

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF ABERTILLERY AND LLANHILLETH
COMMUNITY COUNCIL (ALCC) HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2019 at 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Mitre Street, Abertillery**

PRESENT: Councillors:

Peter Adamson, Keri Bidgood, Gill Clark (Chair) (in the Chair), Roger Clark, Tracey Dyson, Mark Lewis, Beverley Lucas, Perry Morgan, Gary Oakley, Rob Phillips, Allen Rees, Nick Simmons and Graham White

Officers: Richard Gwinnell, Town Clerk

Others: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council representatives:
Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader
Councillor Garth Collier, Deputy Leader
David Watkins, Team Manager, Leisure Services and Facilities
and 3 members of the public

ABSENT: Councillors Amanda Edwards, Julie Holt, Glyn Smith and Bernard Wall

The Chair announced that Councillor Bernard Wall's wife Shirley had recently passed away. The Council stood for a minute's silence in memory of Shirley and asked the Clerk to send a letter of condolence to Councillor Wall on their behalf.

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Amanda Edwards and Julie Holt.

The Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council representatives were welcomed.

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No personal interests were declared.

63. BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL (BGCBC) REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair reminded members that this was the second meeting with senior BGCBC representatives and of the importance of working together closely and sharing relevant information. The issues discussed and responses given by BGCBC representatives are summarised below.

Public toilets in Abertillery

Responses from BGCBC representatives (to ALCC members' questions):

- BGCBC did not have a legal responsibility to provide public toilets
- the budget for public toilets was cut in 2013 and the money was no longer there
- if public toilets were provided by BGCBC in Abertillery, BGCBC would also have to provide them everywhere else
- Tredegar Town Council ran the public toilets in Tredegar, paid for through the precept

- ALCC could do the same if it wished for Abertillery
- toilets in Anvil Court and the library were for staff, not the public, for security reasons
- they could be used by the public at staff's discretion
- the Museum opened its toilets to the public, three mornings a week
- Welsh Government funding had been given to traders, pubs etc to open up their toilets for the public in years gone by, but this had stopped
- BGCBC would be prepared to refurbish the Tillery Street toilets (with capital funds) if ALCC entered into a legal agreement to ensure their future maintenance
- staff were already employed by BGCBC to lock/unlock car parks; their rounds could be extended to unlock/lock the public toilets at 7.30am/3.30pm approximately
- ALCC could employ someone to lock the toilets later in the day if they wished
- the annual cost to maintain public toilets across Blaenau Gwent was approx. £60k
- CCTV near the toilets was an option if it could be paid for, but CCTV was unlikely to help catch vandals, who may not enter through the front door and who could not be seen once they were inside the toilet building.

CCTV

Responses from BGCBC representatives (to ALCC members' questions):

- the cameras were operable but not yet working fully due to a data protection issue
- they would be working fully very soon
- further details were not yet in the public domain
- there were 15 fixed cameras and 4 deployable (mobile) cameras
- there were difficulties with putting CCTV cameras at Abertillery Park (e.g. insufficient lighting to capture clear images) but nothing was impossible.

Trinity Chapel

Responses from BGCBC representatives (to ALCC members' questions):

- a meeting to discuss progress and options relating to Trinity Chapel would be held this week with the 11 local ward councillors of BGCBC
- reports would have to go to Scrutiny Committee and the Executive of BGCBC
- details were not yet in the public domain and third parties were involved
- this issue could be discussed further later, if the press and public were excluded from the meeting.

Car Parking in Abertillery – availability and enforcement

Questions or comments from ALCC Councillors:

- Abertillery town centre was in desperate need of more evening car parking
- the lack of public car parking in the evening was killing the town, preventing local people and visitors enjoying the town, deterring organisations from operating or meeting in Abertillery and hindering local businesses
- The Met theatre, pubs, restaurants, takeaways, Iceland and even churches would benefit from greater custom if there was more evening parking
- longer evening opening hours at the Division Street car park were needed; not just

when there was a special request for a specific event

- evening opening could be achieved using automatic barriers, “crocodile teeth” or employing a private security firm to lock up later in the evening e.g. at 11pm
- other towns had evening car parking facilities
- this was about extending the opening hours, not leaving the car park open all night
- ALCC may want to run the car park itself under a Community Asset Transfer
- CCTV could be placed at the car park to limit crime and anti-social behaviour
- how could organisations request special event late opening of the car park?
- why the car parks could not be locked at 11pm instead of 7pm?
- whether the local byelaw preventing overnight stay in the car park was still in force?
- anti-social behaviour had been a problem in the past but that was not a reason to close down the car park and restrict the economy of the town
- people would be happy to pay £1 to park; the income could be reinvested into extra security costs and charging would deter anti-social use of the car park at night
- better parking enforcement was needed, e.g. on the hill near the Foundry Bridge car park, at the bottom of Tillery Street, parking on double yellow lines, in Market Street and many other places
- whether BGCBC would consider evening opening of the Division Street car park again, if ALCC came up with a plan?
- why James Street was treated differently to everywhere else (with its limited time waiting order, with an exemption for residents)?
- whether a similar arrangement could be made available elsewhere?

Responses from BGCBC representatives:

- 11 local BGCBC councillors had met at least 8 times over several years to discuss late opening of the Division Street car park
- they had unanimously decided on every occasion that the Division Street car park should remain locked in the evenings
- the anti-social behaviour problems experienced in years gone by had not gone away
- if the car park was opened late, those problems would inevitably return
- problems had recently been experienced at Glandwr Street car park, where youths gathered until 2 or 3am, lighting fires and causing a nuisance, so that was now also locked from 7pm and access barred with boulders
- this was a quality of life issue for local residents living close to the car parks
- the town was not shut down at night
- the Division Street car park (top level) could be kept open if there was a special request, received through normal channels at BGCBC or through ALCC
- severe damage was caused to the Division Street car park lift shafts and lower floor previously; the car park had nearly been shut down completely
- this was about health and safety; staff would not be closing the car park at 11pm
- automatic barriers and “crocodile teeth” worked for awhile but inevitably broke down
- the Market Street car park barriers had broken down many times
- the costs of maintenance were prohibitive
- CCTV was recorded but not continuously watched, so this would not solve any problems when they occurred
- the 24/7 keyholder service was for emergencies only, not everyday use
- the byelaws introduced several years ago had been totally ineffective
- the car park off Foundry Bridge was a more obvious choice for late opening, if that

was an option

- there had been numerous complaints from residents suffering anguish as a result of activity in other car parks left open at night, including residents in Park Place
- the decision to close the Division Street car park at night had been taken alongside the Police, health and safety, equalities, community safety and other colleagues
- the new enforcement officers had been issuing warnings for their first few weeks but were now issuing fixed penalty notices
- several double yellow lines had been removed already from Abertillery, creating 20 extra spaces to date, with more to follow after further consultation
- more traffic orders would be introduced to deal with problem areas, e.g. to restrict parking by non-residents in King Street
- an increasing number of areas would be targeted by the new parking enforcement team, including Market Street, over the coming weeks
- parking on pavements, over double yellow lines, could be tackled by BGCBC and by the Police where there was a serious obstruction
- BGCBC would consider any plan which was presented to it
- more streets were expected to apply for “resident only” parking or similar schemes
- however, each house would only get one permit, so households with several cars would not benefit
- limited waiting times (with exceptions for residents) applied already at James Street and in part of Division Street
- in the past, people stopped applying, due to the lack of enforcement by the Police
- the new civil parking enforcement service needed to bed in, after which more would be known about where the real ongoing problems were
- BGCBC would welcome further discussions with local councillors about other areas which may benefit from double yellow line removal.

The Blaenau Gwent App

Responses from BGCBC representatives (to ALCC members’ questions):

- people could download “My Services”, the self-service App onto their phone, tablet or other device, to access information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, e.g. about refuse collection dates
- they could also report issues such as faulty street lights, potholes, fly tipping etc
- “streetscene” crews received these reports directly at the depot and could deal with issues much more quickly than previously, when a paper trail was needed
- the system gave priority to some issues (e.g. faulty traffic lights) over others (e.g. grass cutting requests)
- the speed of street light repairs may depend on the budget available
- all service requests were monitored and results were reported on regularly.

Six Bells Middle Plateau and other vacant sites

Responses from BGCBC representatives (to ALCC members’ questions):

- the former Abertillery leisure centre site would be used for housing in future
- Six Bells Park may be a viable site for a new skate park
- the Six Bells middle plateau site would also be used for housing, as would the former

Nantyglo School site

- there were very few pockets of land large enough to sustain large scale housing development in the valley, as opposed to Ebbw Vale for example
- good housing was vital to quality of life and well-being
- there were other places for people to walk and enjoy open space and fresh air
- the amount of car parking at the new Six Bells School would be considered again
- there were targets for the amount of affordable housing on all housing sites, but developers had to make money, or they wouldn't build at all
- all sites were properly tested e.g. for subsidence before building took place
- the housing mix on the middle plateau site was yet to be decided
- it was preferable to sell a site on which permission to build had already been given.

Roaming sheep

Responses from BGCBC representatives (to ALCC members' comments):

- BGCBC knew the number of sheep roaming in residential areas and on roads was a problem
- tackling ownership and responsibility issues effectively was the real challenge
- removal of fencing and the lack of speedy action by some farmers to repair fencing was a problem
- BGCBC was working closely with farmers and others to resolve the issue.

A potential new Welsh School

Responses from BGCBC representatives (to ALCC members' questions):

- it had been rumoured on social media that BGCBC was turning down £6.5 million of Welsh Government funding to build a new Welsh secondary school at Tredegar
- this was not true
- BGCBC had however made clear that it needed further discussions about funding prior to making any firm commitments or consulting with the public (which could in itself raise expectations, possibly falsely)
- BGCBC could gladly accept £6.5 million for a new-build school
- however, BGCBC would then have to meet significant revenue costs over the years to come, especially during the first five years it would take to fill a new school
- BGCBC had a significant overspend already on education and schools
- any new revenue spending required would therefore have to be taken from existing schools, which would suffer as a result
- BGCBC representatives were seeking a meeting with the Welsh Government Education Minister to discuss the issue further, prior to issuing a press release
- BGCBC wished to work closely with Welsh language groups but so far, offers of meetings had not been taken up by those groups
- BGCBC had not said a new school would not happen; it had however said it needed more time and more discussions about the long-term financial implications
- if the Welsh Government was willing to give £6.5 million to build a new school, it must surely recognise that more revenue funding would also be required.

64. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Council RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business, by virtue of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, on the grounds that disclosure of the matters to be discussed would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of those matters.

65. BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL (BGCBC) REPRESENTATIVES

Further discussion ensued on:

- a potential new Welsh School and the BGCBC “schools” revenue position
- potential future options for Trinity Chapel, the Abertillery library and the Mitre Street building (ALCC offices).

The Leader of BGCBC stated that many further discussions would be required and that he was not in a position to make any commitments at this stage. As soon as he was able to do so, he would be happy to return and make a presentation to ALCC on the future of Trinity Chapel and other buildings which may be impacted upon.

Council **RESOLVED** to receive a further presentation from the Leader of BGCBC and appropriate colleagues in due course, about the future of Trinity Chapel and other buildings.

The Chair thanked the BGCBC representatives for their valuable contributions and attendance.

The Leader of BGCBC stated that he and his colleagues were happy to attend and speak to ALCC members, but that formal public Council meetings may not be the best vehicle to do this, as there were limits on what could be discussed in public.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.

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, Town Clerk