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Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Thursday, 6th November, 2025 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jane Lucas (Chair)
County Councillor Lisa Dymock, (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Jackie Strong, Tudor Thomas, John Crook, Martyn Groucutt, and Paul Pavia (substituting for Tomos Davies)

Also in attendance County Councillors:
Martin Newell

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Craig O'Connor, Chief Officer, Place and Community Well-being
Daniel Fordham, Regeneration Manager
Nicholas Keyse, Head of Landlord Services
Simon Parfitt, Asset Surveyor
Mathew Wooles, Operations Manager

APOLOGIES: County Councillors Tomos Davies

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

1. Cllr Philip Bowyer for Placemaking ~ Abergavenny Town Council

Councillor Bowyer expressed his gratitude to all contributors to the Abergavenny plan, including local residents, consultants, and council officers, recognising the collaborative effort over 18 months. He emphasised that the plan was developed through consensus, with Abergavenny Town Council voting unanimously in support, regardless of political divisions. Highlighting key proposals, he mentioned the ambitious idea of diverting the A40 from the town centre but focused on more achievable goals such as improving access to the railway station and exploring advanced bus systems, including hopper and potentially driverless buses, to reduce traffic and pollution during major festivals. He stressed the urgent need to redevelop the Castle Street car park toilet block and shop mobility cabin into a modern hub with accessible toilets and facilities for bicycles. Describing the extensive consultation process, he noted that over 500 people from diverse groups, including those with accessibility needs, businesses, and young people, were involved in shaping the plan. Finally, he suggested that traditional elections alone are insufficient for democracy and advocated for ongoing, innovative consultation methods to strengthen local governance and engage more young people.

2. Cllr Roger Hoggins for Placemaking ~ Monmouth Town Council

Councillor Hoggins thanked members of both Monmouth Town Council and Monmouthshire County Council, as well as officers and consultants, for their collaborative work on the Monmouth Town Placemaking Plan. He noted that the plan has been formally adopted by Monmouth Town Council,

recognising its importance for residents, visitors, and businesses in shaping future priorities. He stressed that successful delivery depends on securing funding and highlighted that joint council commitment signals seriousness to potential funders. While acknowledging the extensive consultation process, he anticipated some criticism but emphasised that multiple opportunities for public input were provided. He warned against the plan becoming inactive, urging councils to deliver projects and adapt the plan as circumstances evolve. Finally, he underlined the economic benefits of investing in town centres to support retail and overall county prosperity, encouraging continued commitment to implementing the plan.

3. Bridges Community Centre ~ Steve Pospisil (Vice-Chair of Bridges Trustees)

Mr Pospisil introduced himself as a trustee of Bridges in Monmouth and a chartered accountant, focusing on issues concerning Drybridge House, the charity's home. He explained that Bridges has invested heavily to restore the property and spends significant funds on maintenance, yet faces challenges due to the council's policy of market rent leases with only a three-year rental grant guarantee against a 30-year lease. He stated that the absence of a long-term grant commitment exposes Bridges to insolvency risk if the grant is removed or reduced, which trustees cannot legally accept, arguing that this risk is not comparable to normal business practice as Bridges is a charity and cannot operate under such uncertainty. He noted that break clauses create further instability and block access to major funding sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is essential for repairs and upgrades. Addressing concerns about commercial activities, he clarified that charity law and their constitution ensure a charitable focus and even proposed mechanisms for sharing excess income but had been told these concerns were a "red herring." He also argued that the council's financial analysis is flawed, explaining that most reserves are restricted and cannot be used for rent. Finally, he urged the council to turn public statements into meaningful action to secure the long-term future of Bridges and Drybridge House, rather than relying on short-term guarantees.

3. Bridges Petition

Councillor Martin Newell introduced the petition urging the Council to provide Bridges Centre with a Sustainable Long-term Lease without Rebate Reviews.

Councillor Newell expressed his support for Steve Pospisil's remarks and acknowledged his work with Bridges and its trustees. He highlighted that a petition with over 3,100 signatures is being presented, reflecting significant local concern about the issue. Emphasising the vital role Bridges plays in hosting local events and supporting charities, he warned that its loss would negatively impact community organisations, including those serving vulnerable groups. He stressed the urgency of securing a fair lease for Bridges and Drybridge House, arguing that no business would accept such insecure terms for a long-term agreement. Demonstrating a willingness to collaborate, he offered to work with all parties to find a solution and emphasised the duty to safeguard Bridges and Drybridge House for the future. Finally, he pledged to continue advocating for a fair lease and urged council colleagues to help resolve the situation quickly.

Councillors acknowledged the vital role Bridges plays in the Monmouth community and agreed on the need to secure its future. They considered options for handling the petition, including referring it to full council, requesting a written response from the cabinet member, or involving a working group. While several councillors proposed forming a working group of Monmouth councillors and officers to address the lease issue, it was clarified that scrutiny cannot create such a group directly, as this is an executive function. The committee reached a consensus to refer the matter to the Cabinet Member with a

recommendation to consider establishing a working group, viewing this as the most expedient approach. Emphasising urgency to reduce uncertainty for Bridges and the community, the committee voted to proceed with this option rather than sending the petition back to full council. – **ACTION: for the Cabinet Member to provide a response**

4. Placemaking Plans

Daniel Fordham introduced the report, delivered a presentation and answered the members' questions with Craig O'Connor:

Councillor Crook questioned the wording in the Magor with Undy Placemaking Plan in paragraph 3.14, which states that the recently opened walkway train station had made the area accessible to all. He pointed out that the station is not yet open and suggested the language could be misleading.

The officer clarified that the section is written from a future perspective, describing what the area would be like after the plan's delivery in 10-15 years. It was acknowledged that, out of context, the wording could be confusing, and a suggestion was made to clarify this in the document.

Councillor Groucott highlighted the positive impact of recent changes in Abergavenny, such as restricting traffic in the town centre, despite initial opposition, and noted how these changes have improved the area. Councillor Groucott emphasized the importance of local history and heritage, mentioning notable historical events and figures connected to Abergavenny, and how these contribute to community pride. He commended the Placemaking Plan process for bringing together councillors and community members, fostering collaboration, and supporting the town's continued progress into the 21st century.

Councillor Thomas praised the collaborative process of developing the Placemaking Plan, which involved county councillors, town councillors, and local groups, ensuring wide scrutiny and good discussion. He highlighted the positive impact of pedestrianisation since 2017, making the town centre more pedestrian- and user-friendly. Councillor Thomas commended the plan for building on previous successes, especially improving gateways and enhancing green spaces like Bailey Park. He concluded by supporting the plan, emphasising the extensive consultation and agreement, and urged moving forward with its approval and implementation.

Councillor Pavia asked how the proposed delivery groups for the Placemaking Plans will have the authority, capacity, and continuity to move from planning to actual delivery, especially for large-scale projects involving multiple funding sources and agencies. He queried whether the regeneration team has sufficient capacity to support the delivery of all town plans, and asked how resident and business participation will be maintained during the delivery phase and how community input will influence future project sequencing.

The Chief Officer acknowledged the importance of resource capacity and stated that, following Cabinet consideration of the plans, the next stage will focus on setting up delivery groups and assessing resource needs, including funding. The officer clarified that the plans are not solely the responsibility of the County Council's regeneration team; delivery will involve town councils, businesses, and community groups, with resource requirements spread across these partners. The officer also explained that delivery groups, likely mirroring the steering groups, will play a key role in maintaining engagement and that the most effective way to sustain participation is through the delivery of individual projects, which naturally engage residents and businesses

Councillor Dymock asked how community engagement will be maintained and evolve throughout the delivery of the Placemaking Plans, expressing concern that public participation might diminish over time.

She requested clarification on what specific metrics and timelines will be used to evaluate the success of the plans across different towns, referencing the report's mention of outputs and outcomes.

The officer responded that ongoing community engagement will likely focus on the development and delivery of individual projects, with continued involvement from the County Council, town councils, and other partners as projects progress. He explained that the evaluation section in the Placemaking Plans provides initial ideas for assessing project impact, but detailed metrics and evaluation methods will be developed as individual projects are further defined and delivered.

Councillor Brown asked about progress with Chepstow's Placemaking Plan.

The officer explained that Chepstow's Placemaking Plan, called the Transforming Chepstow Master Plan, was adopted by both the County Council and Chepstow Town Council in 2023. A delivery group has been established, bringing together town and county councils, and has overseen the delivery of several projects, including improvements to buildings, bringing vacant properties back into use, and small-scale public realm projects. Delivery is well underway.

Councillor Dymock asked officers to explain the difference between a 'Placemaking Plan' and a 'Place Plan'.

The Chief Officer explained that Placemaking Plans are strategic regeneration documents focused on enhancing town or city centres, while Place Plans are local-level guidance documents related to land use and development, mainly for planning purposes. He noted that the names are unfortunately similar but refer to different types of plans.

Councillor Newell expressed strong support for the Placemaking Plans, thanking Roger Hoggins for chairing the group and the officers for their work on the report. As someone who has lived and worked in Monmouth all his life, the Councillor said he is excited about the plans, fully endorses them as both a ward county councillor and town councillor, and looks forward to seeing them come to fruition.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair concurred with the positive comments made about the Placemaking Plans and emphasised the importance of ongoing consultation with residents, highlighting that they are the ones who pay the bills and elect the council. The committee agreed the recommendations.

5. Markets and Stalls

Mathew Wooles and Simon Parfitt delivered a presentation and answered the members' questions, with Craig O'Connor and Nick Keyse:

Councillor Dymock asked how more stallholders could be encouraged to attend Caldicot market, noting its accessibility and suggesting that the lack of a structure or cover might be a barrier. She enquired about the possibility of a temporary structure in the town centre to increase footfall and attract more traders. She suggested collaboration with Caldicot Town Team for storage solutions, as they have premises near the church, and mentioned that improved advertising by both the County Council and members could help make the market more vibrant. She also asked if the Town Team is involved in the placemaking delivery group.

The main barrier identified was the lack of structure and storage at Caldicot market, making it difficult to attract new traders, especially given weather dependency. Providing a structure and storage for gazebos/tables would help reduce the initial outlay for new traders. The Chief Officer agreed these are problems that need solving and suggested the placemaking delivery group should work with local partners, such as the Town Team, to find solutions for storage and weather protection. He emphasized

the need for collaboration and said the issue would be taken to the delivery group. It was clarified that the decision on Town Team involvement in the delivery group would be made by the group itself.

Councillor Brown asked why Monmouthshire County Council does not promote a market for Chepstow during the week on a regular basis, and enquired about how the Chepstow market operates, specifically whether stallholders have to bring and take away their own stalls.

Officers clarified that Chepstow market is run by a volunteer group and is not one of Monmouthshire County Council's markets.

Councillor Strong commented on the decline of Caldicot market over the years, noting it has gone from a wide range of stalls to just two regular ones, and asked what the team has done to scope what local people want from their market, including whether Tuesday is the best day and if the market is in the right location. She suggested possibly moving the market nearer to the library and Asda for more footfall and asked about the ownership of the land outside the library. She also enquired if the seasonal markets at the castle are run by the council or a private company, and emphasized the need for a collaborative approach to regenerate Caldicot's town centre.

The officers acknowledged agreement with her points, explaining that the initial focus had been on stabilizing Abergavenny market but now attention would turn to strengthening Caldicot market, including increased advertising. It was stated that the County Council likely owns the High Street and possibly the area outside the library, but this would need to be confirmed with a plan. The importance of market location for generating footfall was noted, and openness to exploring different areas and solutions was expressed. The ongoing challenge of maximizing market success and the impact of COVID on footfall and traders was also highlighted.

Councillor Groucott asked to hear more about the Abergavenny night market, describing it as an exciting development that brought vibrancy to the town centre during summer evenings.

The response agreed with his positive assessment and explained that the street food market was reintroduced by the previous manager and has grown significantly in the past year. Increased marketing, collaboration with the Abergavenny market traders, and investment in infrastructure (such as additional power outlets and a distribution box) have helped attract more traders. The night market also features open mic nights and karaoke, and works well when coordinated with theatre events, helping to develop Abergavenny as a cultural hub.

Councillor Bryn asked how the markets, especially themed and night markets, are promoted, noting she had not seen much advertising and wondered about strategies to attract new visitors. She also asked if there are "boot sale" style markets to allow non-traders, especially young people, to try trading at low cost. Finally, she questioned whether splitting Monmouth market into two locations is beneficial or detrimental, suggesting it might be better to consolidate stalls in one place until numbers increase.

The officers explained that advertising is mainly done via social media, the Abergavenny market traders' page, the council's website, local publications, posters in the market, and a digital screen in town. For "boot sale" style markets, it was clarified that all traders must have £5 million public liability insurance, so casual trading is not currently possible, though there is interest in attracting younger traders. Regarding Monmouth market's split locations, officers stated that consolidating into one location would likely be more beneficial, but convincing traders of this change is a challenge.

Councillor Brown asked why Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) does not promote or assist with a regular market in Chepstow, mentioning the existence of a covered area near Marks & Spencer that could host stalls, and questioned who owns that land. She also noted that the Sunday market in Chepstow is only occasional and not held during the week.

The officers clarified that Chepstow Town Council, not MCC, is responsible for the Chepstow market, which is why MCC does not promote or manage it. However, it was acknowledged that MCC could explore opportunities to support or cross-promote Chepstow's market in collaboration with the Town Council.

Councillor Thomas commented on the importance of Abergavenny market as a destination and raised concerns about the building's conditions, specifically the cold in winter and extreme heat in summer due to the glass roof. He asked if there are long-term plans to address these issues, such as heating or covering the outdoor area to improve trading conditions, especially in winter.

The officers acknowledged the challenges of maintaining a listed building, including the costly roof repairs and difficulties in adding heating or structures. They stated that solutions require investment and discussions with heritage authorities, and while some heating schemes are being considered, funding and long-term sustainability remain unresolved. The importance of keeping the market thriving was emphasized.

Councillor Lucas raised several points about market operations, focusing on Abergavenny and Monmouth. She questioned the market's financials, specifically the apparent deficit between income and expenditure, and asked how it is managed and whether MCC subsidizes it. She also enquired about investment strategies, environmental considerations like solar panels, and how to support and advertise markets, especially in Monmouth.

The officers clarified that the market actually operates at a small surplus, not a deficit, and that recent budgets show growth. It was agreed that consolidating Monmouth's market to one location (preferably Shire Hall) would be beneficial, but challenges exist with similar traders and space. The team acknowledged the need for better advertising and collaboration with Monmouth Town Council, and confirmed ongoing discussions about maintaining market operations during Shire Hall renovations. They also noted that expanding market areas would require obtaining a street trading licence for new locations.

*Councillor Lucas also asked how much money is lost by putting two traders in the one car park and therefore losing car parking fees. – **ACTION: to provide a response***

6. Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action Lists

Councillor Brown reiterated an interest in scrutinising surplus council assets, arguing that it should come to Place committee rather than be covered by a review of Property Assets at Performance & Overview committee. – **ACTION: to check again with officers**

7. Cabinet and Council Work Planner

8. Minutes of the meeting held on 9th October 2025

The minutes were confirmed. Councillor Brown requested that these minutes be included in the Cabinet report concerning the Destination Management Plan – **ACTION**

9. Next Meeting: 11th December 2025

The meeting ended at **4.34 pm**