2021.

We hope this is of assistance to you and look forward to hearing from you in the future.

I would also like to take the opportunity to enquire as to whether the opportunity exists for us to replant the "Islwyn Crest" to the North of the town as we originally installed this monument in 1996. It was the last landscape project that we undertook locally and we would be happy to do this ad gratis.

We hope this is too your approval.

Thanks again Anthony Hilditch Director Blackwood Garden Centre

CCTV

Hi

Yes, additional cameras installed.

1 in the waiting room ,a static looking across to the existing camera as underneath the existing camera was a blind spot.

1 additional PTZ (moveable) camera located in the middle of the concourse between the 2 existing cameras

We have also located 2 cameras (1 static on ticket machine / 1 PTZ) in Wesley road car park plus upgraded a few of the old analogue cameras in the town centre to IP cameras plus currently up=grading the network connections between cameras.

Thanks Carl Nesling Control Room Manager

Events

Total cost of Christmas tree at Studio 54 exceeded estimate of £750 - actual cost £813.20

In respect of the response from Blackwood Garden Centre, Councillor D Jones thanked the Clerk for his efforts, and fully supported the renewal of agreement with Boverton Nurseries for the coming year, but was pleased that our contact had initiated the probable replanting of the Islwyn Crest at Cwmgelli.

Members ***accepted*** the increased costs associated with the Christmas tree at Studio 54

13. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held remotely on 30th November 2020

It was ***resolved*** the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee be received.

It was ***agreed*** the application for financial assistance for works at Cefn Fforest Eco Park be further considered after the Clerk & Councillor R Mills meet with representatives

Other matters were included on the Agenda for discussion

14. Independent Review Panel for Wales Draft Report

The Clerk presented his report on the relevant section of the Draft Report that referred to Town & Community Councils, explaining that Town Council would fall into Group B, and that no decision was required regarding the £150 payment to members as a contribution to costs and expenses, as this was mandatory. However, if members decided not to take up the payment they would have to advise the Clerk/ Responsible Officer in writing to that effect.

Policy & Finance Committee agreed to recommend to Town Council that as the Report stands, the position remains as per the current year, and that –

No Payments be made in respect of specific responsibilities for the coming year

Payments of Travel costs be made for attending approved duties

Payment of Overnight Subsistence costs be made for attending approved duties

Payment of Financial loss compensation, where actual loss has occurred be made for attending approved duties

Payment of £400 (uplifted by inflation) be made to the Mayor

No Payment be made to the Deputy Mayor

After some discussion, whilst members generally being in agreement with the recommendation, it was ***agreed*** this be deferred to a future meeting.

The Clerk did again reiterate that if members did not want to take up the £150 payment, they would have to write to him declining same.

15. Medium Term Budget Strategy/ Budget Requirements 2021/2022 & Precept Setting

The Clerk presented his Report on a planned Medium Term Budget Strategy.

He identified that his last Budget Monitoring Report to 31st. October 2020 indicated that our estimated Reserves Position at 31st. March 2021 would be as follows –

	£
General Reserves	37,347 *
Coed Duon	10,000
Other Environmental	2,190
Xmas Lights	18,610
Bi-Centenary	20,160
CIL	303
	<hr/>
	£ 88,610
	=====

- With the currently accepted General Reserves set at £15,000 (approx 25% of Precept) per Town Council Minute of 19th. March 2020, this potentially makes approximately £22,000 available for use

However, given the unwarranted attention on the Town Council precept during the Caerphilly County Borough Council Boundary Changes Consultation, the enforced cancellation of our planned events programme and the cessation of required funding of the Bi-Centenary celebrations, perhaps members might like to consider utilising some of the available funds to reduce the current precept (£20 per Band D property).

Options within the tables indicate the position, that –
with a £1 reduction to £19 would increase our reserves by £2,915 over the 3 years of this proposal
with a £2 reduction to £18 would require £5,950 contribution from reserves over the 3 years *
with £2.50 reduction to £17.50 would require £10,390 contribution from reserves over the 3 years

An unknown at this moment in time is the potential effect of the Independent Review Panel for Wales Draft Report.

If all things remain as last year, then there will be no effect on the figures.
However, if members were to consider introducing specific responsibility allowances and /or now wish to receive the £150, which is their entitlement, then this will have a marked difference on the figures provided. Hence, an early indication of members intentions would greatly assist the budget setting process.

Policy & Finance Committee agreed to recommend to Town Council that the Medium Term Budget Strategy be agreed, and that members consider reducing the precept by £2 per annum at Band D to £18 for 2021/22.

Furthermore, given the ongoing uncertainty around Covid 19 and our events programme the Committee also recommended the budget provision as identified be agreed, and any under spends are revisited throughout the coming year with possible additional support/services for the benefit of the town considered as an alternative

Councillor D Jones thanked the Clerk for his Medium term strategy, and agreed this was a much better alternative than purely dealing with the budget year on year, however, he questioned whether a relatively small reduction in the precept for next year was the best option, when perhaps we should take the opportunity to identify schemes that might better benefit the community.

The Clerk raised his concern at the amount of balances currently held without a planned programme, and that this may well be queried by Audit. Ideally he would welcome a discussion on how the current reserves might best be utilised over the coming years to benefit the town, thereby demonstrating proper financial management of our reserves.

After much discussion, it was **agreed** that a Policy & Finance Committee be held in January prior to a Special Town Council meeting being called to determine the Budget for 2021/22 on possibly 1st February to meet County Borough requirements.

It was also **agreed**, that given his experience in identifying and financing community type projects, Councillor D Jones be co-opted onto the Policy & Finance Committee.

16. Planning Applications

The Clerk presented his report on planning applications received since the last meeting –

Case Ref. 20/0955/FULL

Location: 40 Rhos Y Dderwen Blackwood NP12 1HB

Proposal: Convert garage with bay window

Case Officer: Mr M W Jones (01443 864528 : jonesm5@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 20/0962/COU

Location: Esquire 120-122 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AF (UPRN 000043055507)

Proposal: Change the use from Class A1 Retail to Class A2 Financial and Professional Services

Case Officer: Miss E Rowley (01443 864776 : rowlee@caerphilly.gov.uk

And reported verbally on an additional application received earlier that day -

Case Ref. 20/0959/FULL

Location: Newbold Solicitors, 233 High Street Blackwood

Proposal : Erect new shop front

Case Officer : Mr M W Jones (01443 864528 : jonesm5@caerphilly.gov.uk

After some discussion, it was **agreed** no objections be forwarded

Councillor A Farina-Childs informed members that the application in respect of 1 Coronation Road Blackwood for potential change of use to become a multiple occupancy dwelling had been withdrawn

17. Reports

Councillor R Mills informed members that he and Councillor A Short had been actively seeking potential premises in town that might be suitable as a base, to be manned by members, which the public could visit for advice/support on a range of issues.

Those currently under consideration are the former Granville West Solicitors Office at the southern end of town and units within the Market Precinct whilst also enquiring about other possibilities in the High Street.

They planned to report back to the Policy & Finance Committee early in the new year