

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH COMMUNITY
COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2019 at 5.30pm
in the Council Chamber, Mitre Street, Abertillery**

PRESENT: Councillors:

Peter Adamson, Steve Bard, Keri Bidgood, Gill Clark (Vice Chair), Roger Clark, Tracey Dyson, Julie Holt (Chair) (in the Chair), Mark Lewis, Perry Morgan, Gary Oakley, Rob Phillips, Allen Rees, Nick Simmons, Glyn Smith, Graham White and Trudy Williams

Officers: Steve Edwards, Deputy Clerk and Richard Gwinnell, Town Clerk

Others: Dr David Llewellyn (for agenda item 3)
One member of the public

ABSENT: Councillor Bernard Wall

174. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for late arrival were received from Councillor Roger Clark. The Clerk reported that Councillor Ivor Beynon had resigned from the Council on 15 January 2019.

175. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Allen Rees declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item 7 (solar farm funding) as he was involved in setting up a fishing club at Cwmtillery Lakes, which may possibly benefit from funding in future from the solar farm grant.

Councillor Mark Lewis declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item 7 (solar farm funding) as he was the Secretary of CANCO (Cwmtillery Area Network of Community Organisations), which had submitted a proposal for solar farm grant funding.

176. TRANSFORMING LANDSCAPES AND IDENTITIES IN THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS

The Council received a presentation from Dr David Llewellyn on the above topic. Dr Llewellyn commented on (key points):

- the great opportunities available to transform the South Wales valleys
- the work going on elsewhere e.g. in the Peak District, Todmorton, Frome, Detroit and Pittsburgh (USA), Malmo (Sweden), Treherbert, Pen y Cymoedd, the Valleys Regional Park, Ynysybwl, Clydach Vale etc
- these may not be similar in size to Abertillery but their socio-economics, history and contribution of local councils was key to success
- the opportunities available in the ALCC area, for example at Cwmtillery Lakes and Roseheyworth Woodland, for sustainable tourism, local food growth/production, community renewable energy, outdoor recreation activities, improved housing, health improvement, walking trails etc
- the work he was doing for the Welsh Government and Valleys Regional Park

- the massive changes in landscapes and lives as a result of de-industrialisation in South Wales
- the opportunity for ALCC to work with communities and groups, such as CANCO, Coety Tyleri etc, take advantage of what was already here and be a catalyst for positive change in the ALCC area
- the need to take action in the context of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, Planning Act, Environment Act etc and to work alongside e.g. The Metro
- the need to come up with a USP (unique selling point) for Abertillery e.g. a low carbon town
- the need to be strategic and review the economic function of the area, its assets, strengths, connections, its potential future, and how ALCC could help shape that
- the £8.8 million funding made available to other areas in Wales
- ALCC may be able to access funding in future, with the right strategic, sustainable, partnership approach
- the many assets of the ALCC area, including The Guardian and Ebbw Fach Trail; the question was how these could be connected in a more sustainable way
- how a local football club had taken on the Clydach Vale, turning it into a country park, with café, health walks, activities, volunteering, training, dementia classes etc
- the need to think and invest much more strategically and realistically (e.g. how to use the solar farm grant and the precept to better effect)
- regenerating effectively might take millions, not thousands of pounds
- the CANCO solar farm proposal vastly underestimated the costs of the projects
- the need for a more rigorous approach (e.g. with the solar farm grant); asking what difference can this money make, how many jobs will it create, how can it impact on health, how can we engage with local people and groups, what are the outcomes?

Dr Llewellyn answered questions from members and stated that he would be happy to work further (pro bono) with ALCC, e.g. he could deliver workshops, support community engagement, support ALCC with funding applications etc. He would also send further information for members, via the Clerk.

The Chair thanked Dr Llewellyn for his presentation. Dr Llewellyn left the meeting at this point.

177. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2018

Council RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 12 December 2018 be confirmed as a correct record, for signature by the Chair

178. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no public questions for this meeting.

179. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2019/20

The Chair reminded members of the importance of declaring any personal interests if any applied. She explained that there were three budget proposals, one from the Clerk, one from Councillor Oakley, and one from Councillor Bard. Each would present their proposals and answer questions. Amended budget proposals had been submitted by Councillor Oakley and Councillor Bard and circulated by email on 14 January. Copies

were re-circulated at this meeting. Copies of the latest survey results had also been circulated at the meeting. Copies would be in the minute book.

The Council then considered the report of the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk, which the Clerk outlined in detail. He emphasised and/or replied to questions (key points only):

- that ALCC had no other income (than the precept), so the precept amount would be the same as the budget amount
- the budget should be specific, agreed and the precept request sent to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC) in January
- this was the third meeting at which ALCC had considered the budget for 2019/20
- each element of the proposed budget and what it contained
- this was a standstill budget, not including any new projects or ideas
- there was no extra money for Christmas lights, additional staff, events etc, many of which had been discussed as possibilities or needs for the year ahead
- additional money had been built in for staff increments, external audit fees and replenishing the reserves used recently to pay for 9 defibrillators
- the importance of replenishing reserves, which had stood at over £41k in 2017 and were now down to £16k; at least £30k should be held in reserves, if not more
- SLCC fees were estimated to be £450 (not £350) in 2019/20
- the total standstill budget was therefore £135,399.81
- it was for the Council to decide, what to add or remove from the budget
- some costs had to be budgeted for, even though they might not be spent (e.g. staff pension costs and members' basic allowances)
- any underspend at year-end could be put back into reserves if the Council wanted to do that, but the Council could not knowingly "under-budget"
- the Human Resources Committee had informed Council that extra staffing costs would need to be budgeted for in the year ahead; no extra money was provided for that in the standstill budget presented.

Councillor Gary Oakley then presented the paper he had submitted (annex 3 to the report), along with the amended proposal circulated. He emphasised and/or replied to questions (key points only):

- he respected the other budget proposals but ALCC needed to go much further and do much more for the area
- the budget for 2018/19 was £112k; £10k had also been taken from reserves for WW1 Party in the Park and £15k had been taken from reserves for defibrillators
- ALCC was therefore spending £137k in 2018/19, not £112k
- a future budget of £135k was not therefore a standstill; it was going backwards
- his paper contained £161k worth of additional projects, events, youth services spending etc; the £161k was a list of possibilities only and these would need to be slimmed down to £78k
- he proposed that a working group be established to consider the detail and report back to Council with solid recommendations and costings in March
- he proposed a total budget of £234k, which would mean approx. £30 per house per year for a Band A house (72% of houses in the ALCC area were in Band A)
- the vast majority of people wanted ALCC to do more and were willing to pay more for that, as shown very clearly in the ALCC survey

- he personally favoured additional spending on staffing, youth services, late opening of the car park and defibrillators; other people may have other ideas
- reserves must be replenished and should be at least one third of the Council's total yearly budget; the national guidance was to have reserves of between 3 months' and 12 months' working capital
- many town and community councils were increasing their reserves massively in anticipation of asset transfers and precept capping; 430 T&CCs in Wales had increased their reserves in the last year
- ALCC had possibly the lowest reserves in Wales, pro rata to its budget
- the cost per house may go up by over 50% under his proposals, but ALCC had kept the precept too low, and done too little, for too many years
- £30 per house per year was not too much to pay for better services; people on benefits were protected from price rises
- ALCC could not do anything about increases by the Police or BGCBC
- ALCC could do a great deal more with the additional funds he proposed.

Discussion ensued, during which the following key points arose:

- this was a nearly 60% increase per house; that was way too much
- an increase of £1 a month or 24p a week per house was not too much to pay for some of the additional events or other things proposed
- ALCC was very good value for money
- £1 a month more was too much for some families
- more needed to be spent on Christmas lights; other areas spent a lot more
- there may be other options around Christmas lights, e.g. businesses rather than ALCC paying for them
- additional defibrillators/sites would need to be agreed by Council
- the proposal from Cllr Oakley was visionary; this was what was needed and what had been lacking for many years
- people always complained; it was time ALCC did something about the lack of facilities for young people and the amount of anti-social behaviour for example
- ALCC had spent too little for too long
- ALCC and the Police and BGCBC were all putting up Council Tax.

Councillor Roger Clark arrived at this point.

Councillor Steve Bard then presented the amended budget paper he had submitted. He emphasised and/or replied to questions (key points only):

- he admired Councillor Oakley's bold approach, but people could not afford to pay for an increase of 75% in ALCC's budget
- an increase of £1 a month was massive for some families, when they were having to go to foodbanks
- he proposed that ALCC do more, but in a more manageable, gradual way
- he supported the idea of a working group to come up with spending proposals, but that should be for 2020/21, not 2019/20
- he proposed additional spending of £26k on youth services, a trial late opening of the car park, events and a TV monitor for the chamber, but also savings of £18.8k e.g. by cutting ward donation grants, cutting spending on public toilets

and streamlining events

- he proposed replenishing reserves over 3 years (at £5k per year)
- his proposed budget increase (compared to 2018/19) was 26%
- members could get together over the year ahead, come up with a strategic vision and plan for future years spending, whilst engaging with other people/groups
- ALCC could not ask people to pay £100k more for “what ifs”
- £5k for the car park was an estimate, not a true cost; he did not intend to pay a private company but to get local groups to help with the late closure of the car park for a three-month trial period
- the £5k for youth services might pay towards extending the youth café opening hours in year one; such things mainly involved volunteers
- paying for summer playschemes might also be possible in partnership with other organisations such as Blaenau Gwent or Torfaen County Borough Councils.

Discussion ensued, during which the following key points arose:

- £5k was not enough for the car park; officers had previously reported costs of £15k for an asset transfer and Cllr Oakley had reported much higher costs for a security firm to open and close the car park later in the evening
- a security firm would require a contract of a year at least
- there would also be insurance and other costs and implications
- the Council had not discussed or agreed to take on the car park; this was fraught with difficulties
- £15k needed to be put back into reserves, as decided, to pay for the defibrillators
- £5k was nowhere near enough for youth services; one playscheme in one location cost around £1,000 for one week
- what was needed was outreach workers; people working where and when young people were, not simply in the youth café for a few more hours
- a budget of £142k as proposed would not even pay for more Christmas lights.

The Clerk reminded members of the recommendations in the report. The Council had to note the reserves position and it had to notify the precept to BGCBC by 31 January. However, there were three key options around the budget itself: option A, the Clerk’s standstill budget (£135k), option B, Councillor Oakley’s proposed budget and working group (£234k) and option C, Councillor Bard’s budget (£142k). If there was a majority for one of those options, amendments could then be moved (to add items to or remove items from the chosen option).

Members agreed that they did not wish to consider any further amendments; they wished to make a straight choice between the three key budget options.

Option A (the standstill budget of £135k set out in the Clerk’s report) was moved by Councillor White. It was not seconded, so it fell away.

Option B (the budget of £234k and working group proposed by Councillor Oakley) was moved by Councillor Morgan and seconded by Councillor Smith.

11 members (out of 16) voted in favour of Option B.

Councillor Bard stated that he therefore withdrew his proposed budget (Option C) and that he would also leave the meeting and tender his immediate resignation, as he could not support a budget of £234k.

Other members asked Councillor Bard to stay, reminded him that this was a democratic decision, and reminded him of the expertise and contribution he had brought to ALCC.

Councillor Bard reiterated that he could *not* support the increase and he left the meeting at this point.

Council RESOLVED:

- (1) to note the reserves position and its decision of 7 November 2018, to replenish the reserves already spent on purchasing 9 defibrillators
- (2) to increase the 2019/20 budget and precept to £234,000, comprising the standstill budget of £135.3k, plus £20k for additional staff/project support, plus £78.7k for additional projects
- (3) that a working group is set up forthwith to consider which of the proposed projects should be carried out in the year 2019/20 and to report back to Council with recommendations and
- (4) that the Council notifies its precept to BGCBC by 31 January 2019.

180. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 1(z)

Council **RESOLVED** (prior to the vote on the budget item above) to suspend standing order 1(z) to extend the meeting for longer than two hours.

181. SOLAR FARM GRANTS

Councillor Allen Rees declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this agenda item, as he was involved in setting up a fishing club at Cwmtillery Lakes, which may possibly benefit from funding in future from the solar farm grant. Councillor Rees left the room.

Councillor Mark Lewis declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this agenda item, as he was the Secretary of CANCO (the Cwmtillery Area Network of Community Organisations), which had submitted a proposal for solar farm grant funding. Councillor Lewis left the room.

The Chair emphasised the importance of members declaring interests if they were involved in CANCO or any organisations involved in the CANCO proposals in any way.

Councillor Perry Morgan stated that he attended CANCO meetings as he was the local ward councillor, but he was not a member of CANCO.

Councillor Rob Phillips stated that he had been asked by CANCO to submit their proposal, but he was not a member of CANCO or connected to them in any way.

Two members asked why other proposals, from Aberbeeg Community Centre (ACC) and Six Bells Park, had not been issued with the agenda.

The Clerk (and several members) reminded others of the previous decisions of Council, on 21 November, to split the funding equally between the five wards (which led to the submission of earlier proposals, e.g. for Six Bells Park), and on 12 December to rescind that decision, in favour of a larger project, and consider the issue further at this meeting. Following further clarification from the solar farm company and clear instructions issued by email, only one proposal had been submitted for this meeting on time, and that was the CANCO proposal, which was attached to the agenda. The required details from ACC had only been received this morning, which was too late, and no other proposals had been submitted for this meeting by the deadline specified. Project ideas considered previously could not continue to be reissued indefinitely.

Councillor Phillips then spoke to the “Abertillery Country Park” proposal which he had submitted on behalf of CANCO. This involved several sub-projects at Roseheyworth Woodlands, Cwmtillery Heritage Centre, Cwmtillery Lakes, mountain bike trails, heritage trails, restoration and repainting of the Pit Head Memorial and promotion of tourism, which he explained in detail. He referred back to the presentation from Dr Llewellyn earlier in the meeting, to the need to make the most of the area’s natural assets, to the importance of having a strategic approach and a visionary project, to the importance of involving as many people and organisations as possible, and to the need to “kick start” a project somewhere, even if the initial funding was inadequate, with a view to assessing the longer term feasibility of project ideas and applying for more funding later.

Lengthy debate ensued and members commented or asked (key points only):

- the November decision, to split the money between the five wards, should not have been rescinded; this was against standing orders
- the Clerk had read out the relevant standing order at the 12 December meeting; Council had agreed to rescind the November decision anyway on a vote
- the minutes of the 12 December meeting had already been confirmed; the person objecting had not attended the meeting, so had no right to query the minutes
- these were excellent proposals, for the Tillery Valley as a whole
- how much CANCO had already raised for these projects, or whether CANCO was expecting ALCC to give them the whole £35k without any matching resource
- £35k could not simply be given out, without any due diligence checks
- ALCC would need to see signed accounts from CANCO and properly costed proposals, as well as progress reports on delivery of the projects
- setting up a regional country park would cost £millions; this was just the start
- all the projects proposed at this stage were in the Cwmtillery ward
- work had been done and money had been spent before at Cwmtillery woods; it had been vandalised and left to go to ruin
- this proposal involved many aspects, including facilities at Cwmtillery lakes; these could be built upon and more improvements added later
- the proposal to allocate the £35k to one large project (not split it between the 5 wards) had been submitted at the 12 December meeting; this was not acceptable
- other proposals could have been submitted for this meeting, but none were
- many other groups should be involved in the Cwmtillery projects proposed by CANCO, as others (e.g. CLEAN and Coetir Tyleri) were doing similar things
- other projects such as a woodland camping site and lakes café had been under development for several years, by other groups
- no other groups had been approached by CANCO; nor had they done any public

consultation

- the CANCO proposal was put together quickly, using others' ideas, the figures were not accurate and the projects had no hope of being delivered
- CANCO had discussed the proposals widely, they could be achieved and CANCO was a properly constituted organisation, with a bank account
- the cabin intended for use as a café belonged to Blaenau Gwent; there was no permission to use it
- other organisations had bank accounts too; it was not acceptable to give all this funding to one group when other groups were also involved in delivering projects
- similar projects for the Cwmtillery area had been discussed ten years ago; they were still good ideas, even though they had not yet happened
- only one proposal had been received; from CANCO
- the solar farm funding had to be decided upon quickly, or it may be lost
- proper consultation was needed; if the funding was lost in the meantime, sobeit
- it was essential, for the benefit of all ALCC communities, not to lose this funding
- a committee or working group could be set up, with monthly meetings, to monitor the spending of the money and progress of the projects
- members could form a working group and invite CANCO and other relevant people and organisations along, to discuss the proposals and find a way forward
- the working group could be the same working group as Council had already agreed, under the budget proposals decided earlier
- the solar farm funding should not be given to anyone until people had been consulted properly and issues such as land ownership had been explored.

The Clerk answered questions about the timescale and process and emphasised the need to decide soon, or risk losing the funding altogether.

Councillors Allen Rees and Mark Lewis (ML) were invited back into the meeting to answer questions. They responded (key points only):

- the ideas were very good and some were quite complex; it was not possible to rely solely on volunteers as business acumen and expertise were needed
- many organisations had thousands of people following them on Facebook, such as Ffrindiau Tyleri and Friends of Six Bells Park, but invariably only a handful of people turned up to meetings
- ML was on CANCO, he ran their Facebook page and he had been involved in many discussions about these ideas
- the projects were connected (e.g. with the Ebbw Fach Trail) and were a realistic possibility; ML had suggested they apply for funding
- hundreds of people followed CANCO on Facebook but only a few people went to meetings; this was normal in most organisations
- they did not know the extent of discussions held between CANCO, CLEAN and Abertillery Excelsoirs for example.

Councillors Rees and Lewis left the meeting after the above question and answer session, due to the interests they had declared earlier.

Following a motion from Councillor Glyn Smith and amendments from Councillor Gill Clark and Councillor Rob Phillips:

Council RESOLVED (with 11 members voting in favour and 2 abstaining):

- (1) to support the submitted Cwmtillery project proposals in principle, subject to further work, checks and discussions
- (2) to ask the solar farm company for the funding, to allocate for these proposals, subject to further work, checks and discussions
- (3) that Council is not satisfied that CANCO is effective, or that it is able to deliver, or that it has discussed these proposals with any other organisations/people in the area (some of whom are already involved in similar projects)
- (4) that the Council meets as soon as possible with representatives of CANCO, CLEAN, Coetir Tyleri and other appropriate people/organisations in the area, including Dr David Llewellyn, to discuss the proposals further and decide how to proceed towards funding and delivery of the proposals.

Councillors Rees and Lewis returned to the meeting at this point.

182. DEFERRAL OF FURTHER BUSINESS

The Council **RESOLVED** to defer any further business remaining on the agenda to the next available Council meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.55pm.

Signed as a correct record by the Chair

NB these minutes are a summary of the proceedings and record of the decisions taken. They are not intended to be a verbatim record.

Minutes produced by Richard Gwinnell, Clerk