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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
on Thursday, 20th June, 2019 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Woodhouse (Chairman)
County Councillor S.B. Jones (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: P. Clarke, D. Batrouni, D. Blakebrough, L. Brown, A. Davies, D. Dovey, L. Dymock, A. Easson, D. Evans, M. Feakins, P.A. Fox, R.J.W. Greenland, M. Groucutt, L. Guppy, R. Harris, J. Higginson, G. Howard, S. Howarth, R. John, P. Jones, S. Jones, P. Jordan, M. Lane, P. Murphy, M. Powell, J. Pratt, R. Roden, B. Strong, F. Taylor, T. Thomas, J. Treharne, J. Watkins, A. Watts, A. Webb and K. Williams

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matthew Phillips	Head of Law/ Monitoring Officer
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors J. Becker, R. Edwards, D. Jones, L. Jones, P. Pavia and V. Smith

2. Declarations of interest

County Councillor M. Powell declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 5d as a governor of King Henry VIII Comprehensive School.

3. Public questions

The Chair welcomed Pete and Julie Wilson of the Magor Action Group On Rail who were in attendance in support of the motion raised by County Councillor F. Taylor.

Mr. Wilson provided some background information on Magor and Undy village stations. He explained that there is now a population of over 6000, predicted to rise 10,000 over the next five to ten years with the development and planning of new houses. A large proportion of those people are commuters to Cardiff or Bristol. He explained that the proposed station is no more than a 15 minute walk from both villages. The lack of parking facilities means it will be a walk way station, which could serve as a blueprint for future station developments. The concept falls into a plan to encourage active and alternative travel. It ticks all the boxes in line with current Welsh Government concerns over both climate emergency and the need for active travel. Situated on the B4245, Magor with Undy has a high volume of traffic passing through, many are commuters and users of Severn Tunnel Junction, and it is believed that the proposed station will greatly reduce the number of vehicles travelling to Severn Tunnel Junction.

Members were urged to support the motion proposed by Councillor Taylor.

4. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions

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We noted the Chairman's announcement.

There were no petitions presented.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People read a statement relating to the Wales Education Building Awards at which Monmouth Comprehensive School had been nominated in four categories and won the prestigious award of Project of the Year Award. This follows the winning of the Digital Innovation Award at the Constructing Excellence in Wales awards. Officers were thanked for their work in delivering this fantastic facility, along with our partners in Welsh Government, BDP, Interserve, and students and staff at the school. Members were encouraged to attend the official gala opening of the school the following day.

5. Notices of motion:

5.1. From County Councillor P. Fox

County Councillor R. Greenland seconded the motion.

Debate ensued.

Many Members echoed the sentiments of the Leader, expressing disappointment with the decision to disregard the proposed M4 relief road. Concerns were highlighted around the problems for commuters and businesses due to ever increasing congestion.

Further information was sought regarding expansion around the Chepstow area.

There was also support for the decision to not develop the relief road, particularly given current concerns around the climate emergency. Also it was stated that we should get 'our own house in order' before we approach WG for infrastructure improvements.

It was felt important to encourage active travel and develop the infrastructure already in place.

Reference was made to item 6 of the motion regarding the new independent commission and Welsh Government were urged to recognise the problems in Monmouthshire and to extend a seat on the commission for Monmouthshire County Council.

Councillor J. Watkins referred to a motion she raised at the December 2018 meeting of Council, which was unanimously supported, that Council write to WG asking why our rail service was so badly disrupted. She added that she was not aware of a WG response to that letter. She also added her support to the Grip 3 study for Magor Station.

Frustrations were noted regarding the limitations to public transport.

The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services felt that MCC have a strong case to apply for a grant under the Active Travel Act, and hopes to be successful in our application which will go forward next year.

It was felt important to encourage Forest of Dean, Gloucester, England Highways, Wales Highways and Monmouthshire County Council to work together to resolve issues in the Chepstow area from Lydney.

Upon being put to the vote Council unanimously resolved to agree the motion.

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5.2. From County Councillor F. Taylor

In presenting the motion Councillor F. Taylor paid tribute to the MAGOR Group, two of whom are currently meeting with the Department for Transport in London.

Councillor Batrouni seconded the motion.

Comments were made regarding the professionalism and the amount of work the MAGOR Group have carried out to put this scheme forward, and it was expressed they deserve full support of Council and the highest commendation.

Upon being put to the Council unanimously resolved to agree the motion.

5.3. From County Councillor A. Easson

The motion was seconded by Councillor Batrouni.

The Cabinet Member thanked Councillor Easson for the motion and expressed her support. She added that following concerns raised by users of the B4245 at Severnside Area Committee, Highways made a commitment to undertake a review of the route. The results of the road safety audit was reported back to the committee and did not identify the B4245 as a high risk road. However, now that the decision has been made not to build a new M4 motorway the next stage of the report can proceed and will involve a detailed traffic review. The findings will be reported back to Severnside Area Committee for further consideration.

Upon being put to the vote Council resolved the motion was carried.

5.4. From County Councillor D. Batrouni

Councillor Thomas seconded the motion, and expressed his full support. He believed Monmouthshire to be a County of two halves, with a very affluent sector but also areas where people are struggling to survive. It was thought that many families are being failed by the Authority.

Concerns were aired around the amount of deficits in schools.

The lack of access to social housing was thought to be a major factor in child poverty, and the data provided indicates that the Authority is failing on its aspirations.

There was objection to the comments supporting the motion and it was stated that our school children receive every help and assistance, mentally and practically, whatever their circumstance.

Councillor Groucutt, referred to an Adults Select report on the impact of the roll-out of Universal Credit in Monmouthshire which highlighted the areas of child poverty in Monmouthshire. He asked how, given that nearly a third of children are living in households in poverty, where we see the regular use of foodbanks, can Council conclude anything other than we are failing our children?

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The Cabinet Member for Social Justice understood and recognised the challenges and took the opportunity to highlight work in place. She reaffirmed the commitment to providing equal opportunities for all. We were advised of initiatives in place across the County.

Suggestion was made that the Labour Group challenge the Welsh Government settlement figure.

It was confirmed that breakfast clubs are offered within the WG guidelines. There is a small charge for the childcare element. This is free to those entitled to free school meals.

The results of a recorded vote were:

For:	9
Against:	22
Abstain:	2

Therefore the motion was defeated.

6. Members' Questions:

6.1. From County Councillor M. Groucutt to County Councillor R. Greenland

Councillor Greenland referred to the Gwent Green Grid Partnership being an important group who are bringing forward a strategic piece of work with NRW and other partners to find sustainable management of important natural resources within Wales. It is not the intention of that body to replace the work of the LDP in identifying green wedges. Instead it will be the work of the LDP to take account of what the group is saying. We are very much focused on the need for these green wedges to come into our LDP, but we also have competing issues in terms of preparation of the LDP. We will need to look at both the existing green wedges and decide if they are still appropriate, and consider other green wedges as we move forward. It will be looked at as part of the whole LDP process and for Members to decide what is appropriate going forward. It is important to remember the other important issues of providing housing land and industrial land for further jobs.

As a supplementary Councillor Groucutt asked Councillor Greenland to confirm whether MCC worked with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority to identify, and put forward, any green wedge proposals for the Abergavenny area. He also asked whether MCC has undertaken a landscape appraisal of the area towards the national park to enable the designation of green wedges around Abergavenny, and create that area for recreation.

Councillor Greenland confirmed that as we move forward with the development of the LDP we will be consulting with a whole host of interested parties, particularly Brecon Beacon National Park Authority.

6.2. From County Councillor A. Easson to County Councillor J. Pratt

The Cabinet Member responded that Highways Department only charge non-profit making organisations an amount to cover the legal costs associated with processing a Section 50 license. The major cost associated with the license process and inspection fees are absorbed within the Highways budget. This arrangement is not offered to other contractors or organisations and is applied consistently across the authority. Councillor Pratt has met with

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officers on this issue, and added that this is not to be confused with the issue of street furniture and A-boards.

Councillor Pratt explained that up to now this cost has been met by Town Councils, and officers are looking at the Section 50 money and fees, and a report has been produced which will be presented shortly.

Councillor Easson disputed that this had been paid for by the Town Council, and as a supplementary asked the Cabinet Member if she was aware that since 2001, 235 Section 50 licenses have been issued to utility works across the County, of which, only 2 were for permanent fixtures of floral attributes. He stated that group in question put on an event in Caldicot in 2018 and made over £2000 profit, of which over 2 thirds went back to the Authority. He asked that this be resolved outside the Chamber, to benefit this particular group.

The Cabinet Member agreed to meet with Councillor Easson and Officers following the meeting.

6.3. From County Councillor B. Strong to County Councillor P. Jordan

Councillor Jordan responded that the new post office desk opened 1st May 2019, and Monmouthshire is the first Council to run a local post office. This is the latest development in the evolution of our community hubs, showing that combining services in a single building can help maintain locally accessible services. The service mirrors the opening hours of the Hub which includes Saturday mornings. We have appointed two part-time staff to run the service, and it would not be possible without the support of Usk Town Council who are co-funding the operating costs.

Thanks were expressed to Richard Drinkwater who has been running the service alongside his other responsibilities whilst training is undertaken.

A number of other authorities have shown interest in the model and the service manager will be providing a presentation on our approach. Staff have reported some positive non-financial benefits for other service in the Hub such as an increase in library membership.

During the first month of trading there were 4559 counter transactions, an average of 38 for each hour the service was available. Further information on financial performance will be reported later in the year.

An official opening will take place on Thursday 27th June 2019.

8. Urgent Question from Councillor R. John to Councillor R. Greenland

Would the Cabinet Member for Enterprise make a statement on the Welsh Government decision to overturn planning permission to secure the future of Troy House in the Mitchel Troy Ward?

Councillor Greenland explained that he was extremely surprised and disappointed by the decision of the Welsh Inspector, confirmed by the Welsh Minister, that the application for the development of Troy House should be overturned. He explained that Troy House is a listed building which stands outside Monmouth in urgent need of repair and on the buildings at risk register.

The owner had been negotiating with the Council for 8 years to convert the building into apartments but size and costs meant another enabling development was needed to make it a commercial proposition. Planning had been approved by the Planning Committee, but has since been turned down, meaning it remains a building at risk and to give it a long-term future would run into millions. Unless there is a feasible opportunity for development adjacent to the

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building there is no commercial future, and upkeep will fall on this Council. Welsh Government will need to come up with a solution that will enable us to move forward.

The Leader and Chief Executive are due to meet with the Minister and it is hoped this matter will be raised. Any further information will be brought back to Council.

As a supplementary Councillor John added that the planning application was not without localised concern but mainly regarding access to the neighbouring farm rather than flood risk. There is a desire locally to secure the future of Troy House. He added concern that WG can overturn the local expertise of our Planning Committee.

7. To confirm the following minutes:

7.1. 14th May 2019

The minutes of the meeting of full Council held on 14th May 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

7.2. 16th May 2019

The minutes of the meeting of full Council held on 16th May 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair. In doing so we noted that a minute silence had been held in respect of the passing of former Chairman Donald Spencer.

Also Councillor Greenland had given apologies for the meeting.

The meeting ended at 5:00pm