

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Lower Wye Area Committee held
at Chepstow Town Council Offices on Thursday, 29th September, 2016 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: County Councillor: D.L.S. Dovey (Chair)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, G. Down, P. Farley,
R.J.W. Greenland, P.A.D. Hobson and P. Murphy

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor S. Dovey – Chepstow Town Council
Mrs. H. Phillips – Chair, Walkers are Welcome

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Katie Burton – Tourism Business Development Co-Ordinator
Will McLean – Head of Governance, Engagement and Improvement
Debbie McCarty – Whole Place Manager
Wendy Barnard – Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor A. Webb and Councillor B. Moore

1. Declarations of Interest

County Councillor P. Farley declared a personal non-prejudicial interest as a Member of Chepstow Town Council.

2. Public Open Forum

The Chair welcomed Hilary Phillips, representing Walkers are Welcome, to the meeting and invited her to raise her discussion points at the appropriate agenda item.

3. To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 15th June 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th June 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

The following updates regarding Capital Funding Requests were provided:

- Bulwark Community Centre: It was confirmed that the information received had been satisfactory and the payment of £1000 has been processed.
- Caerwent Community Centre Committee Ltd: It was noted that the application has been passed to Property Services.
- There was no further update available regarding investigation into two applications submitted but not presented to the Area Committee. This action is carried forward.

4. Highways Update:

The Chair provided the response of the Group Engineer (Highway & Flood Management) on:

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- Progress made with the A466 link road. It was noted that the temporary warning signs provided by MCC were installed in June and the Welsh Government are currently reviewing an early draft of the A466 Route-Based Safety Study. There is still some work to be done on the study including updating following a meeting between the Town Council and WSP | Parsons Brinckerhoff.

It was explained that, in addition to the study report, the Welsh Government are still considering a trial closure of the lay-bys on a trial basis.

- Traffic plans for the new development at the bottom of Chepstow. It was noted that it is expected that a planning application for the former Fairfield Mabey site will shortly be made and at which time highways will prepare a full report. The Welsh Government have already responding on the proposals and indicated that they are satisfied with the traffic modelling which shows that any improvements to the existing road layout and junction on the A48 at Tesco are not required until the majority of the properties have been occupied. The detail of the improvements at this junction are to be determined however it is anticipated that they will incorporate an upgrade pedestrian link on the A48 connecting the town with the new development.

Furthermore MCC will be seeking improvements on the local highway network as well as seeking contributions towards bus services and improvements of Chepstow Rail Station (to be addressed by the Monmouthshire Strategic Transport Group).

It was suggested that the plans should have been dealt with as part of the planning application to allow completion at an earlier stage.

- The Committee discussed the Air Quality meeting and report in the context of the A48 and the traffic issues. It was agreed that these issues impact on several areas and should be considered together. It was agreed that the options for improving the A48 (including the roundabout) must be prioritised. It was emphasised that the impact of improvements would be good for the local and national economy. The Committee was alerted to the potential significant impact of the proposed reduction in Severn Bridge tolls, and of the need to consider this point in any plans, as the incentive to use public transport will be lessened, creating more traffic.

The complexities of progressing improvements to the Rail Station were discussed. It was confirmed that up to 400 cars park at Severn Tunnel Junction Station daily.

5. Chepstow Tourist Information Centre Update

The Tourism Business Development Officer presented the report to provide an update on the issues affecting the operation of Chepstow Tourist Information Centre (TIC) and the options being considered for the future delivery of the service.

It was noted that no feedback forms from interested parties have been received to date. It was commented on that the preferable course of action is to retain the TIC where it is. It was added that there are issues with the lease to resolve and any consequent effect on rental charged. The need to consult more widely before any decisions are made was acknowledged and to find a way of bringing interested parties together. It was commented that some parties in the town were unaware of the survey and more proactivity was required.

Hilary Phillips, Chair of Walkers are Welcome, spoke in favour of the TIC referring to her concern that the Council could not afford the £65,000 running costs. She referred to the

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amount of monetary return from each tourist enquiry which exceeds running costs. It was queried what will happen to the lease if a new party takes it over.

Mrs. Phillips explained the purpose of the Walkers are Welcome organisation is to encourage visitors to the area to spend money through a love of walking. It was suggested that the existing building was excellently situated and could potentially have a shop selling locally produced food, drink, craft and art. It was accepted that a café was not a viable option as running costs were too high and income too low for sustainability. It was accepted that the TIC brings money into the town but noted that it returns to local traders not the Council.

It was commented that the model used to provide a dedicated TIC in Abergavenny is an excellent example of partnership working, but also acknowledged that there are differing circumstances in that area such as support from the National Park. A way forward with partners is being sought e.g. an approach to CADW is being made and discussions are taking place with interested business owners in Chepstow.

6. Community Governance Report

Corporate Governance Report:

The Head of Governance, Engagement and Improvement provided a report to update Members on the way the Council is changing its relationship with Town and Community Councils.

The following points were highlighted:

- Members took the decision to establish a cross party, Member led working group to consider recommendations and decide upon a structure for community governance and engagement.
- Of the seven options proposed, Option 2 to establish five area committees instead of the current four was the preferred model - Abergavenny, Monmouth, Usk, Caldicot and Chepstow.
- Chris Jones had been commissioned to undertake a piece of work with Whole Place and all Members to look at the name of group, terms of reference, how often groups should meet, level of power and participation.
- A priority is to improve communication between the County Council and Town and Community Councils.
- Member of SLT had been allocated as a liaison officer to each of the five areas. The Chepstow meeting has been held.

Members made the following points:

- It was queried how the local government reforms might affect the proposals.
- The Chepstow area meeting was valuable and was received positively.
- Concern was expressed that one Councillor's ward had two community councils that would be in different areas under the proposals and queried if this would cause any difficulties.
- Concern was expressed that there was no mention of budgetary provision for the new committees and that the public would continue to not attend meetings. It was queried how productive and proactive the meetings would be and that it was potentially another layer of bureaucracy or a talking shop.
- The re-establishment of urban and rural councils approach was suggested as a favourable alternative.

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- It was noted that the proposals do not define the role of County Councillors, Town and Community Councillors.
- The opportunity to talk about local issues for an area was raised as a priority whilst accepting that the public will not necessarily attend when they are largely satisfied with the services they receive.
- It was suggested that it should be borne in mind that any attempt to abolish community councils would be difficult with membership consisting of dedicated, community spirited volunteers.
- It was stated that the limited capital available to area committees under the current arrangements was a constraint and should be considered as part of the detail of the new proposals that could include how to spend S. 106 funding and also improvements to the grants process.
- How best to encourage participation is difficult unless the public are directly impacted by proposals.

Community Hub:

Members were assured of progress and were impressed after their visits. Better signage and expansion of the desk area is in hand. Confirmation was provided that the library continues to be supported by professional librarians, who also work in the Hub. Feedback on the range of queries on services and interventions was requested. Additionally, it was requested that Councillors are provided with feedback when requests are made concerning their Ward.

Whole Place:

The Whole Place Manager provided an update on Whole Place. The following points were made:

- Plans were evaluated and were not working well, so it was decided to change to working with groups and identify leaders to make more sustainable progress.
- Members agreed that they need to know what the residents and proposed residents of large housing developments need.
- It was explained that a bid for £55,000 has been submitted to work with GAVO to develop a toolkit for the Whole Place group to have plans of their own. Additionally, a bid has been submitted to provide training for community members in e.g. road closures, leadership, event management and managing finance.
- It was commented that the meeting was helpful to discuss clusters, positioning senior officers in the cluster areas and the work with communities, however, the loss of the local knowledge held by former Area Service Managers is regrettable.
- Section 106 monies may be available for training for Community Councils. Planning training may also be arranged. It will also be possible to invite an adviser on Rural Development Plan to attend a meeting as necessary.
- It was confirmed that Town and Community Councils can access grants for innovative projects that target gaps in services. Attention was drawn to the availability of £2.7million grants that, to date, £250,000 have been allocated.
- Engineering work - Severn Tunnel: The significant work to reschedule trains, provide alternative travel arrangements and meet the public's needs was acknowledged.

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7. To the date and time of the next meeting as Wednesday 14th December 2016 at 10.00am

The date and time of the next meeting were confirmed as Wednesday 14th December 2016 at 10.00am at the Café, Chepstow Leisure Centre.

Agenda to include:

- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board,
- Simon Griffiths about Fuel Policy

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm