

**Minutes of the Lower Wye Area Committee held at
Mathern Village Hall
on Wednesday 19th March 2014 at 10:00am**

Agenda Item 6

PRESENT: County Councillor: A. Webb (Chairman)

County Councillors: D.L.S. Dovey, G.L. Down, P.S. Farley, A.C. Watts and A.E. Webb

County Councillor V.E. Smith was also in attendance at the meeting.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms A. Perrin	-	Car Parking Manager
Mr R.Hoggins	-	Head of Operations
Mr W.Mclean	-	Head of Policy and Partnerships
Mr M. Lloyd	-	Welcome Monmouthshire Project Officer
Mrs E. Tapper	-	
Democratic Services Officer.		

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillor V.E. Smith

Ms M. Lewis	-	Vice President, Chepstow Rotary Club
Press		

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor R.J.W. Greenland and P. Murphy.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

County Councillor D.L.S. Dovey declared a personal, non – prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct, Local Government Act 2000 within the capacity of spouse of Chepstow Town Councillor (Minute item 6: Managing Our Highways – Consultation Progress; Pembroke Primary School signage)

County Councillor P. Farley declared a personal, non - prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct Local Government Act 2000 within the capacity of spouse of Governor at Pembroke Primary School.(Minute item 6: Managing Our Highways – Consultation Progress - Pembroke Primary School signage)

County Councillor A.C. Watts declared a personal, non – prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct, Local Government Act 2000 within the capacity of Town Councillor and small business owner. (Minute item 6: Managing Our Highways Consultation Progress)

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3.PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

The Chairman welcomed Ms M. Lewis, Vice President, Chepstow Rotary Club, to the meeting.

We heard that Chepstow Rotary Club were investigating the possibility of a “Tree of Light” which would attract annual donations for charitable causes, community project and volunteer groups such as Mencap and the redesign of the Bulwark Scout Hut.

The chosen tree was located at the entrance to Nelson Street and would be lit with 500 to 1000 lights for three weeks prior to Christmas but would be separate to the normal town Christmas lights. Mr Roger Joy, Monmouthshire County Council confirmed that it was feasible to run a 10m power supply around the base of the tree.

Businesses and individuals would be asked to sponsor the tree in celebration or in memory of a loved one.

Chepstow Rotary Club has received a quotation for the illumination of the tree and the removal of the lights and two were pending. The estimated cost was £2500.

Ms Lewis requested that Lower Wye Area Committee considers offering a grant to Chepstow Rotary Club to commence the project in December 2014.

During consideration of the request the following issues were raised:

- Concern was expressed regarding the tree’s potential to distract drivers using the A48 and at the junction to Nelson Street Car Park when illuminated. Ms Lewis agreed to verify the legality and road safety issues of this with the Traffic and Networks Manager.
- Concern was expressed that a “Tree of Light” could encourage vandalism.
- Members expressed support for the symbolism and the intended impact of the tree provided that road safety was not compromised.
- Ms Lewis stated that there was no suitable alternative location for the tree as it needed to be in a prominent position to raise money and interest.
- The Car Park Manager would be in a position to confirm ownership of the tree in due course.
- Members informed the Rotary Club that the Area Committee could only contribute to the capital purchase of the lights and suggested that consideration should be given to purchasing the most efficient LED lights.

We resolved to reconsider the application upon confirmation of ownership of the tree and clarification of road safety issues.

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4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

We resolved to confirm the minutes of Lower Wye Area Committee held on Wednesday 11th December 2013 as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman subject to the following highlighted addition:

Area Services Officer Various Updates – Signage to Chepstow Rugby Club, page 4:

*The Committee requested that the Area Services Officer liaise with the relevant Cabinet Member with a view to providing Chepstow Rugby Club with the requested signage **immediately**.*

5. CHEPSTOW TOWN ENTRY SIGNS

We welcomed the Welcome Monmouthshire Project Officer to the meeting.

We received some visual examples of possible enhancements to the four entry signs to Chepstow town, 3 of which are located on trunk roads. Enhancements could include options such as the inclusion of Fair trade and Transition Chepstow, town twinning information and “Walkers Welcome” with funding, estimated at £3000, provided by the Rural Development Plan’s “Welcome Monmouthshire” project.

We welcomed notice that the views of stakeholders had been sought to ensure any decisions regarding additional messages, logos, to be included on the signage were informed.

From a survey of Area Committee members, results produced an equal split of those who preferred to see the town twinning information as well as “Walkers are Welcome” and those who wished to see the town twinning information plus more than one other message.

We acknowledged that all signs must be bilingual and there would be practical difficulties if all information was for display on the signage.

The Committee considered the visual examples and in so doing commented that:

The signage would need to be adaptable for change given that Fair trade recognition is subject to annual review.

Signage should not be too cluttered to maximise impact and to avoid distracting road users.

Recognition that Chepstow marks the beginning of the coastal walk should be incorporated on entry signs.

Changes to signage should be discussed with Chepstow Town Council.

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The Welcome Monmouthshire Project Officer advised Members that as part of the Authority's commitment to Whole Place Planning a welcome message for Chepstow would be formulated in due course.

The Committee resolved therefore to delay enhancements/changes to entry signage pending the outcome of Whole Place Planning.

The Chairman expressed thanks to the Welcome Monmouthshire Project Officer for his continued efforts.

6. MANAGING OUR HIGHWAYS – CONSULTATION PROGRESS

We received an update on the consultation work undertaken to date regarding options for the future management of street furniture and introducing advertising on the public highway from the Head of Operations.

The Head of Operations informed Members of the following key issues:

Uniform implementation of the existing street furniture policy had proven difficult. Policing of the existing policy was sporadic with wide variation between the Authority's towns.

The visually impaired and those registered disabled oppose too many obstructions on the highway.

Alternative methods of street furniture management had been researched and draft proposals considered within the forum of an officer/member working group. The revised management option would allow negotiations with individual properties with licences issued by outlet. This would create an administrative need of 2 - 3 days per outlet and the work would be chargeable. Members noted the indicative costs provided.

The budget for 2014/15 assumes income arising from advertising on the public highway.

The commercial sector had expressed concern that changes to the management of street furniture was simply a further means of income generation. This view was echoed by some members of the Area Committee who stated that whilst repeat offenders should be challenged the revised policy did not support entrepreneurship.

The Committee felt that charity banners should not be chargeable and that charitable organisations and political parties should be permitted to erect street furniture or signage free of charge.

Advertising on the public highways was received positively by the Committee. Members felt that the impact on an outlet's commercial viability would need to be assessed against issues of highway littering and controls would be required to restrict the size and number of advertisements and to prevent distracting road users.

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Sponsorship of floral displays on the Authority's roundabouts was considered as a positive method of advertising.

County Councillor D.L.S Dovey commented that the fencing on High Beech roundabout required repair following damage caused by the erection of signage. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to progress this with Mark Youngman.

The Head of Operations welcomed the comments and advised Members that feedback received from interested bodies would be incorporated into a future report for scrutiny by Strong Communities Select Committee.

We resolved to note the interim report.

County Councillor P. Farley expressed grave concern regarding the Authority's apparent reluctance to provide adequate signage to Pembroke Primary School particularly important for access by emergency vehicles. County Councillor D. L.S. Dovey supported this and requested prompt remedial action.

7. MCC CAR PARK REVIEW

We welcomed the Car Park Manager to the meeting. The Head of Operations and the Car Park Manager presented the consultant's report, which had been compiled following a review of car parks in Monmouthshire.

Parsons Brinkerhoff had carried out the car park study at a cost of £28125. The report was previously considered on 20th February 2014 by the Economy and Development Select committee and whilst general recommendations were discussed, it was agreed that specific area issues should be considered by the relevant area committee and comments reported back to the Select committee.

The review identified that Pay and Display machines required updating, some car parks were poorly maintained with poor signage and existing short/long stay car parks had not been effectively managed enabling people to feed the meters, by topping up valid tickets.

There was a requirement to update and simplify the charging regime. It was suggested that existing pay and display machines be replaced, due to their age and lack of availability of spare parts. The report recommended that machines were replaced with fully networked models, which would allow information to be fed back in real time.

The report proposed unique charging regimes to reflect the needs of the individual towns.

The following proposals were made in relation to Chepstow:

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- Sunday charging to be introduced for car parks not in close proximity to places of worship. Opposition to the proposal was expressed.
- Evening charges to be introduced. Concern was expressed that this would adversely affect the café culture within the town. Rounding up charges was not considered appropriate given the adverse economic climate in which businesses were operating. Members questioned whether the cost of monitoring evening charges would outweigh the income generated.
- Blue badge holders to be charged for parking. Members expressed concern that this could be viewed as discriminatory
- The Committee unanimously supported the first hour free proposal stating that it would increase foot fall in the high street. It was suggested that free weekend parking during the run up to Christmas be implemented
- Charges to be introduced at Station Road Car Park between the hours of 9am – 5pm Members expressed the need for Station car park to be for the exclusive use of station users until the site is re – developed. It was essential to promote rail travel within the Authority.
- The Seven Bridge Car Park is under – used. Members requested that consideration be afforded to providing a subsidy to the Seven Bridge Social Club to operate the car park. We were advised that the club had recently given notice to the Authority as the club planned to develop the site and therefore the facility was likely to be lost. The Authority is currently leasing the car park on a month by month basis.
- Re - classification of Nelson Street and Welsh Street to short stay car parking.
- Concern was expressed regarding inconsistent charges for car parking across the Authority and within Chepstow itself.
- Members requested that the potential for Chepstow Racecourse to be utilised as a park and ride facility be explored.

The Area Committee resolved to provide feedback to Economy and Development Select Committee and expressed thanks to the officers present.

8. CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND THE FUTURE OF AREA COMMITTEES

We welcomed the Head of Strategic Partnerships to the meeting in order to canvass members' views regarding the most effective use of Area Committees. During consideration of the benefits of area committees and how they could be adapted or improved the following issues were raised:

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- Area Committees provide a valuable opportunity for the public to speak to local members.
- Public attendance varies between areas. Members felt that public attendance was determined by the local significance of the agenda items. Members felt that there was a need to advertise Area Committees more widely.
- Engagement needs to be embedded; meetings should be mobile and timings flexible to accommodate all sections of the community and to maximise attendance.
- Concern was expressed regarding the lack of Cabinet Member attendance at Area Committee, which could have a negative impact on the Committee's outcomes.
- Potential exists for Area Committee work to link with Whole Place Planning to ensure that elected members and the public are kept informed. Improved coordination between interested bodies would be essential to improve focus for area based issues.
- Members expressed a desire to canvass the views of town and community councils regarding the benefit of Area Committees.
- Existing Area Committee naming conventions heightened the distance of the public from Area Committees.
- The buddy arrangement needs to be utilised to ensure that members of town and community councils can participate fully in debates.
If Community Councils were to merge this could reinforce their status and reduce silo working. Members felt that it was important not to underestimate the role of smaller individual forums.

The Head of Strategic Partnerships stated that it may be necessary to review the constitution in terms of the role and function of Area Committees and to consider issues of alignment. Area Committee papers should be issued on a timely basis to all relevant stakeholders and interaction with town and community councils strengthened.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Strategic Partnerships for his attendance.

9. AREA SERVICES OFFICER – VARIOUS UPDATES REPORT

We received the updates report of the Area Services Officer and in so doing we noted the following:

- **Chepstow Marketing Group**

The Marketing Group met on 4th March 2014. We noted that the first monthly pedestrianisation of the High Street would be delayed until April. The Marketing Group had created its own Facebook page and a revision of the town map was imminent.

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- **Lower Wye Community Safety Action Team**

The group met on 6th March 2014. We welcomed an 8.3% reduction in crime during the current year but shoplifting from larger shops and supermarkets was of particular concern.

We also noted that the Street Pastors were considering a change to their current base possibly to Thomas Street.

- **Joint Rail Transport Working Group**

A meeting of the Working Group would be held on 18th March to discuss the Group's transformation into a countywide strategic group.

- **South Monmouthshire Flood Forum**

We were advised that the Flood Forum would meet in May/June 2014. A meeting could not be arranged in January 2014 given budget congestion in the Council diary.

- **Air Quality Steering Group**

The Air Quality Steering Group previously met on 20th November 2013 with the group's next meeting scheduled for 26th March 2014. We noted that the final air quality readings for 2013 should be available by the end of March.

- **Community Liaison Committee (The Charter)**

A meeting of the Community Liaison Committee was held on 6^h February 2014. Members noted the appended minutes.

County Councillor P. Farley requested clarification of town and community council representation on the Community Liaison Committee. We noted that County Councillor G.L. Down represents Lower Wye on the Committee.

- **MOD Community Covenant**

Members were reminded of the grants which could be made available to local community groups via the Community Covenant.

- **Chepstow Bus Station Toilets**

We noted that £14 028 allocated by the Area Committee had been transferred to the Town Council to facilitate the opening of the public toilets at Chepstow Bus Station, anticipated for early April.

- **Signage to Chepstow Rugby Club**

The Welcome Monmouthshire Project Officer had visited the Rugby Club to provide advice on completing the application form and plans indicating intended signage locations. Signage required on the A48 at Bulwark Corner is under the jurisdiction of the South Wales Trunk Road Agency and would require separate consent. A response from Chepstow Rugby Club was yet to be received.

- **Cycling Events**

We noted that Monmouthshire would be holding the National Cycling Championships between 23rd and 29th June 2014 with events passing through the Lower Wye area.

- **Chepstow Walking Festival**

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We noted that the Festival would take place from 12th to 14th April 2014.

- **Flea Market**

We welcomed notice that planning was underway for a "flea market" to be held on 28th June 2014 which would encompass Chepstow town.

- **Environment/Capital Funds**

The Committee agreed to unanimously to ratify its previous decision and to award funding as follows:

St Thomas A Beckett Church, Wolvesnewton	£1317
1 st Bulwark Guides	£395
St Arvans Baby and Toddler Group	£286
St Mary's Church, Llanvair Discoed	£658
Caerwent Community Centre Committee	£329

We welcomed notice of an expression of thanks from Mathern Football Club for funds allocated at the previous meeting of Lower Wye Area Committee.

10. COORDINATING BAORD FEEDBACK

We noted the minutes of the meeting of Coordinating Board held on 21st January 2014.

11. LOWER WYE AREA COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14

We noted the contents of the work programme and resolved that the programme should be reviewed for 2014/15.

12. TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

We noted that the next meeting of Lower Wye Area Committee would be held on Wednesday 11th June 2014.

The meeting closed at 12:20am