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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Lower Wye Area Committee held
at Community Room , Chepstow Leisure Centre - Chepstow on Wednesday, 18th July,
2018 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Dovey (Chair)

County Councillors: L.Brown, J.Becker, P. Murphy and A. Watts

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
James Woodcock	Business Insights Manager
Andy Smith	Strategic Investment and Funding Manager
Judith Langdon	Communities and Partnership Development Lead

APOLOGIES:

Councillors A. Webb, D. Batrouni, R.J.W. Greenland and P.Pavia

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Public Open Forum

The Area Committee listened to the concerns of Mr A. Newman regarding the A466 at Livox Quarry. The Committee were informed that the site has new owners and Mr. Newman explained his unease about the possibility of clustered advertising level with the roadside on an attractive part of the road. He was uncertain if planning permission would be required but suggested that the matter needed to be managed as it would be a) unattractive and b) a distraction for drivers on a bend. He asked the Committee to consider these points.

Secondly, Mr. Newman referred to the roadworks. Whilst accepting the works are essential, he questioned the decision to close the road in October for approximately 4 weeks and cited the impact on businesses and residents. He also commented that October is still a very busy "Tourist" month in the Wye Valley.

It was responded that the road closure was unavoidable. Regarding signage, it was noted that there was no planning application submitted to date. If an application is received, it was acknowledged that account would be taken of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty status and signage would be strictly controlled; highways matters would also be a major consideration.

3. To receive the notes of the meeting held on 25th April 2018

The notes of the previous meeting held on 25th April 2018 were confirmed as a true record subject to inclusion of a reference to the M48 link between Rogiet and Caldicot regarding the road survey being undertaken by Capita and in reference to the traffic problems in Chepstow.

4. Chepstow Town Report: Business opportunities arising from removal of toll from Severn Bridge

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The Committee welcomed James Woodcock, Business Insights Manager, to the meeting to consider both the impact and opportunities arising from the removal of the tolls on the Severn Bridge. It was noted that the Chamber of Commerce had commissioned a report on the High Street and how it would be perceived by visitors.

The importance of ensuring that the retail offer appeals to residents and visitors was emphasised in view of the alternatives, such as Cribbs Causeway and online shopping. Regarding the number of store closures, it was noted that efforts are being made to reach out to other retailers to locate in town whilst also acknowledging the reduction in footfall and the rise in business rates.

A report has been commissioned on the future of the Monmouthshire economy that will consider e.g. the development of arts, entertainment and recreation. Other areas targeted are manufacturing, storage and the science and technology sectors where there are real opportunities to pursue growth.

It was explained that part of the above process is to continue to seek the range of premises that attract businesses for inclusion in the Local Development Plan. There is a well-qualified work force that often works out of the area. It is hoped that new businesses offer employment to local people and also encourage more young people to stay in the area.

It was agreed that the removal of the toll is not so much of an issue for longer term visitors but does discourage short term day visitors. Plans are in place to encourage coach tourism to help keep cafés and restaurants etc. open.

A Member questioned what funding is available in Wales. It was responded that the Welsh Government supports enterprise. The Cardiff City Region supports investment within the region and can be approached for specific projects; European funding is also still available. The Council has already accessed central government funding for Broadband. Welsh Government has adopted a national approach with regard to infrastructure funding and now targets specific areas; Severnside is currently being considered and it will be possible to consider other areas will be considered in future.

A Member stressed the importance of cross border relationships. Regarding economic opportunities, it was questioned what is being done to promote the area and nurture local growth. It was explained that there is significant joint working especially on tourism.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that local businesses can receive support from the Council. It was confirmed that there is limited help available for small businesses. The Council is open to negotiation on rent for some industrial units and small grants are available for new businesses according to potential.

A Member made the point that the average worker age is 48 compared with 34 in Cardiff. This highlights the importance of creating the conditions for young people to stay in the county especially in terms of provision of affordable housing. Concern was expressed that the new LDP will take at least 2 years. It was also queried if there is a mentoring facility for small businesses to encourage enterprise and entrepreneurship.

A Committee Member called for urgent action to address the vacant shops in town and to address aspects that make the town unattractive, such as overflowing bins. The importance of the Council having a directory of businesses was also emphasised, as was the need for a skilled labour force. It was queried how we adjust school curricula to suit businesses of the

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future. All agreed that the road network in Chepstow and the shortage of affordable housing both require urgent attention.

The need for more apprenticeships was identified. It was also suggested that all schools ensure pupils complete a weeks' work experience.

The Committee was supportive of the work of the Chamber of Commerce.

5. Transport and travel update:

6. Feedback from meeting of three Councils (Monmouthshire County Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Forest of Dean District Council)

The Chair reported on his attendance at the first meeting. It was explained that the joint meeting is chaired by Capita. The remit of the group is to consider all the road issues not just the potential for a Chepstow by-pass.

A Member commented that there is a long list of issues published on Facebook. He referred to previous discussion about maintaining momentum between phases and suggested that Phase 2 should now commence. The Member agreed to circulate the list to Councillor L. Brown. An update on when an interim report would be available was requested from the Head of Resources.

A member queried the C1/C5 bus services as the contract expired and Newport Transport has arranged a temporary service until the end of July. The existing service is inadequate and affects people's ability to get to work, hospital appointments etc. Wider consultation has been sought as there has been no proper engagement with Councillors. It is understood the contract is out to tender.

A Member representing Devauden Community Council explained that consideration of discontinuing the 65 route in Devauden is a concern for bus-users in the area. Whilst accepting that it is a small village, the bus is still a vital service for residents who don't have their own transport. It was questioned when a decision would be made.

It was responded that there is a need to better understand the situation and to investigate allocation of Welsh Government monies. Members added that there is a need for budget processes to be clearer on such matters.

7. Bus services to and from Chepstow

This matter was deferred.

8. Update on Chepstow Station Footbridge and facilities

The following information was provided to the Committee from Christian Schmidt in his absence.

Chepstow Service:

Chepstow is current served by an irregular ATW service every 1-2 hours and an irregular CrossCountry service every 1-2 hours.

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Concerning the local (Wales & Borders / ATW) service, the original Metro proposals suggested that all lines should have a turn-up and go service (max. 15 minute wait) during the day. Given the current usage and infrastructure, this would be overkill and undeliverable, so MCC asked for a regular half-hourly service, increasing to turn-up and go service as demand increases. The briefing on the new Wales & Borders rail franchise included “a consistent 1 train per hour between Cheltenham and Cardiff by December 2022” only, which is obviously very disappointing. When Transport for Wales officials attended a regional cabinet / transport authority briefing on Monday 9 July, and Cllr Bryan Jones asked about this, the answer was that the new franchise will allow Transport for Wales (TfW) to request improved frequencies, and TfW will look at this including funding options. At this point in time it is quite unclear what this actually means and MCC members and officers will continue to raise the issue with TfW.

Concerning the regional Cross-Country (CC) service, it should be noted that CC could withdraw the Chepstow stops if it wishes to do so. There is no requirement to stop in Chepstow. No change is expected in the near future; could not accelerate the service because of timetable issues at Cardiff and Birmingham. However, it is expected that there will be major timetable changes once the new CC franchise starts after 2019, and MCC is currently preparing a response to the UK government’s CC consultation demanding that an hourly service for Chepstow will be written into the franchise specification

Concerning services to/from Bristol, it remains MCC’s ambition to see an experimental 2 trains per day direct service from Lydney/Chepstow to Bristol (reversing at STJ, am to Bristol, pm back). This is supported by Gloucester CC and fits with the Cardiff Capital Region and the West of England plans for trains between Cardiff and Bristol.

Chepstow fares:

Fares from Chepstow to Cardiff are substantially higher than from other places within the Cardiff Capital Region of equivalent distance. The briefing on the new Wales & Borders rail franchise contains a commitment to flatten (i.e. reduce) fares from the Heads of the Valleys. At this point it is unclear whether this includes Chepstow. (TfW have been asked.)

Chepstow station facilities:

KeolisAmey’s winning bid for the franchise contained a proposals for “KA and MCC undertake to provide joint funding to develop and implement (KA - £300,000)

- The station being made fully accessible for passengers with reduced mobility
- The construction of a new Park-and-Ride car park
- The creation of a new bus interchange at the station forecourt”

We do not know yet in detail what has been accepted by TfW, though the briefing on the new Wales & Borders rail franchise included Chepstow in a list of stations with the comment of “facilities for tourists and coach/bus interchange“

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9. Update on Severn Tunnel Junction and GWR services

A Member stressed that the service should be improved to two trains per hour as local residents need links to Cardiff, Gloucestershire and Bristol. Another referred to the overcrowding on trains, delays and cancellations especially from Severn Tunnel Junction.

Whilst accepting that the process to change train times is complicated, it was commented that timetabling is not helpful e.g. to get to Cardiff before 9 a.m. residents of Chepstow must leave before 7.30a.m.

It was commented that the Great Western Railway services to Bristol and London are not good with numbers of carriages being reduced leading to full trains that don't stop. A letter has been sent to the franchisee and MPs demanding improvement.

10. Roads around Chepstow/Wye Valley Tourist Area

This matter was discussed in the Public Open Forum.

11. To confirm representation on Strategic Transport Group

It was confirmed that County Councillor J. Becker would represent the Lower Wye area on the Strategic Transport Group.

12. Chepstow Hospital, St. Pierre Ward

It was explained that talks are ongoing with the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and its representatives are attending a Special Adults Select Committee meeting on 19th July 2018 at 3p.m.

A Member explained his disappointment that patients in this area have the furthest to travel in Wales for mental health services. The Member argued that the County Council should not have accepted the £200,000 per annum to compensate for the closure of the St. Pierre Ward especially as there is an increasing elderly population and only 3 adult mental health nurses for the area and challenged how this money will improve services. Members were not happy with the consultation process.

It was agreed that mental health services are not good enough and insufficient staff are available. It was concerning that services are being removed when more services are needed in Chepstow. Members decried the decision to close the St Pierre Ward and noted that the saving of £846,000 has been allocated away from this area.

A member of the public complained that the public were not allowed to speak at a meeting with the Health Board at St. Cadoc's Hospital and was of the opinion that there was no intention of keeping the hospital open.

13. Area Grants

Andy Smith, Strategic Investment and Funding Manager attended the meeting to answer queries on area grants. It was explained that the current review of area committees and pilot at Bryn y Cwm Area Committee concludes in September 2018. The area grant application process is suspended whilst the review is undertaken. It was suggested that applications can still be forwarded to Andy Smith who will look at alternatives. He recommended that any interested groups should contact him in the first instance.

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Lottery for All (up to £10,000), Comic Relief and Children in Need are examples of available grants dependent on the type of project. More details are available on the Monmouthshire CC website. It was suggested, and agreed, that a grants surgery would be useful at a community venue to signpost people and organisations to funding opportunities.

Concern was expressed that an area grant deadline could be missed whilst exploring other funding avenues. The Chair reminded the Committee that Elected Members can help projects in their local wards from a capital grant fund.

14. Items for next meeting

The following items were suggested for the next meeting:

- Housing Issues (invite comments from the public)
- A466 Link Road between High Beech roundabout and the motorway – rights of way

15. To confirm the date, time and venue of the next meeting as Wednesday 17th October 2018 at 10.00am - venue to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 12.40 pm