

DRAFT

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 12TH. JUNE 2023

Present : Cllr. G Edwards (Mayor)

Cllr. R Mills (Deputy Mayor)

Cllrs. A Farina-Childs, K Etheridge, N Dix, K Jones A Short, C Erasmus, D Davies K Williams,
C Clark & N Nyle

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. D Box & M Gwynne

Cllr. D Box did attempt to join the meeting remotely whilst on holidays but unfortunately failed

2. Declarations Of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest at this point

3. Police Report

Unfortunately there were no officers in attendance

4. County Borough Report

County Borough members informed the meeting of the following –

That the decision to refuse planning permission for the garage development at William Street had been appealed against by the applicant and that a Welsh Government Inspector would now be appointed to rule on same.

There was a planned site meeting on the proposed Skate Park at the Showfield week commencing 19th. June. As members were aware there were significant concerns regarding actual positioning of the park and the fact that there was no provision of CCTV or lighting planned for the development.

The Borough Councils No Mow May policy (Welsh Government initiative) of no cutting of grass during the month of May had received numerous complaints from the public regarding the general untidiness of grass verges and roundabouts and the resultant litter problems associated with same including dog fouling.

The issue of litter and dog fouling at the Showfield in particular had been raised by members on several occasions with requests for more/ larger bins to assist in alleviating the problem.

Members were also reminded that the Welsh Government intend to implement new legislation in September that will reduce many 30mph roads across Wales reduced to 20mph.

Local authorities have been asked to identify roads in their areas which will be considered as exceptions to this 20mph limit and remain at 30mph. The list prepared by Caerphilly C.B.C. has been published and is now open for consultation.

The Clerk informed members they had been forwarded the proposed listing and those roads affecting the Blackwood area specifically were listed under his Correspondence Report .

5. *Mayoral Announcements*

The Mayor reported that he continued to work on the Remembrance Service and planned concert at the Blackwood Miners Institute.

Cllr A Farina-Childs asked how the plans for flag poles were progressing and the Mayor responded by stating the necessary planning application forms were currently being completed.

6. *Correspondence*

The Clerk presented his report on correspondence received since the last meeting, and all were *noted*

Caerphilly C.B.C.

Temp. Prohibition of Driving Order – Albion Terrace with junction of Gordon Road for length of 55 metres between 9.00-17.00 on Thursday 20th.July

Prohibition & Restriction of Waiting & Loading and On Street Parking at various points on High Street to allow for continuation of Parklets

Notification of adjustment to Car Park times at Wesley Road Car Park – will now be locked at 9.00pm

Notification of temporary closure of 6 parking bays at Montclair Car Park to allow for culvert works

Weekly footfall figures (forwarded to members for info.)

VZTA Smart Towns App – request to advertise

Proposed Traffic Regulation Order – 30mph Speed Limits for -
Bryn Road from Highfields Way R/about to junction with Twyn Gardens
B4254 Highfields Way from R/about to west of junction with Montclair Av.
B4251 High Street from Chartist Bridge R/about to a point north of access road To St. Margaret's Church
B4254 Southern Cross Valley Link between Libanus traffic signals & Penmaen Rd. R/about (incl. B4251 Penmaen Road approach)

Notification of no new CIL payments for 2022/23

Gwent Police

Cllrs. Catch Up Session change of date to Thur.25th May or Wed. 31st. May

Notification of Safer Streets Crime Prevention Event ASDA Sat. 20th. May

One Voice Wales

Notification of Training Events

In respect of VZTA Smart Towns App, Cllr. K Williams queried whether an officer might be invited along to a future meeting of Town Council to fully explain the benefits. The Mayor responded by stating that he had been in touch with officers and it is hoped there would be attendance at one of our forthcoming meetings

7. *Schedule of Payments*

The Clerk presented his report identifying that the following payments had been made/ were due for payment -

		£. p
Anuerin Bevan UHB	Turn Town Pink	250.00
Hope	Financial Assistance	250.00
Blackwood Garden Centre	Christmas Tree	450.00
John Hold	April Sals & reimbursements	1,046.20
HMRC	April Sals - Tax/ N.I.	318.27
Playworks	April Sals - Fee	20.00
K & R Print	Printing Costs	96.00
John Hold	May Sals & reimbursements	1,191.30
HMRC	May Sals – Tax/ N.I.	318.27
Playworks	May Sals – Fee	20.00
SSE	Christmas lighting electricity charges	459.04
Information Commissioner	Data Protection Fee Renewal	40.00

He also reported verbally on an invoice received earlier in the day, namely
 Boverton Nurseries Hanging Baskets (incl.£277.14 VAT) 1,662.84

All payments were *unanimously agreed*

8. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Annual General Meeting held 31st. May 2023*

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

9. *Matters Arising*

Cllr K Etheridge queried whether the Mayor had submitted his claim for expenses in respect of his trip referred to in item of Minutes

The Clerk responded that the Mayor had submitted details and claim would be settled shortly

10. *To Receive the Minutes of the Co-option Interview Panel Meeting held 31st. May 2023*

It was resolved the minutes *be received*

11. Completion of Audit for Year Ended 31st. March 2022 - Annual Returns/ Issues Arising Reports

The audit of accounts for the year ended 31st. March 2022 was the first year the council received a full audit under the Auditor General's new audit arrangements

The audit of accounts was completed on 17th April 2023 and The Annual Return will be available to be viewed on the Town Council's website.

The Auditor General for Wales gave an Unqualified audit opinion.

“Except for the matters reported below in my Basis of qualification in my opinion, no matters have come to my attention giving cause for concern that in any material respect the information reported in the Annual Return:

- has not been prepared in accordance with proper practices
- that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met
- is not consistent with the Council's / Committee's governance arrangements; and
- that the Council / Committee does not have proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of resources.”

There are no further matters I wish to draw to the Council's attention

12. Financial Accounts 2022/2023 together with Internal Audit Report & Annual Return for the Year Ended 31st. March 2023

The Clerk presented the Annual Accounts, previously agreed by Council in early April for the new members information, together with an Explanation of Variances between 2022/23 & 2021/22 and Copy of Bank Reconciliation.

He explained that the figures shown in the Accounting Statements were based on the figures contained in the Annual Accounts, and having had the opportunity to compare both members satisfied themselves all was in order, and it was **resolved** the Accounting Statement be approved and accepted.

Members then turned their attention to the Annual Governance Statements and considered each in turn.

The Clerk accepted this was difficult for newer members having had no input whatsoever during the term of the Accounts period and trusted previous members would agree same.

After some discussion, members were confident that Statements 1-8 could be answered positively whilst Statement 9 was not applicable. The Annual Governance Statement was therefore **approved and accepted**.

Members then received the Annual Internal Audit Report and after a brief discussion **resolved it be approved and accepted**

The Annual Return will now be signed by the Mayor on behalf of Town Council and submitted to the external auditors together with any supplementary information requested.

The necessary Notice of Appointment of Date for the Exercise of Electors Rights will be posted on our Web Page and Notice board from 18th. June as directed by Audit Wales

13. To discuss possible Town Council Office in Blackwood

The Clerk presented his report which identified that prior to COVID members had previously discussed this possibility as a way of highlighting the presence and work of Town Council to our residents, but that unfortunately the pandemic curtailed any further progress.

Several members have of late raised the possibility again.

The Clerk had checked for vacant shops in the High Street itself and rentals seem to range from £10,000 to £15,000 per annum dependant upon size.

The Mayor had identified Units in the Market Precinct, namely Units 13-15 (Former Wales Air Ambulance), and having made some enquiries the following information has been attained, for members reference

The Rateable Value for the shop is £20,000.

Based on Unified Business Rate of 53.5p this will mean a gross rates payable of £10,700 – however you should check directly with Caerphilly Council in this regard to clarify exact rates costs.

The rent has been reduced to £12,000 per annum plus VAT.

There is a service charge which is levied for the upkeep and maintenance of the common areas and general management of the estate – this currently runs at circa £605.72 per quarter which is subject to annual change based on works required.

With regards to utilities, water, gas/ electricity it would be on meter.

In essence, the lease, business rates & service charge would cost approx £25k, and with other associated utility costs, telephone / broadband and cleaning we should be looking at a budget of at least £30k per annum (equivalent to 50 % of our current precept of £20 for Band D Properties)

The Clerk & Mayor highlighted this was just one possible property in town that might meet Town Councils needs, with probable space for a meeting room, working office and possible space to invite other organisations eg. CAB to hold sessions available to the public. Members queried whether we might be able to rent out space to organisations to help offset costs. The Clerk stated he would probably need to check with OVW regarding letting out rooms but that any potential income would realistically only amount to hundreds of pounds and not necessarily be a major issue.

As previously, members ***agreed*** in principle that this be progressed further, and it was ***agreed*** this be further investigated, with other possible options and referred to Policy & Finance Committee to report back at a future meeting

14. To discuss possible provision of tablets/ laptops for members to properly satisfy Data Protection issues

The Mayor reported that we were currently likely to be in breach of data protection rules with members using personal email addresses and devices for receiving and sending Town Council business documents.

Whilst new email addresses had been set up to comply with the regulations, urgent consideration now needed to be given to providing tablets/ laptops for members to more fully comply. Members queried what screen size the tablets were likely to be, and after some discussion a 14 inch screen seemed the minimum requirement.

Members were in full agreement of provision of same and whilst one or two were slightly apprehensive in using the devices, also accepted this would ultimately save on printing costs, as all minutes and reports could be viewed during our meetings

The Mayor did a quick check of members preferences, and after some further discussion it was **agreed** to report back to the next meeting regarding costs etc.

15. Mayors request to attend Local Government Association Conference in Bournemouth 4th- 6th July as approved duty and to postpone July Town Council meeting from 3rd. to 10th. July to accommodate same

The Mayor declared an Interest in this item, and took no part in any discussion and/or decision making.

Cllr. R Mills, Deputy Mayor, took the Chair at this point.

Cllr. K Etheridge explained to members that he would be attending the Conference as a Caerphilly C.B.C. representative, and had negotiated with the Association, as he would only be attending for two days to speak on his Motion regarding Openness in Local Government, a waiver of the Conference fee. This in effect would mean the cost to Town Council for the Mayors attendance would only necessitate 2 overnight stays (confirmed by the Clerk agreed allowance of £95 per night) as the Mayor could travel with him.

Some members queried what benefits there were for Town Council in attendance, and some other members quoted the raising of Town Council profile, networking, gaining an understanding of other Councils ways of working etc.

After some further discussion, it was **agreed** attendance at this LGA Conference be classed an approved duty and furthermore **agreed** the July meeting be moved to 10th July

16. To further consider Toilet Attendant at Bus Station toilets

Again, the Mayor declared an Interest left the meeting and took no part in the discussion or decision making.

Cllr. R Mills, Deputy Mayor retained the Chair for this item.

The Clerk presented his brief report, which worked on the assumption that the initial reasoning behind this proposal was the physical presence of an attendant would ultimately deter the mindless vandalism taking place but for this to succeed, on worst case scenario, would mean the attendant being present while the toilets are open, normally Tuesday to Saturday 8.00am – 5.00pm, thus necessitating presence for 45 hours per week, at an approximate overall annual cost of circa £30,000

Discussion took place, and members felt it was obvious these costs were not affordable, but understood the premise of the Clerks calculation.

Some members referred back to the original decision taken by Town Council in that whilst funding the Turnstile Payment Furniture, the day to day running of the toilets were the responsibility of the Caerphilly Taxi Drivers Association.

This was not disputed, but the continued vandalism at the site does impact on the viability of the service and with the toilets out of action for some extended periods means the town is potentially suffering with some shoppers possibly visiting other towns who are better provided with toilet facilities.

It was queried whether the Association would share information on expenditure and fees collected at the site and the Clerk said he would make enquiries.

Cllr. K Etheridge proposed that consideration be given to providing attendant cover between the hours of 10.00 am -3.30pm. within a budget of £10,000. However the Clerk pointed out that this still equated to 33 hours per week or approx £23k per annum and that for an annual budget of £10k an attendant could realistically only be in attendance for 16 hours per week.

Members queried whether there were any other alternatives we should be considering eg. Portaloos on the Market Square

After much further discussion, it was ultimately *agreed* this issue should be referred back to Policy & Finance Committee for further consideration and exploring any other options.

17. Verbal Update on Beach Party to be held Saturday 8th. July

The Clerk reported that things were well in hand and the Events team happy now with the On Street Entertainment.

The Stage entertainment was coming together and only a few slots left to fill at present.

He promised to forward details of High Street layout and On Street & On Stage Entertainment once finalised.

Whilst there is little to do on the day members presence in and around the Stage area would be appreciated throughout the day.

18. Applications for Financial Assistance

The Clerk presented his report on Applications/ enquiries received for Financial Assistance received from -

Cefn Glas Extra Care Sheltered Housing Scheme

SSAFA – Armed Forces Charity

Pengam Boys & Girls Club

After discussing each application in turn, it was unanimously agreed that

£300 be awarded to Cefn Glas to enable them to purchase a barbecue

£100 be awarded to SSAFA to assist their continued support of Service personnel and their families

In respect of Pengam Boys and Girls Club, members supported the Clerk in signposting same to Jacks Appeal Charity, who assist in providing defibrillators to local; sports clubs, and agreed to leave until an actual application is received

19. Planning Applications

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

Case Ref. 23/0288/HH

Location: 4 Lilian Road Blackwood NP12 1DN

Proposal: Erect two storey rear extension and three storey side extension

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

Case Ref. 22/0626/COU

Location: The Chimneys Heol-Y-Bedw-Hirion Bedwellty Blackwood NP12 0BE

Proposal: Convert and extend existing domestic garage for residential use

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

Case Ref. 23/0291/COU

Location: 113 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AD

Proposal: Change the use of basement into 1 no. studio apartment and first floor extension to provide 1 no. two bed apartment.

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

Case Ref. 22/1037/FULL

Location: 82 Beaumaris Way Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1DE

Proposal: Erect first floor side extension

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

Case Ref. 23/0321/COU

Location: 161 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AA

Proposal: Change the use and convert former Shoezone into A3 usage including the provision of traditional shop front, internal alterations and rear smoking area

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

Case Ref. 23/0326/COU

Location: Dessert Yard Shop Unit 181 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AA

Proposal: Change the use from A3 to A2

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

Case Ref. 22/0851/FULL

Location: Blackwood Rugby Club Hall Street Blackwood NP12 1NY

Proposal: Resurface and raise existing pitch level, extend existing pitch to form storage area and erect new fencing and gates

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

Case Ref. 23/0257/ADV

Location: Specsavers Opticians 167 High Street Blackwood NP12 1AA

Proposal: Install replacement fascia & projecting sign

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

Case Ref. 23/0265/HH

Location: 77 Bloomfield Road Blackwood NP12 1LY

Proposal: Erect single, two storey rear extension and front porch

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

Case Ref. 23/0243/CLPU

Location: Mulberry House Gordon Road Blackwood NP12 1DS

Proposal: Obtain a Lawful Development Certificate for proposed detached summer house

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

Case Ref. 22/0193/FULL

Location: 14 Conway Court Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1DP

Proposal: Remove existing conservatory and replace with single storey extension

Case Officer: Mike Jones (01443 864528 : jonesm5@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 22/0319/OUT

Location: Land Within Curtliage Of Bryncynon Tredegar Road Cwmgelli Blackwood NP12 1BW

Proposal: Erect detached house

Case Officer: Mike Jones (01443 864528 : jonesm5@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Case Ref. 22/0280/FULL

Location: 19 Addison Street Cefn Fforest Blackwood NP12 1ES

Proposal: Erect single storey side and rear extension

Case Officer: Kate Pearce (07874 641733 : pearck@caerphilly.gov.uk)

After some discussion when it was noted that the application in respect of 161 High Street Blackwood for Changing the use and convert former Shoezone into A3 usage including the provision of traditional shop front, internal alterations and rear smoking area had in fact received Officers approval, no objections to any other applications were raised.

20. Reports

There were no Reports