

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD 16TH. OCTOBER 2023

Present : Cllr. G Edwards Etheridge (Mayor)
Cllrs. N Dix, K Etheridge, A Farina – Childs, C Clark K Williams, K Jones, C Erasmus,
A Short, D Davies & M Gwynne

Also present representing Gwent Police PCSO Adrian Popa

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Clls. D Box & R Mills

2. Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point

3. Police Report

PCSO Adrian Popa gave brief update of the major issues affecting the town, namely –

Property damage and harassment by youths in Marianwen Street

Property damage and harassment by youths in Palmer Place. Albeit there is a CCTV camera in the area, its positioning needs attention to properly assist officers in identifying the perpetrators. Residents have been provided with individual CCTV by the police

The town itself, especially in the Mc Donald's vicinity is not so much of a problem, since the female gang leaders from Trinant had both received ASB referrals

The officer again highlighted his concerns regarding the hap-hazard parking of vehicles on the High Street and reiterated his call for a Joint Campaign with the Borough Council that would ultimately ease the congestion in the town, whilst potentially assisting in stopping a nasty accident waiting to happen.

Members were fully supportive of this proposed initiative, and suggested the officer ask Inspector Petty make contact with the Borough (possibly copying Cllr. Nigel George, Cabinet Member for Highways into any correspondence) asking that after a Social Media Campaign asking the public to respect the double yellow lines, the Police & Community Safety Wardens blitz the town in a joint operation and ticketing those breaking the parking restrictions.

The Clerk stated he would contact the Inspector and arrange to e mail CCBC supporting this request

The Officer was thanked for his attendance, and he left the meeting at this point.

4. County Borough Report

Borough members gave a brief update on current issues namely –

A request by Cllr. N Dix for a review of Residents Parking in and around town, and the possible introduction of bollards on the pavement in strategic places on the High Street to help in the hazardous parking referred to earlier.

A meeting with Officers regarding the proposed Place Making Plan, which would be going out for general consultation from 2nd. January 2024.

Whilst it had been accepted everyone wanted the best for the town, members identified that great emphasis had been placed on the Night -time economy, with little or no mention of how to stimulate the Day-time economy.

Members had also asked that the Plan be more realistic, and that perhaps the railway station for Blackwood should be revisited and perhaps removed.

A very poor attendance at a recent Caerphilly Safer Community Safety Partnership meeting

Also, members felt the recent Stakeholders meeting held on October 4th. at Blackwood Miners Institute had not been very productive, with the majority of the session taken with a talk/ discussion on terrorism.

Members informed those present that a meeting had been arranged regarding the planned Persimmon development

5. Mayoral Announcements

The Mayor gave a brief update on the Remembrance Day Services (see Minute 15 for details). He had requested, and Cllr. D Davies was able to confirm that the Moose Hall would be open in the event of inclement weather.

Cllr. A Farina-Childs queried the sound system available, and the Mayor reported Town Council were considering purchase of a 4 speaker system suitable for this and any other events.

The Mayor informed members that he and the Clerk had submitted the necessary Planning application in respect of the proposed erection of 3 flag poles on ground adjacent to the War Memorial. Whilst initially being led to believe permission would not take long, it now seems unlikely these will be erected in time for this years Service, but should be in place soon after. He also advised the proposed erection of a single flag pole at the Remembrance Garden on Gordon Road would need to be subject to a separate application.

The Mayor also detailed his Charity Concert being held on Wednesday 22nd. November and promised to email details to all members asking for their support.

6. *Correspondence*

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

Caerphilly C.B.C.

Footfall figures (forwarded weekly to members)

News Online (forwarded to members)

Speed Limits Traffic Regulation Order (20mph) (forwarded to members)

Surveillance Camera Commissioner requires justification for deployment of surveillance cameras via Data Protection Impact Assessment

Various correspondence regarding Planning application for erection of flag poles at War Memorial, Pentwyn Road, Blackwood

Signing of Armed Forces Covenant – 2nd. November 12.15 -.30pm. at Ty Penallta

Formal Request & Purchase Order for Town Council to organise On Stage Entertainment & Rotary Sleigh at Winter Market/ Fair to be held Saturday 25th November in sum of £2,100

Notice of Wilkinsons Closure & Request for the public to show their appreciation

One Voice Wales

Agenda for Meeting 4th. October RCT/ Merthyr/ Caerphilly Area Committee.

Due to technical issues meeting rearranged for 7pm. November 1st.

Training Courses (forwarded to members)

Newsletter (forwarded to members)

Reminder of Annual Conference/ AGM to be held Saturday 30th. September at Royal Welsh Showground Builth Wells
Follow up notifying cancellation of same, due to low number

Town, Parish & Community Councils – D Day 80 – 6th.June 2024

Town & Comm. Councils C'ttee

Notification and papers for our next TCCLC to immediately follow on from an AGM. Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen CC have kindly offered their Bedwas Offices as the venue for a 7 pm start on Tuesday 17 Oct.
(Papers also forwarded to Town Council reps)

Welsh Blood Service

Request to advertise poster re. Blood Sessions
– posted on Facebook page

Aneurin Bevan UHB

Request for nominations for Co-guardian/s for each Defib site to come on “Circuit”. This will help spread the workload and information via the Circuit and Jacks Appeal can still support as needed.

Beverley Edwards

Letter of thanks – flowers on 50th Anniversary of Tidal Stores

HSBC

The attached was shared on our website & Facebook page

HSBC UK TRIALS THREE POP-UP BRANCHES IN SOUTH WALES

HSBC UK is trialling a ‘pop-up’ branch in three locations in South Wales to understand demand for the service.

The initiative, covering Abergavenny, Pontypridd and Blackwood, brings an additional and more flexible type of face-to-face guidance and support for the bank’s customers in addition to its physical branches, and will assess the local demand for this type of local support.

The dates and locations for the pop-up branches are:

- **Blackwood** – every Wednesday from 4th October to 13th December, open between 9:30am and midday, located within Blackwood Library
- **Pontypridd** – every Wednesday from 4th October to 13th December, open between 2:00pm and 4:30pm, located within Pontypridd Library in Gas Road.
- **Abergavenny** – every Friday from 6th October to 15th December, open between 10am and 3pm and will be located within the Cross Street Library.

Wales Air Ambulance

Community Council Appeal 2023 – Defer to Policy & Finance C’tee

Boundary Commission Wales – Proposed to Agenda for discussion at November Meeting, albeit no proposed amendments for Blackwood

Dear Sir / Madam,

REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ARRANGEMENTS OF THE COUNTY BOROUGH OF CAERPHILLY

I am writing to inform you that the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission has published their Draft Proposals Report in relation to the review of the community arrangements of the County Borough of Caerphilly.

The Report has been published electronically as requested by Caerphilly County Borough Council and can be viewed on our [website](#).

A hard copy is available for public viewing at Penallta House and Blackwood Library.

The Commission would welcome any comments which you may wish to make on the Draft Proposals. The 8-week consultation period begins on the 10 October 2023 and closes on 4 December 2023 and any representations should be sent to the Commission at the above address.

The Commission will carefully consider any representations made to them during the consultation period before they prepare their Final Recommendations Report.

Yours Faithfully, Carys Vaughan

Laura Ann Jones MS

Request for Nominations for Community Stars

In respect of the request for a Co - Guardian for our Defibrillator sites, Cllr. Andrew Short volunteered, and the Clerk stated he would forward his contact details.

It was unanimously **agreed** the Review of Community arrangements would be placed on the Agenda for our next meeting.

It was also **agreed** the D Day 80 proposals be discussed at a future meeting

7. Schedule of Payments

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

		£. p
Currys Group	Laptops/ Tablets	5,673.93
Currys Group	“ “	348.99
J Hold	September Salary & Reimbursements	1,221.02
HMRC	September Tax/NI	318.27
Playworks	September Fee	20.00
J.S. Lee	Watering of Hanging Baskets (Incl. £836.50 VAT)	5,019.00

All payments were **unanimously agreed**

8. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 4th.September 2023

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 Policy & Finance Committee Meeting held on 20th. September 2023

It was *resolved* the minutes be received

11. Financial Assistance to Blackwood Bowls Club in the form of £400 Sponsorship Package

Cllr. C Clark declared an interest as a member of the Ladies Section and Cllr. A Farina-Childs declared an interest as a frequent user/ visitor of the facilities at the club.

Neither member took part in the discussion that followed or the decision taken.

The Clerk reported that after reporting back to Blackwood Bowls Club regarding their initial application in respect of funding towards recycling bins and issues that members had raised, he queried whether there might be any other one off project/ scheme that might be more appropriate for consideration.

It was identified that 2024 marks the 120th. Anniversary of the Club and that the Club were looking to raise funds via sponsorship for new Commemorative kit to mark this milestone. Details had been recently received which identified that the following sponsorship packages are available -

£100 Basic - Corporate logo added to all social media updates, advert included in annual membership handbook and awards night programme, invite to annual corporate day at club.

£200 Advanced - As above (basic) plus corporate logo display on advertising board (2ft X 4ft) around bowling green for full season.

£400 Premium - As above (basic and advanced) plus corporate logo displayed on new commemorative kit for our 120th season.

After some discussion, when members voiced their support for this organisation, and recognising had not requested funding over many, many years *agreed* with the recommendation from Policy & Resources Committee to recommend support via a £400 Premium Sponsorship Package

12. Confirmation of Suspension of Standing Orders/ Financial Regulations to enable purchase of Laptops/ Tablets from Currys to ensure compliance with Data Protection issues

The Clerk reported he had forwarded the following e mail immediately after the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting, as requested –

Good evening all, at the Policy & Finance Committee earlier this evening members considered a quotation from Curry's in respect of provision of 17 laptops or tablets in the sum of £6,022.92 (incl. VAT which is reclaimable).

Members will recall this item was discussed at Town Council on 12th. June when members agreed in principle and the Mayor was tasked to report on costings.

Having liaised with Bargoed T.C. Clerk who have gone through a similar exercise, Curry's were approached and quoted.

Given that we as Town Council are currently likely to be in breach of data protection rules, with members and Clerk using personal e mail addresses and devices for receiving and sending Town Council business documents, Policy & Finance Committee are recommending to Town Council that we suspend standing orders and look to place the order and purchase as a matter of urgency.

The situation is further complicated by me going on leave Sunday and Council not due to meet until Monday 16th October- almost 4 weeks away.

If members could indicate as a matter of some urgency if they support Policy & Finance recommendations to suspend Standing Orders and purchase asap, I can try to organise tomorrow/ Friday and negate any further likely delays.

Many thanks

Regards John Hold Clerk to Blackwood Town Council

Following this e mail, confirmation of Policy & Finance Committee (Cllrs. Kirsty Williams, George Edwards Etheridge, Kevin Etheridge, Rhys Mills, Carol Erasmus & Donna Box) recommendation was received from Cllrs. Cathrine Clark, Andrew Farina-Childs, Mark Gwynne & Nigel Dix

The devices have now been received and the necessary licences/software packages will need to be installed.

At the date of the Policy & Finance Committee we were still awaiting further associated costs.

Again using contacts supplied by Bargoed Town Council we have received a quote in the sum of £1655.20 from Einfinity, to ensure all devices are fully licensed, supported and ready for use.

It was **unanimously agreed** by all present to again suspend Standing Orders/ Financial Regulations and accept quotation from Einfinity to ensure a timely and efficient installation of necessary licences and software packages

13. Notices of Vacancies – Blackwood North Ward/ Cefn Fforest East Ward/ Blackwood South Ward

The Clerk reminded Members that the following was agreed at our last meeting

After some discussion, members **agreed** to defer advertising the Vacancy in the Blackwood North Ward until the Cllr. Pearce situation is resolved, and then if nothing changes, both vacancies could be advertised at the same time

However, since then not only has Cllr. Jacob Pearce tendered his resignation, but so has Cllr. Noah Nyle, which now leaves us with 3 vacancies.

A Notice of Vacancies should now be posted, and if notice in writing is given to the Returning Officer by ten Local Govt. Electors from the respective Wards an Election will be held to fill said Ward vacancy. If no such notice is received within 14 days of the posting then these can then be filled by Co-option.

County members queried whether the notice in writing of ten local Govt. electors from the respective wards was still valid, and asked the Clerk to double check with Dave Beecham.

The Clerk stated he had already run the Notice by Dave, who apart from a minor alteration had agreed same. He did, however, agree to double check.

With that proviso, it was **agreed** the required Notice be posted on our Web Page and Notice Board, and we wait for the statutory period to elapse to see if any Elections to fill the vacancies on Town Council is called or whether we can arrange to fill by Co-option

14. Completion of Audit for Year Ended 31st. March 2023 - Annual Returns/ Issues Arising Reports

The Clerk reported the following had been received from our External Auditors

Auditor General's report and audit opinion

I certify that I have completed the audit of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2023 of BLACKWOOD Town Council.

My audit has been conducted on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales and in accordance with the requirements of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and guidance issued by the Auditor General for Wales.

Audit opinion: Unqualified

On the basis of my audit, in my opinion no matters have come to my attention to give cause for concern that, in any material respect, the information reported in this Annual Return:

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

Other matters and recommendations

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

Deryck Evans, Audit Manager, Audit Wales For and on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales
Date 26/09/2023

Members expressed their thanks to the Clerk, and it was ***agreed*** the required notice together with Annual Return will now be placed on the Notice Board & Council Website

15. Remembrance Services Arrangements

After significant work by the Mayor the following arrangements are in place for this years Remembrance Services, namely -

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Friday 10 th . November | Market Place, Blackwood
Congregate at 10.30am. with Blackwood & Libanus Primary Schools in attendance |
| Sunday 12 th . November | War Memorial, Pentwyn Road, Blackwood
Congregate from 10.30am. with Mynyddislwyn Choir, Markham Brass Band in attendance.
Wreath Laying & Roll of Honour
Light refreshments provided after Service at St. Margaret's Church Hall |

16. Verbal Report on Planned Christmas Events

The Clerk and Mayor reminded members that the Winter Fair was being held on Saturday 25th November, with Town Council organising On Stage Entertainment.

The Programme of Entertainment was well in hand, with several dance groups, singers, brass band and choirs approached and several already confirmed.

The Pipe & Drum Band would again be leading Santa's Sleigh through the High Street in readiness for the Christmas Light switch on.

The Lantern Parade/ Carol Concert was confirmed for Thursday 30th November.

Schools and others asked to congregate on the Market Square for 6.00pm for 6.15pm Blessing of the Christmas Tree before leaving the Square to walk to the Methodist Church for approx 6.30pm. and Concert to follow asap.

Both Blackwood & Libanus have confirmed their choirs will be in attendance, as will Mynyddislwyn Choir & Oakdale Silver Band.

Seasonal light refreshments will be served as usual.

The Mayor confirmed the Selection Boxes have been ordered for the Schools and will be delivered during the first week of December

17. Potential Town Council Office Accommodation in Town

Cllr. Mark Gwynne left the meeting at this point due to prior commitment

The Clerk reported on his email, which identified that a property had become available in town – the former Gwyn George Partnership Solicitors Offices on Gravel Lane.

The owners had kindly agreed to make the keys available and several members took the opportunity to view the premises last Saturday morning to inspect same and check out suitability.

The lease quoted is £9,600 per annum plus VAT (which is reclaimable) and National Non Domestic Rates are currently quoted as £4,988 per annum.

Office furniture, equipment and furnishings will obviously be required and it is proposed these be earmarked and financed via existing balances, if the decision of members is to proceed. On checking with County Borough Officers, these costs could rightly be charged against our CIL monies, as this facility will help address demands that development has placed on the area.

Members present who had visited the property, namely Cllrs. G Edwards Etheridge, K Etheridge, K Williams, C Erasmus, C Clark & A Farina- Childs agreed the location and size of the premises met with Town Councils requirements and the rental quoted was reasonable compared with others on the market. Cllr. A Short informed members that he and Cllr. R Mills had visited this building several years ago, when the proposal for office accommodation was first raised and had considered it suitable at the time, albeit prior to COVID.

Cllr. A Farina-Childs, however, did sound a note of caution in respect of the premises citing the need for a Fire Risk Assessment/ Legionella Certificate/ and review of Electrics and possible /Surveyors Report prior to signing any agreement.

Cllr. N Dix queried how the costs would be met, and whether there was an opportunity to rent out rooms to other organisations whilst also querying how often the Offices would be open, not wanting them shut for a large part of the week.

Some members queried what would be an acceptable period of opening the Offices 3/4/5 days per week, whilst some also stated they may be able to assist for some time during the week. The Mayor raised the issue of consideration being given to increasing the Clerks hours and/or employing an additional member of staff in the future

The Clerk advised that members shouldn't think that the renting of rooms to organisations would generate much income, as most would probably be struggling. He also informed members he had updated the Medium Term Budget Strategy and felt that with an ongoing 10% increase in Precept over the next 4/5 years and the use of balances Town Council could have a balanced budget at the end of that period. Members were reminded that the current years budget was already supported by approx £13k, equivalent to approx £3.38 for Band D properties.

Cllrs. A Farina-Childs & N Dix stated they would prefer the use of balances and couldn't realistically support a potential 10% increase (£2 per annum for Band D properties)
Other members felt that considering we hadn't raised our precept for many years that the Clerks proposals seemed acceptable.

After some further discussion, it was moved by Cllr. K Etheridge & seconded by Cllr. K Williams that we move to a vote on whether we move forward with the lease of these premises, subject to the necessary Assessments/ Reports mentioned earlier being undertaken.
Members were unanimous in their agreement to move forward with leasing of the premises.

On checking e mails after the meeting, Cllrs. D Box & R Mills had intimated their support for leasing of these premises, and Cllr. M Gwynne also emailed requesting an update on discussion and also giving his support.

Unanimous support therefore by all existing members of Town Council

18. Planning Applications

The Clerk presented his report on planning applications received since the last meeting, and an additional application received after preparation of report and after some discussion it was **agreed** no objections be raised -

Case Ref. 23/0574/TPO

Location: Farnham 11 Lon Pennant Cwmgelli Blackwood NP12 1EL

Proposal: Thin the crown of beech tree T1 by 15% with removal of dead wood and smaller branches including branch on the left of the tree at about 5m (Tree Preservation Order 2/82/LBC)

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

Case Ref. 23/0600/ADV

Location: Blackwood War Memorial Lewis Lewis Avenue Blackwood

Proposal: Erect 3 No. heavy duty flag poles

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

Case Ref. 23/0668/TPO Site Area: 43m²

Location: 10 Coed Y Bryn Blackwood NP12 1HA (UPRN 000043077041)

Proposal: Carry out tree works on T1 3050 East Oak Tree - Reduce up to 1.5m, T2 3051 West Oak Tree - Reduce up to 1.5-2m, T3 Southwest - Reduce by maximum of 2m (Tree Preservation Order 66/72/MCC)

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

19. Reports

Cllr. A Farina-Childs reported that it had been his pleasure to be asked by the Mayor to attend the GAVO Awards evening at Blackwood Miners Institute on Wednesday 20th. September, as he had prior commitments (initially informed in error event was September 29th.)

The Mayor thanked Andrew for stepping in at short notice due to wrong date being given