

## ***MINUTES OF THE BLACKWOOD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 2<sup>ND</sup>. SEPTEMBER 2024***

Present : Cllr. R Mills ( Mayor )

Cllr. G Etheridge ( Deputy Mayor )

Cllrs. K Williams, C Clark, C Erasmus, K Etheridge, N Dix, A Farina- Childs, M Gwynne, K Jones & D Davies ( arrived part way through Item 3 )

Cllrs D Box & P Cook attended remotely

### ***1. To Receive Apologies for Absence***

Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. J Griffiths & A Short

### ***2. Declarations Of Interest***

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point

### ***3. Presentation on Mental Wellbeing & Suicide Prevention Resources – Jackie Williams ( Aneurin Bevan Gwent Public Health Team ) & colleagues from Samaritans, POPYRUS & Jacob Abraham Foundation***

The Mayor welcomed Jackie and colleagues to the meeting and introduction were made, namely

- ABUHB Local Public Health Team: Jackie Williams, Emily Clark
- Samaritans: Jay Cox
- POPYRUS: Emma Noble, Danielle Taylor
- Jacob Abraham Foundation: Bryn Morgan
- NHS Executive: Ceri Fowler

Presentations were given to the Councillors regarding Melo, Samaritans, POPYRUS, and Jacob Abraham Foundation. There was then opportunity for discussion.

#### ***Raising awareness of support services available***

Councillors offered their links with local networks and support to raise awareness of existing resources, including:

- Blackwood Town Council offices: suggestion to host regular events to raise awareness of support services available, for example, POPYRUS provide a presentation to the public. Emma Noble said that POPYRUS were happy to do some community work such as holding drop-ins at Council buildings
- Businesses, the high street, and community centres: opportunity to place posters and other resources
- Schools and school governors: opportunities to place posters/resources as well as give talks to students
- Social media – through Blackwood Town Council, as well as individual Councillor's social media accounts. Estimated combined reach around 10,000 people. Suggestion to spotlight one service per month across all social media channels, with a link to the full list of services. The full list on its own may be overwhelming and spotlighting one per month was considered more accessible.

### **Actions:**

- **Services** to develop a resource pack containing full details of services, social media posts, and other relevant information which could be used by Councillors and other stakeholders to support the opportunities above
- **Services** to liaise with Blackwood Town Council to arrange regular awareness raising sessions
- **Councillors** to consider a local Mental Health Awareness Day to highlight resources and services
- **Working Group** to plan timetable for the spotlight of the services on social media

### ***Chartist Bridge as a location of concern***

Concerns raised that the bridge was still too accessible and spontaneous action was still a risk. Discussion that an engineering firm is assessing possible modifications, but our understanding is that so far, findings have not presented an easy solution. For example, raising the barriers has implications on weight, wind, and may make emergency services access, if required, more challenging.

Update that national guidance on locations of concern guidance is under development and will be published soon.

Suggestion of adding further signage, in addition to Samaritans current signage, with information of other support services on the bridge. Discussed that this may increase concerns for safety at the bridge so this would need to be very carefully monitored if implemented. Similarly, memorials can draw attention to a location – instead, it is advised to place memorials in more positive locations.

### **Actions:**

- **Ceri Fowler** to share national guidance on locations of concern when published
- **Working group** to review actions needed based on national guidance
- **Ceri Fowler** to request an update on options available for physical amendments to Chartist Bridge from the engineering firm

### ***Collaboration with Caerphilly County Borough Council***

An offer was made to arrange for the group to present at the Social Services and Education Scrutiny Committee at Caerphilly County Borough Council.

Support requested to increase awareness of concerns regarding Chartist Bridge to Caerphilly County Borough Council.

### **Actions:**

- Councillors to arrange for the group to present at the Social Services and Education Scrutiny Committee at Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Ceri Fowler to write to Caerphilly County Borough Council from a National team perspective to request update on possible changes to bridge

The Mayor thanked Jackie and her colleagues for their attendance and expressed Town Councils hopes that we can work together closely in the future for the benefit of the town and surrounding communities.

Having been informed by the Clerk that the British Legion representatives had arrived early and were waiting in reception it was proposed and seconded that Item 15 or at least the part relating to the British Legion Poppy Appeal Launch be moved up the Agenda to the next item to be discussed. This was unanimously agreed and the Mayor welcomed Andrew Doody & others to the meeting.

#### **4. Events - Andrew Doody, Chair Blackwood British Legion request to attend for part of item**

At this point both Cllrs G Etheridge & D Davies declared an Interest as members of the British Legion and neither took part in the ensuing discussion or decision making.

Andrew Doody, Chair of Blackwood Branch thanked members for the opportunity to address them, and took the opportunity to firstly thank Town Council for taking on the organisation of the Remembrance Services over the past couple of years, and congratulated them and especially Cllr. George Etheridge on the remarkable turn around witnessed not only in content but also attendance at the services.

Andrew explained that he was also Vice Chair of the Gwent County British Legion and that this year the Annual Poppy Appeal for Gwent was to be Launched in Blackwood on 24<sup>th</sup>. October where it was anticipated approximately 24 Branches will be represented along with the Lord Lieutenant Of Gwent. This was an honour for the Blackwood & District Branch but also for the town itself, but the organising Committee had encountered some problems in their plans for a 30 minute road closure to enable a march from St. Margaret's Church ( where the launch service was to take place ) down the High Street to opposite the Blackwood Miners Institute and then down to the Dragon Circle. In conversations with the Borough Council the organisers had been quoted between £2,500 - £3,500, and wondered if Town Council could lobby on their behalf.

Members were most sympathetic to the issues encountered by the Legion and were well aware the road closure was an overly expensive exercise.

The Legion stated that the whole purpose of the Launch was to raise monies, and there was no way they could afford such an expense, but were adamant the march would take place with or without the closure.

The Organising Committee were also hoping Town Council could assist in contacting the local businesses/ shops in town to decorate the windows in recognition of the event, and also assist in gaining permission to erect gazebos and a few stalls on the Dragon Circle, whilst also using their media contacts to try and arrange T. V. coverage for the event. It was suggested that perhaps representatives of the Legion could be invited to the upcoming Blackwood Stakeholders meeting and address that meeting with their requests.

Finally the Legion queried whether it might be possible or the lamp post poppies to be erected slightly earlier to be in place for 24<sup>th</sup>. October.

After much discussion it was agreed the Clerk write to C.C.B.C. regarding waiver of any costs associated with the proposed road closure, citing the fact that the British Legion had been Granted Freedom of the Borough back in and that Blackwood Town Council were one of the few signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Furthermore, to try and ensure the Legion get an invitation to the Stakeholders Event and address said meeting with their other requests.

Members responsible for the erection of the lamp post poppies saw no problem in ensuring they were in place in readiness for the Launch Event.

Andrew thanked Town Council for their positive support and invited all members to the Launch on October 24<sup>th</sup>. and then the delegation left the meeting.

## 5. *County Borough Report*

Cllr. A Farina – Childs gave a brief update on the planning application in respect of development on the old Somerfield site.

He had raised a number of concerns on behalf of local residents affected by same, including the car parking provision pro rata to the number of flats proposed, the overbearing nature of the development on neighbouring properties, potential/possible drainage issues and the possible affect on the SNAP Gym business

## 6. *Mayoral Announcements*

The Mayor reported that he had now sent his letter to the Prime Minister regarding Mineworkers Pensions.

Furthermore he had given a T.V. interview in Welsh with regard the proposed mothballing of B.M.I.

## 7. *Correspondence*

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

Caerphilly C.B.C.

Footfall figures ( forwarded to members )

Review of Statement of Licensing Policies

Responses from Leader / Deputy Leader/ Monitoring Officer on BMI  
(will report same at Agenda Item 13 – most copied to members )

Notification 2<sup>nd</sup>. Instalment of Precept to be paid £40,382.92

One Voice Wales

6 Month Rule

Powers & Policies

Training Events

Borough Ward Members

Request to use Offices for Joint Surgery on Friday 20<sup>th</sup>. Sept.  
12noon

Sight Cymru

Notification of next meeting at Office – Monday 9<sup>th</sup>. Sept. 10.30am

Cllr. Teresa Heron

Invitation to members to Launch of Gwent Poppy Appeal at 9.45 am.  
on 24<sup>th</sup>. October at St.Margaret's Church

Andrew Doody

Request to attend meeting to inform members of plans and seek some  
assistance on some matters

Oakdale & Penmaen Partnership	Application for Financial Assistance – Defer to Policy & Finance Committee for deliberation when received
Blackwood Tennis Club	Application for Financial Assistance – as above
Mariana Borota	Letter of application for Co-option to Town Council

In respect of the request for Joint Surgery at the Offices on Friday 20<sup>th</sup>. September this was **agreed** by members.

In respect of Sight Cymru, it had been reported that some of their members had difficulty in identifying the steps up to the Chamber. It was **agreed** this could be rectified by placing tape on the steps and should be sorted as a matter of some urgency.

It was also **agreed** that Mariana Borota be invited along for interview for Co-option, together with Louise Phillips & Trefor Evans

### **8. Schedule of Payments**

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

		£. p
Notetop Office Solutions	Office stationery	29.40
John Hold	August Salary + reimbursements	822.89
HMRC	August Tax/ N.I.	606.05
Playworks	August Fee	20.00
Bebb, Tasker & Sucksmith	Lease Payment	960.00

### **9. To Confirm the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held 5<sup>th</sup>.August 2024**

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

### **10. Matters Arising - Consideration of attendance at One Voice Wales Annual Conference**

The Mayor asked which members were interested in attending the One Voice Wales Annual Conference, and Cllrs. K Etheridge & G Etheridge indicated their wish to attend. After a short discussion it was **agreed** the Clerk make the necessary arrangements for both members to attend and that travelling/ subsistence payments be made in respect of same.

### **11. To Receive the Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee (Interview Meeting) held 12<sup>th</sup>. August 2024**

It was agreed the Minutes be received.

The Mayor and members of the interview Panel reported all candidates interviewed were credible candidates, but it had been unanimously agreed to offer the post, subject to satisfactory reference to Clair Cook who would likely commence early October

## **12. Budget Monitoring Report to Period 4 - 30<sup>th</sup>. July 2024**

The Clerk presented his report which was *agreed* by members.

## **13. BMI Closure Proposals – Update**

The Clerk gave a brief update on the position.

His letter to the Leader and Cabinet requesting answers to numerous questions raised received a somewhat dismissive response, stating they would prefer if we went through the proper consultation exercise. This prompted him to request that his initial letter be treated as an FOI, which was duly responded to within approx 10 days. He had contacted both Lord Kinnock & Lord Touhig and both were fully supportive and writing to the Borough expressing their profound disappointment

Not being fully satisfied with the Borough response he then reported that he had written to the Charity Commissioners stating that Town Council had concerns over the Trusteeship of the BMI, quoting their own website that states a Local Authority must take action to ensure it fulfils its responsibility in accordance with Charity Law and that A Charity is an organisation established exclusively for purposes which are capable of being charitable and for which are for public benefit. For a body to be a Charity it must be independent ie. must exist and operate solely for charitable Purposes and not as a means of carrying out the policies or directions of the local authority. Trustees have a legal duty to act only in the interests of the Charity. The proposed mothballing of the Blackwood Miners Institute from the end of December is in the Cabinet's own communications, purely a cost saving exercise, looking to save approx £350k per annum in subsidy to the Centre, so how can they as Trustees be only acting in the interests of the Charity ??

Whilst understanding the financial problems faced by the authority, he queried why they couldn't have undertaken the exercise to identify other potential providers whilst the Centre remains open, rather than when it is mothballed. Mothballing/closure will mean that the BMI potentially loses its hard earned reputation as one of the premier Arts venues in South East Wales, numerous groups who use the facility regularly throughout the week will be forced to seek out other venues, staff potentially made redundant and the building potentially lying empty, for who knows how long, with all the problems vacant premises bring with them.

He reported that members had been copied into all correspondence referred to.

Members thanked the Clerk for all his work in fighting against this proposed mothballing.

The Deputy Mayor reported that the Petition now had well in excess of 4,500 signatures, but that we must continue to urge individuals to also complete the online consultation exercise.

He also reported that a March/ Rally had been organised for Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>. October and asked as many members as possible to attend and show their support

#### **14. Planning Applications**

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

**Case Ref. 24/0548/COU**

Location: Gorseland Cliff Road Blackwood

Proposal: Change the use from two flats to a C2 use class children's care home

Case Officer: Joshua Burrows ( 01443 864427 : burroj1@caerphilly.gov.uk

It was **agreed** no objections be raised

#### **15. Reports**

The Deputy Mayor reported that he had applied for a position on the Local Govt. Association Places & Peoples Panel, and that he had been shortlisted invited for interview. Members congratulated Cllr. Etheridge and after a short discussion it was unanimously agreed this be determined as an approved duty, with travel and subsistence expenses payable.

Cllr. C Clark queried if the Deputy Mayor had been reimbursed for the framing costs of the donated paintings hanging in the waiting room. The Clerk responded that as soon as the receipt is submitted reimbursement would be made

#### **15. Events - Andrew Doody, Chair Blackwood British Legion request to attend for part of item**

The Clerk presented his Report which outlined the list of Events which came under the remit of the Events Committee prior to the pandemic together with current budgets allocated to each.

The Mayor thanked the Clerk for the information, and reported that since the pandemic, the Events Committee have had very little input into many of the identified events but had for various reasons been left very much to the Clerk and previous Mayor to organise.

He hoped the Events Committee would become much more involved in the future, and proposed Events be a standing item on each Town Council Agenda, with the October meeting concentrating on the planned Remembrance Services & Christmas Activities, with hopefully a list of Actions taken/ to be finalised for each. This should then ease the pressure/ workload on the Clerk/ Deputy Mayor and sand us in good stead for the future.

The Deputy Mayor identified that the Mayors Charity Concert arranged for 19<sup>th</sup>. November at the BMI ( and well in hand ) was not included on the list, and whilst not strictly a Town Council Event had been mentioned as possibly coming under the remit of the Events Committee previously.

It was **agreed** the Concert be added to list.

The Clerk reminded members each event / responsibility would need to be discussed and agreed during the budget setting process each year.

