

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 6TH. FEBRUARY 2023

Present : Cllr. G. Edwards (Mayor)

Cllrs. A Farina-Childs, D Davies, G James, K Williams, A Bradfield, K Jones, C Erasmus,
A Short, C Clark, J Pearce

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. P Cook, D Box, R Mills, L Phillips & K Etheridge

2. Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point

3. Ryan Bevan, Community Liaison Officer OGI - Overview of works to be carried out in Blackwood to Improve broadband speed

The Mayor introduced Mike Scott, Senior Communications Executive who apologised for the absence of Ryan Bevan.

Ogi is the internet company made in Wales, and on a mission to connect Welsh communities to one of the UK's fastest-capable full fibre networks that will help us to live and work smarter at, and closer to, home. It's an ambitious programme that's transforming Wales's digital landscape - bringing world-leading connectivity direct to the doors of homes and businesses. We're bringing good economic news to Welsh communities at a tough time too: creating hundreds of high-quality local jobs across the company and through our supply-chain; generating a long-term economic impact worth up to five times the capital investment in each community. Better connectivity enables people to work from home without compromise and businesses to thrive wherever they are based – bringing much-needed regeneration to the places we call home.

Work has started to connect tens of thousands of people in twenty-three new communities, as Ogi's £200million phase one plan extends to thriving commuter communities and business hubs across south Wales. The latest towns and villages to benefit from Ogi's rollout include Blackwood, Langstone, Maesteg, Pontypool, Trehafod, and Underwood. Once work is complete, homes and businesses in these areas will have access to the altnet's ultrafast network – with most able to access fibre to the door for the very first time. This is an economic impact worth around £5million to each local area, with research suggesting the long-term benefit could be as high as five times that, as local homes and businesses adopt the new technology. Together with its next generation ultrafast fibre network for homes, Ogi's rollout will make access to world class IT support ever easier for local businesses too – giving workplaces of all kinds the competitive edge to thrive.

We know people will have questions about our work from time-to-time. Here are the key contact details for the public to find out more about our work in their area. Customer Care Phone 029 2002 0550 Email customer.care@ogi.wales Customer Care is here to help answer any questions the public have about our rollout – so if there's something not quite right, we're on it, right away.

Community is at the heart of all we do Our community fund ‘Cefnogi’ (meaning support in Welsh) offers micro-grants to a range of local groups and community organisations in our towns and villages. So, if it brings people together – then we want to support it, and you! www.ogi.wales/support

Bringing a full fibre network to you takes a lot of planning – we’ll be in the community for quite a bit of time... but, don’t worry, if we need to dig in your street, we’ll be in touch. Once it’s in, your full fibre network is capable of being up-cycled continually, so you won’t be seeing our engineers again for a very long time, unless we need to quickly repair something. www.ogi.wales/what-to-expect

A real local broadband company We’re investing £200million installing one of the UK's fastest-capable network across south Wales. It's already providing customers with ultrafast Gigabit-capable broadband speeds, and is ready to scale as demand grows.

Mike stated that he was of the opinion BT would not be available locally for much longer and also stated special rates would be available for those signing up to Ogi.

Members asked some questions regarding availability in neighbouring communities and whether the special rates referred to would be advertised. He responded by stating an advertising campaign would be launched in the near future. He apologised he didn’t have handouts for members but promised to forward information to the Clerk as soon as possible.

The Mayor thanked Mike for his attendance and presentation and he left the meeting

4. County Borough Report

Cllr. A Farina-Childs gave a brief report on current issues affecting the town, namely –

The ongoing problems with the vandalism to the parking meters in the car parks, and the fact people are having to search for machines that are actually working.

The proposed development at William Street with local residents raising their concerns in respect of access/ egress/ parking and noise

Ongoing issues at Cwmgelli relating to drainage/ removal of trees on site and resulting soil erosion

Warm Hubs now operational at Libanus/ HCT/ Blackwood Cricket Club & Cefn Glas

Caerphilly CBC proposed Council Tax increase of 7.9%

Homelessness appears to be on the increase in and around the town again

5. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor, other than assisting with various issues for residents had nothing further to report

6. Correspondence

The Clerk presented his report on Items of Correspondence received since the last meeting, and all were *noted* –

Caerphilly CBC Footfall figures (forwarded to members)

Notification of likely recharge figures in respect of Beach Party (£2,979.38)

Surveillance Camera Commissioner approval of continuation of cameras in Cefn Fforest (responded as in previous years T.C. in favour as they are an integral tool against ASB in the area)

Budget Proposals 2023/24 (forwarded to members)

Review of Community Council Boundary Arrangements

Temporary Closure Notice - Hall Street Blackwood between its junctions with George Street and Hall Street roundabout for a distance of approx. 240 metres in a Southerly direction From 09:00 until 17:00 on Monday 20 February 2023 – forwarded to members

Proposed Closure of Wesley Road & Thornecombe Road 3 Car Park

Request for Feedback on Christmas Market Event and ideas for future events plus confirmation of Sat March 4th Spring Fair /Sat July 8th Beach Party /Sat Nov 25th Winter Fair

Parking Machine Problems

Road Closures Notice in respect of Spring Fair

Notification to Borough Members of a more formal Agenda request by Taylor Woodrow for future meetings

Licensing Act - Variation of Premises Licence - Opening times/Music – Bijou, Blackwood

Notification of Community Council Liaison Committee Meeting dates- 3rd. April / 24th July / 20th. November

Notification of Council Tax Base for 2023/24 - £2,959.91 for Band D Properties
(compared with £2,972.91 for current year) Request for information on Precept
requirements by 31st. January

One Voice Wales Training Courses available for Members Jan - March - forwarded to members

Agenda/ Papers for Larger Councils Meeting 15th. February

Community/Town Council Census of Community Defibrillators

Police & Crime Commissioner Views sought on proposed Police Budget for 2023/24 – forwarded to
members

Welsh Govt. Notification of changes to VAT on Sports Fees - local authorities can now reclaim
VAT for the past 4 years

Consultation on Tech. Advice Note (TAN) 15 - Development, flooding & coastal
erosion

Sight Cymru Invitation to members - opening of Charity Shop 215 High Street, Blackwood
Wednesday 15th. February 12.00 – 2.00pm.

Andrew Ferns Notification of HSBC Closure in town on 25th July - is apparently willing to attend
Town Council meeting

Welsh Blood Service Information regarding details of Local Clinics

In respect of the notification of the HSBC closure, the Clerk reported that he had received confirmation
from Chris Evans MP that a representative would be willing to meet with members. It was *agreed* the
Clerk try and arrange same asap

7. *Schedule of Payments*

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

		£. P
K & R Print	Printing Christingle	295.00
Mrs.S. Davidson	Refreshments Christingle	128.56
John Hold	Dec.Sals & Reimbursements	1,554.84
Katherine Watkins	Dec. Fee	20.00
HMRC	Dec. Tax/N.I.	505.81
J.S. Lee	Place Christmas Tree & Star (incl. £30 VAT)	180.00
Don Elsbury	Erect/ Take down / Storage of Xmas Lights (incl. £735.72 VAT)	4,414.32
Blackwood Methodist	Hire/ Cleaning of Church – Xmas Events	110.00
John Hold	Jan. Sals & Reimbursements	1,045.30
Katherine Watkins	Jan. Fee	20.00
HMRC	Jan Tax/N.I.	318.27

8. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 5th .December 2022*

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

9. *Matters Arising*

There were no matters arising

10. *To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 24th. January 2023*

The Clerk presented the Minutes and these were *accepted*.

The Clerk highlighted that most of the decisions recommended to Town Council are on the Agenda for further discussion

11. *Applications for Financial Assistance*

The Clerk presented the following two applications

Applications for Financial Assistance HCT (Helping Caring Team) requesting £550 to fund a washer/ dryer machine to enable homeless and vulnerable people in Blackwood to wash & dry their clothes free of charge. HCT would need to install plumbing at their premises at 28 Bridge Street to enable same and are planning to fund the estimated cost (£200) from their own funds

Vikram Yadh (Caerphilly Comic Con) requesting £2,200 to run a 12 month project based in Blackwood Library (and involving 17 schools in and around the Blackwood area) to encourage and develop an interest in comic arts, Sci Fi and table top gaming among children and families in the community, thus helping to promote Arts, Humanities & Science Technology, Engineering & Maths

After some discussion it was agreed that £550 be donated to HCT to enable the purchase/ provision of washing/drying facilities at 28 Bridge Street.

In respect of Caerphilly Comic Con, members had some concerns regarding the benefits to a potentially small number of individuals and the future of the project after the first year – was there an expectation that Town Council continues funding in the future ?

After some discussion it was **agreed** arrangements be made for representatives to attend a future meeting to put their case and answer members concerns

12. Arrangements for Payments of Members Contributions to Expenses

The Clerk reminded members of their entitlement to the payments, and wished to get agreement on arrangements for same. After some discussion it was **agreed** that Payments (currently £150 per annum/ or pro rata) are automatically made annually each March (unless members notify the Clerk in writing they do not wish to receive same) by direct transfer to Members Bank Account.

Members are requested to provide their bank details – Sort Code/ Account Name & Number as soon as possible to the Clerk / Proper Officer

13. Budget Monitoring Report - Period 9 to 31st. December 2022

The Clerk presented his monitoring report, which identified the potential surplus for the current year was likely to increase by approx £72,000, albeit approx £69,000 was in respect of Community Infrastructure Levy which had quite strict criteria attached to its spending. After some discussion the report was agreed and accepted by members.

14. Budget Requirements 2023/2024/ Reserves Position/ Precept Setting / Medium Term Budget Strategy

The Clerk presented his report which included a proposed budget for 2023/2024 based on current spending patterns, plus inflationary increases on some expenditure heads, but which also reflected the Council's previous decisions to continue the provision of hanging baskets, continued sponsorship of the Blackwood RFC Firework Display and the GAVO Volunteer Awards Evening and ongoing Events Programme and Grants to Voluntary Organisations, including Turn the Town Pink in support of the planned Breast Cancer Unit at Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (£250), whilst also including a budget of £1,000 to support the maintenance of the Remembrance Garden and provide assistance at the Remembrance Day Service which received much praise last November.

It also includes budgetary provision for the Newsletter at £2,000 for the coming year, together with provision for a potential Civic Awards Evening in the sum of £2,000, and also £1,000 for the continued potential provision of Christmas Selection Boxes to Blackwood & Libanus Schools

The report also highlights the inclusion of £3,300 for 2023/24, and future years in respect of the potential Contributions to Members Expenses, and assumes all members will claim all entitlements (£156 plus additional £52) together with £1,600 included for next year in support of the Members Training Programme.

He pointed out that the projected Reserves Position at 31st. March 2023 would be as follows –

	Actual 31/3/22	Projected 31/3/23
	£	£
General Reserves	15,000	15,000
Coed Duon	10,000	-
Other – Strategic Plan Projects / Budget Support	46,444	82,427
Xmas Lights	20,547	22,547
Bi- Centenary	25,160	-
CIL	303	69,498 *
	<u>£ 117,454</u>	<u>£189,472</u>

In setting the Precept for next year 2023/2024 members must have due regard to the levels of reserves/ balances.

Of the £189,472 Projected Balances as shown above, realistically some £82,427 is currently available, with £15,000 having been previously accepted as a prudent General Reserve, £22,547 earmarked for updating our Christmas Lighting (last updated 2015/16) and £69,498 CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) having specific criteria attached to it and any potential spend must be agreed by Caerphilly C.B.C.

Furthermore, at present the following items have been potentially prioritised but without identified funding -

	£
3 Tier Flower Planters plus planter for Blackwood Primary	2,500 *
Flag Poles with fitting	2,500 *
Part Time Toilet Attendant / Cleaner	say 10,000

If these * go ahead, they will either be funded from the £82,427 or if the criteria is met from CIL. The Toilet Attendant/ Cleaner will have to be funded from this sum (if it becomes permanent that would equate to approx £5 per annum increase on precept)

Furthermore, it will be for the Council to determine each year whether or not Special Allowances will be paid in respect of Chairs of Committees, Level of Payments to Mayor/ Deputy Mayor and whether Attendance Allowances are introduced.

Policy & Finance Committee unanimously agreed to recommend to Town Council the budget as presented and that the Precept for 2023/2024 remain at £20 per Band D Property, which will necessitate utilising £12,830 from balances.

After some discussion the budget as presented was *agreed* as was the Precept remaining at £20 per Band D Property. Furthermore, that the Medium Term Strategy be accepted in principle, and obviously updated as and when certain issues become clearer

15. **Notice of Motion** - *We the undersigned request the Town Mayor funding raised for his charity is incorporated into a Town Centre Development Plan, and the Town Clerk makes written representations to all organisations which covers the Blackwood Town Council area asking for donations to this worthy cause during the commencement of their period of office*
Proposer - Kevin Etheridge
Seconded and supported by Kirsty Williams / Donna Box

In the absence of the proposer and one of the seconders, the above Motion was considered. Much discussion, led in the main by previous mayors who felt that the Mayors Charity had little to do with any proposed / future Development Plan and the current practice of Mayors organising their own Charity fund raising efforts/ events had served them well over many years. Whilst it was readily accepted that the Covid Pandemic had had a dramatic effect on the fundraising efforts for recent Mayors it was felt that with the support of fellow members Mayors Charity fundraising should remain the responsibility of the Mayor, albeit with support, if required, from the Events Committee. When put to the vote the motion was defeated.

16. **Planning Applications**

Cllr. A Farina-Childs declared an interest in respect of Application Case Ref.22/1026/FULL as a Trustee for 277 Squadron Air Cadets

Cllr. C Erasmus declared an interest in respect of Application Case Ref. 22/1045/LA as a Member of Governors at Libanus School,

Cllr. A Short declared an interest in respect of Application Case Ref. 23/0003/COU as a previous owner of the land in question and a business proprietor of a similar one to that proposed.

Neither of the members took part in discussion or decision making in respect of their respective applications.

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

Case Ref. 22/0935/FULL

Location: The Jays 13 Ladysmith Road Blackwood NP12 1DJ

Proposal: Demolish existing bungalow and erect a 4 bed detached dwelling

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows 07874 641749 burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/1004/FULL

Location: 27 Beaumaris Way Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1DF

Proposal: Erect first floor side extension

Case Officer: Abbie-Jane Stokes 07907 574195 stokea@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/1026/FULL

Location: Drill Hall High Street Blackwood NP12 1BE

Proposal: Install a new wheelchair accessible ramp at from the front of the building extending to a proposed new entrance door to the left side elevation

Case Officer: Joe Simmons 07874 641751 simmoj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/1028/FULL

Location: 3 Montclair Avenue Blackwood NP12 1EE

Proposal: Erect two storey rear extension

Case Officer: Joe Simmons 07874 641751 simmoj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/1060/FULL

Location: 1 Mayhill Bungalows Blackwood NP12 1EB

Proposal: Raise ridge height and carry out loft conversion with rear dormer

Case Officer: Abbie-Jane Stokes 07907 574195 stokea@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 23/0003/COU

Location: Garages Lewis Yard William Street East UL Blackwood

Proposal: Change the use from existing 9 No. redundant units to a MOT centre and motor repair and tyre fitting workshops. Conduct internal and external wall alternations, roof alterations and erect customer facility room

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows 07874 641749 burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

Case Ref. 22/1045/LA

Location: Libanus Primary School Libanus Road Blackwood NP12 1EH

Proposal: Erect extension to front of school and construct retaining wall to form a raised yard area

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows 07874 641749 burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

After some discussion it was agreed that other than Case Ref. 23/003/COU the applications did not seem contentious and no objections would be raised.

However, members had significant concerns regarding the Proposed MOT centre and motor repair and tyre fitting workshops at Lewis Yard, William Street, and it was **agreed** Town Council support the objections raised by County members and local residents in respect of potential problem relating to access, egress, parking and noise

17. Reports

Cllr. Gerwyn James informed the meeting that he had earlier today accepted a promotion at his Company which unfortunately means he does not feel able to fully engage in Town Council business and feels it best for all concerned if he tendered his resignation with immediate effect. He said he had thoroughly enjoyed his time on Town Council and wished all the best for the future. Members in turn paid tribute to Cllr. James for his service to the community and in particular his term as Mayor during the Covid Pandemic. The Clerk placed on record his thanks for all his advice and support in setting up the remote meetings during lockdown and in updating the Councils webpage.

Cllr. D. Davies informed the meeting that Blackwood Moose Hall had received notification there had been granted Warm Space status by Caerphilly C.B.C.

Cllr. A. Short reported on issues regarding the Grit Bin at the Bus Station

Cllr. A. Farina- Childs requested an approach be made regarding the repair to the damaged artwork on the wall leading towards the Bus Station