

TREDEGAR TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Meeting of Council held via Microsoft Teams / hybrid on Wednesday, 30th October, 2024 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors M. Turner (Chair)
A.E. Tippings
A. Jones
D. Rowberry
J. Thomas
H. Trollope
S. Trollope
G. Walters

In attendance: Clerk – Ms. C. Aherne

161) Apologies. Councillors K. Phillips, E. Griffin, G. Badham, E. Jones, A. Evans and K. Waldron

162) Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members to make their declarations as and when necessary.

163) To discuss the position the Council has taken in respect of not paying Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to undertake structural testing on the lamp-posts to which the Christmas Light Motifs are attached.

As a full Council, Members need to reassess the decision on new information from the Christmas Lighting contractor and correspondence from the Borough Council and other organisations affected.

(** In accordance with Standing Order 35. 'Rescission of Previous Resolution')

At the behest of the Chair, the Clerk briefly provided the background information and the reason for convening this Special Meeting of Council. At the Civic Meeting of Council on 4th September, 2024, following an extensive exchange of correspondence between the Local Authority and Council, it had unanimously been agreed that the expenditure **not** be approved and clarity be sought from BGCBC in respect of the structural testing. Council had requested information in respect of the age of each lamp-post, as structural testing should be dependent on when each lamp-post had been placed; this information had not been forthcoming. Also, inconsistent information had been received from the Local Authority in respect of participation of other community / town councils and local groups.

Following a meeting with the lighting contractor, Blachere Illumination, convened as a matter of urgency to discuss options following discussions at the October meeting of full Council: Members were informed that, due to the timeframe involved and lack of infrastructure, there were no alternatives for the current year 2024. Also, due to the fact that the motifs reserved for Council would require payment, there was no opportunity to refund the amount to be

levied.

The Chair thereupon outlined the issues and situation to date:

In May, BGCBC informed Council that town / community councils had to pay for structural testing in order to place any adornments on their lamp-posts. Discussions had ensued as a Council asking for clarification. At the meeting in September, as a Council, it was agreed not to pay for the structural testing on the basis that the Local Authority would have to test these lamp-posts anyway. Discussion had been undertaken with himself, as Leader of Town Council, the Leader of the Local Authority, Councillor Stephen Thomas, and Councillor Haydn Trollope. From a personal viewpoint, the Leader objected on the basis stated, and still objected to a certain extent, as the structural testing of all lamp-posts were the responsibility of Blaenau Gwent.

Town Council did place motifs to the lamp-posts but the issue was that, on undertaking the structural testing, a certificate would be produced for a twelve-month period. In a meeting with the Local Authority, it was plainly stated that this be a one-year certificate, whereupon any other organisations, including the Local Authority, could then place items on these lamp-posts for the remainder of the year without incurring payment.

The Leader had written a letter to BGCBC, using the word 'lie', as he had been informed that Tredegar Town Council was the only outliers to participate in the structural testing. On checking with the other town / community councils, this was not the case with none of the others participating in the exercise and also community groups in Beaufort, Waunlwyd and Ebbw Vale had not paid for structural testing before placing adornments. Therefore, it was considered unfair that Tredegar Town Council had to pay.

Therefore, following the further information relayed by Blachere Illumination, Council had a decision to make, i.e. Council paid up to £30,000 for the Christmas Lighting display, and this would be severely impacted without the lamp-post motifs, opposed to the amount levied for structural testing of £65.00 per lamp-post, plus £600.00 for motif design, totalling £2,745.00. Should Council stay with the original decision, not to pay for structural testing, the best part of the display would not be utilised.

A Member was aware that when the lamp-posts were erected in Tredegar, they were not of a design structure to bear the weight of banners, etc. because of wind shear. There were a number of considerations 1) what would happen if a motif fell; 2) Council had explored alternative options with the lighting contractor, therefore there was no alternative plan for this year. Therefore, Council was in a difficult position whereby the town centre would not have the display or rescind the previous decision; 3) erect the motifs and incur the wrath of the Local Authority. The Member was aware that the Leader and Clerk had strived to resolve the matter but Council was now at a critical time in progressing the display.

Another Member said every year new Regulations were being introduced, especially in regard to health and safety and queried if Council was aware of the need to test every lamp-post in Blaenau Gwent. The Leader confirmed that every lamp-post in the County Borough had a life span and, at some point, would need to be structurally tested. However, he suggested the payment should be divided by twelve to reflect the period of time Council were using the lamp-post and others pay accordingly if attaching adornments throughout the year

Members were of the impression this was a way of BGCBC trying to find ways of how to claw back monies and, although a regrettable situation, Council would need to pay for the

certification for lamp-posts that were the responsibility of Blaenau Gwent. However, a Member suggested Council could seek a payment plan to pay by instalments, if required. Members agreed that the Local Authority had placed Council in a very difficult situation and, if agreed to undertake structural testing, further conversations were needed with Council continuing to liaise with Officers going forward, e.g. time period of certification, whether testing was required on an annual basis.

It was agreed to proceed with the structural testing, commencing on Monday, 4th November 2024, with the caveat that Council continue to liaise with the Local Authority going forward, as there was still a need for further clarification for the future as to what councils / groups / organisations were paying for.

- Special Event Road Closure Order application form

The Clerk referred to the application form, whereby the overall expenditure had previously been approved by Council. the Officer said Council had been informed of the actual expenditure of £148.60, and asked that this amount be approved and minuted accordingly.

The Clerk confirmed that the amount would be shown on the Schedule of Payments in November, however the cheque had to be issued in order to secure the closure.

The expenditure of £148.60 was thereupon approved and the cheque signed by the named signatories in attendance.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 6.40 p.m.

_____ Chair