

MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 8TH. JANUARY 2024

Present: Cllr. G Edwards Etheridge (Mayor)
Cllr. R Mills (Deputy Mayor)
Cllrs. A Farina-Childs, D Box, D Davies, K Williams, M Gwynne, K Jones, K Etheridge, C Clark
& C Erasmus

Also present were a number of residents

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. N Dix & A Short

2. Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point

3. Presentation by High Light Planning on Proposed Development at Market Place Car Park, Blackwood

The Mayor reported that he had received a message stating that Mr. Joe Ayoubkhani , Director of High Light Planning was caught in traffic and so would be delayed.

It was ***agreed*** we continue with the remainder of business on the agenda and return to this item when he arrives

4. Police Report

The Clerk reported that having consulted with the Mayor it was agreed not to invite the Police along to this meeting, given the planned Presentation

5. County Borough Report

Cllrs. A Farina-Childs & K Etheridge gave a brief update on current issues, namely –

Continued drainage problems at Cwmgelli as a result of the Taylor Wimpey development that all 3 Borough members had voted against. The residents have encountered major problems since the start of the development, with further flooding again over Christmas. A further meeting is planned with the developers in the near future .

There was no further update on the positioning of the Skateboard Park on the Showfield, albeit with views now being sought to accommodate an increased footprint as to whether the Outdoor Gym is relocated slightly north or that the equipment is relocated to various locations on the Showfield. The Clerk reported that from responses received from members the general consensus appeared to be the relocation of equipment option.

Members also reported ongoing anti social behaviour in and around town

Homelessness appeared to be on the increase, but members did indicate that several people were not engaging with CCBC officers and refusing assistance.

As members were well aware Barclays Bank had made the decision to close their High Street Branch on 22nd. March 2024. Whilst this is obviously another major blow to the town, it was a business decision, and there is no way they will reconsider this decision. They are now seeking to establish a hub somewhere in town, as HSBC has done.

The Clerk reported that he had contacted Alan March, Deputy Customer Care Director of Wales & West offering an opportunity for the Bank to utilise our Offices and an initial meeting with the current Manager is planned for later in the week

6. *Mayoral Announcements*

The Mayor reported on well attended Remembrance Services at the Market Place on Friday prior to Remembrance Day, and on Sunday at the War Memorial albeit the weather had been against us. He also reported on his Mayors Charity Concert at the Blackwood Miners Institute which had been an enormous success, and thanked all those who had taken part and those who had attended on the evening.

7. *Correspondence*

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

Caerphilly C.B.C. Footfall figures – forwarded to members

Notification of Next years events dates –

Spring Fair 13th. April

Beach Party 13th. July

Winter Fair 23rd. November

Notification of Consultation on Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre commenced 15th. November

Request via Borough members for views on newly proposed site of Skate board Park at Showfield. Looking to increase size to incorporate Outdoor Gym – 2 options to facilitate same (a) Relocate Gym slightly north or (b) relocate equipment to various locations on the Showfield

Notification of Governor Vacancy at Blackwood Primary School

Notification of Town Centre Place Making Plan meeting to be held Thursday 7th. December – forwarded to members

Notification of provision of double yellow lines on north east side of Greenwood Road from boundary wall of 11/13 in south east direction to existing double yellow lines approx. 26 metres

Council Tax Base Notification £2,936.94 at Band D equivalent for 2024/25 (last year £ 2,959.91) Town Council \Precept requirements by 31st January if possible

Notification of Meeting to discuss Blackwood Bus Station Anti Social Behaviour and Town Councils proposals to alleviate same with provision of Shutters - 16th. January
11.00am – 12 noon

Notification of Draft Greater Blackwood Masterplan Public Consultation which ends
14th. February

N.A.L.C. Notification of National Pay Award payable from 1st. April 2024 - Flat Rate increase of £1, 925 per annum for all spinal points to 43. This results in an increase of £833 per annum to the Clerk based on 16 hours per week – now equivalent to £15,848 per annum

Plasmawr Community Centre Vacancy now that Cllr. P Cook is no longer serving on Town Council

Welsh Govt. Notification that Section 137 limits increase to £10.81 per elector for 2024/25 (compared with £9.93 for current year) – refers to spending limits where there are no specific powers

One Voice Wales Notification of RCT/ Merthyr/ Caerphilly Area Committee Meeting to be held 7.00pm 17th. January via Teams

Notification of training opportunities – forwarded to members

Notification of new digital training opportunities – forwarded to members

Blackwood Litter Group Funding request - application forwarded

Police & Crime Commissioner Response to Clerks e mail querying any potential funding source to assist potential project at bus station to alleviate anti social behaviour. No specific funding in their remit all such funding contained in Community Safety Partnership funding paid directly to each local authority. Suggest approach to Insp. Oliver Petty re. possibility of support via force budget eg. target hardening or positive impact fund.

My email was also copied to Leeanne Husselbee, Funding & Partnership Lead at Gwent Police, and her response identified that she had proposed Consideration for shutters to be installed to prevent access out of hours damage and ASB at the Bus Station with the Community Safety teams.

Furthermore, she stated that she would definitely support the installation of the shutters and also identified other interventions which may wish to be considered -

- Is there any signage in place to support the existing PSPO?: pspo_sealed_order_bus_stations.aspx (caerphilly.gov.uk)
- Utilising social media channels/signage to state (X amount) of fixed penalties have been issued in the area will show they are being used and the behaviour is not tolerated.
- Deployment of the mobile cctv van – can be used to identify the offenders and act as a deterrent
- Use of static CCTV together with the required signage in place – can be used to identify the offenders and act as a deterrent
- Effective lighting to support cctv (for the identification of offenders)
- Regular patrols by the Wardens/local Neighbourhood Policing Team – promoting this activity on social media to make it well known
- Positioning of a marked police vehicle can give the impression there is a police presence in the area – depending if there is a available and the need to change its position periodically.

Please note, when “target hardening an area” to make it less desirable to crime and anti-social behaviour this may not fully solve the problem and there is a risk that it can displace to other areas, therefore please also consider any vulnerable areas leading to/from this location.

I hope this information assists, if there is anything else you require please let me know.

In respect of the Notification of Governor Vacancy at Blackwood Primary School, it was ***agreed*** any member interested should contact the Clerk.

In respect of the Notification of the National Pay Award it was ***agreed*** this be implemented

In respect of the letter from Police & Crime Commissioner it was ***agreed*** the contents of correspondence from Leeanne Husselbee be raised in upcoming meeting with CCBC regarding our proposal for roller shutters at the Bus Station to prevent access out of hours, damage and ASB.

8. *Schedule of Payments*

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

		£. P
H Green	Buffet – Remembrance Service	330.00
Zelma Services	Sound System	1, 215.29
K & R Print	Printing – Mayors Charity Concert	185.00
Studio 54	Entertainment – Xmas Market	900.00
G Edwards Etheridge	Conference Expenses	263.40
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John Hold	Nov. Salary + reimbursements	1,537.70
Playworks	Nov. Salary –	20.00
HMRC	Nov. Tax/ N.I.	318.47
G Edwards Etheridge	Flowers – Mayors Charity Concert	200.00
DYT Dance	Entertainment Xmas Market	150.00
Markham Band	Entertainment Xmas Market / Remembrance Day	250.00
G Edwards Etheridge	Printing Ink/ Paper	70.99
K White	Entertainment Xmas Market	100.00
Mynyddislwyn Choir	Entertainment Xmas Market/ Carols/ Rememb.	300.00
Dancelicious	Entertainment Xmas Market	100.00
Pontllanfraith Rotary	Entertainment Xmas Market	550.00
Oakdale Silver Band	Carol Concert	100.00
K & R Print	Carol Concert – Printing	80.00
Henllys Pipe & Drums	Entertainment Xmas Market	300.00
G Edwards Etheridge	Licences for Laptops/ Tablets	360.00
Cwm Bakery	Refreshments – Carol Concert	170.00
Blackwood Bowls Club	Financial Assistance/ Sponsorship	400.00
Don Elsbury	Xmas Lighting 50% payment	2,193.24
Audit Wales	Audit Fee 2021/22	400.00
Town & Comm. Councils	Subscription Fee	100.00
John Hold	Reimbursement Schools Selection Boxes	965.25
Mynyddislwyn Choir	Accompanyists fees – Mayors Concert	80.00
British Legion	Poppy wreaths	495.00
Audit Wales	Audit Fee 2022/23	336.00
John Hold	Dec. Salary + reimbursements	1,561.57
Playworks	Dec. salary - fee	20.00
HMRC	Dec. Tax/ N.I.	529.27

9. *To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 6th.November 2023*

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

10. *Matters Arising*

The Clerk reported the Notice Of Election had been reposted

11. To Confirm the Minutes of the Special Meeting of Town Council held on 19th. December 2023

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

12. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

13. Verbal Update on Remembrance Day Services/ Christmas Events

The Clerk gave a verbal update on these events

As stated by the Mayor, both Remembrance Services had been very well attended ,with the Friday Service at the Market Place exceeding all expectations, helped no doubt by the presence of the Blackwood Primary & Libanus Primary School Choirs, with their increased numbers and supporters.

14. Planning Applications

The Clerk presented his report on planning applications received since the last meeting. After some discussion it was ***agreed*** no objections be raised

Case Ref. 23/0833/HH

Location: 30 Sunnybank Road Blackwood NP12 1HZ

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

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

Case Ref. 23/0777/RET

Location: 3 Montclair Avenue Blackwood NP12 1EE

Proposal: Retain the garage to rear of property

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

15. Reports

Cllr C Clark reported on the overflowing bins at Tidal's Car Park and asked if the Clerk could rep[ort same

With the business concluded the Mayor informed members Mr Joe was expected shortly and we would continue with his Presentation as soon as he arrived

3. *Presentation by High Light Planning on Proposed Development at Market Place Car Park, Blackwood*

The Mayor welcomed Mr Joe Ayoubkhani to the meeting, who apologised to all present for any inconvenience, but that he had been stuck in traffic for well over an hour.

Joe outlined the proposal for a housing development comprising 40 x 1 Bed Units plus 19 x 2 Bed Units, many with balconies – ranging from 2 storey to 5 storey configuration on the old Somerfield Car Park Site, with parking for 26 residents and provision for bicycle parking. He identified that some 30 car parking spaces were to be retained for use by the Gym. There would be landscaped areas for seating, with a maintenance path around the site.

The proposed development is a United Welsh Social Housing Scheme with tenants allocated from CCBC waiting lists via their local lettings policy. Provision is also likely to be provided for CCBC housing & police officers to have a presence on site

A drop in Consultation exercise was planned to be held on 19th. January

He informed the meeting they were currently at Pre Application process, having consulted with the planning Authority on Environmental, Planning & Highways issues. It was hoped the Planning application would be formally submitted by end of February and if successful a Summer/ Autumn start on site.

He then invited questions from members

Numerous questions were raised which included the following issues –

The fact that provision for CCBC housing & police officers is included on site raises concern of anticipated problems ?

As stated tenants allocated via CCBC waiting lists via local lettings policy, should not assume problems

The proximity of the development to nearby properties at Highland Terrace & Tuckers Villas, and the fact the planned balconies would be potentially overlooking same affecting privacy?

Joe responded that the most up to date modern standards would be met, and any such matters would be minimal

The noise, dirt ,dust and disruption during the development ?

Standard issues covered by planning conditions via Schedule of Works and will be kept to a minimum

Has the case been proved for the need for housing in this area, and the benefits for the town ?

Significant numbers of people have indicated a wish to live in Blackwood, and such a development would possibly support local businesses

With self build and other housing nearby some residents have expressed concern that property values will be devalued ?

This is not a planning consideration

With regard the consultation exercise, will views expressed be taken into account or is it merely a tick box exercise ?

Views expressed will be considered if thought feasible and cost effective

Is there sufficient parking provision included for the development ?

26 parking spaces for 59 units and potential visitors seems unrealistic and concerns are that neighbouring streets will be affected by the overspill – has two storey parking been considered ?
The provision included is based on standard affordable units parking guidelines

Have/ will Businesses/ market traders/ Local residents be consulted ?

Letters have gone to local residents and all will be welcome to express their views at the upcoming Consultation Event

The Mayor then asked the residents present if they had any issues they wished to raise.

A number raised similar queries regarding privacy, being concerned their homes/gardens would be overlooked by the proposed balconies and questioned whether consideration could be given to doing away with them.

Parking provision shortfall could well lead to vehicles being parked on neighbouring streets and concerns were expressed their streets and possibly gardens could also be used as short cuts to the development.

Several residents were concerned that provision seemed to be included for CCBC and police officers as part of the development and this perhaps indicated that perhaps some problems were to be anticipated from tenants.

This in turn fuelled speculation that this development would have a detrimental effect on the value of their properties and /or make the sale of their properties more difficult. One resident stated that a local estate agent had suggested that this might be possibility.

The Mayor thanked Joe and the residents for their attendance and valued contributions to the debate, and urged residents to attend the forthcoming Consultation exercise on 19th. January.