



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 16TH OCTOBER 2015

**SUBJECT: CHOOSE THE HIGH STREET 'PAST & PRESENT' – ANALYSIS
REPORT**

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report provides an overview of the 'Past & Present' initiative which was run over the summer months by the Council's Town Centre Management team.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This summer, a new element to the successful 'Choose the High Street' campaign was launched. 'Past & Present' focused on re-establishing people's connection with their local town centre. The initiative consisted of library exhibitions in each of the five managed town centres, street galleries of historic photos displayed in shop windows and online *Flickr* galleries of archive photos.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Council has agreed to a five-year regeneration programme entitled "People, Businesses and Places". The proposals within the strategy are based on a number of regeneration principles, one of which is "Strengthening Town Centres".
- 3.2 "Prosperous Caerphilly" is identified as one of the key outcomes in the Council's "Single Integrated Plan". The Implementation of the *Unique Places* model of Town Centre Management in the County Borough's principal town centres is one of the actions identified to achieve this outcome.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The 'Choose the High Street' - Past & Present campaign ran for five months from April – August inclusive and focused on two areas. Firstly, the past element used archive photographs to evoke memories and re-established people's connection to a particular place. Secondly, through asking people to think about why they choose the high street, people were encouraged to appreciate and value their town centre in the present day. The overall objective of the initiative was to encourage people to invest economically, socially and emotionally in the future of their town centres.
- 4.2 The aims of the scheme were:
- (a) To maintain town centre footfall over the summer period;
 - (b) Improve people's sense of connection with their local town;

- (c) Generate renewed interest in town centres as a location for business;
- (d) Encourage retailers to participate in the life of the town centre;
- (e) Increase footfall in town centre libraries;
- (f) Engage with local schools.

4.3 Library Exhibitions

4.3.1 As part of the initiative five exhibitions were held in town centre libraries, these featured historic photos of the town centre, artwork by local schools, car sticker and shopping bag giveaways, as well as the chance for local people to win high street shopping vouchers. The entry form for the competition included three questions:

1. "I choose the high street because..."
2. If someone wants to start a new business in xxx town centre what should it be?
3. In addition to shops what other facilities would you like to see located in the town centres?

4.3.2 Question 1 - Some of the reasons people gave for choosing the high street were:

- "It's central to where I live"
- "To meet friends have a chat & get out of the house"
- "It's convenient"
- "I like the personal touch"
- "Diverse range of small shops"
- "Easy bus routes"
- "Sense of community"
- "Less stressful than travelling into the city"
- "I like to shop in actual shops"
- "Close to home and I like the personal touch and friendliness"
- "Supports local business and is accessible"
- "Feel the quality of potential purchases"
- "Park easily, access local amenities & chat to old friends"
- "Its historical"
- "Parking is easier"
- "I haven't got a car"
- "It promotes small independent business"
- "I value meeting and talking to people"
- "Atmosphere / Good vibe"
- "Local people need jobs"
- "Staff are very polite"
- "Walking distance from my home"
- "Its familiar and I meet people I know"
- "It's the best"
- "I can walk into town"
- "More friendly and has the personal touch"

4.3.3 Question 2 - Businesses that respondents felt were missing from the various town centres were:

- **Ystrad Mynach** – Clothes shop, shoe shop, antiques/second hand shop, electrical shop, child-friendly restaurant.
- **Bargoed** – Sports shop, fashion shop, hardware store, newsagent, stationer, shoe shop, indoor market, children's clothing shop, bakery, mobile phone shop, book/DVD shop, more national retailers, veterinary surgery.
- **Risca** – Gym, clothing shop, baby shop, drycleaners, gardening/hardware/DIY store, coffee lounge, toy shop, internet café, cocktail bar, family pub restaurant with children's play area, knitting wool shop, haberdashery, Jewellery/make up store, craft shop, fish mongers, national frozen food retailers.

- **Blackwood** – butchers, men’s & women’s clothing shop, specialist food shop, electronic recycling shop, children’s play centre, homeware/kitchen shop, arts & crafts shop, bakers and greengrocers.
- **Caerphilly** – bookshop, ladies & men’s clothing shop, small supermarket, DIY store, butchers/delicatessen, toy shop, vegetarian café, Welsh organic food shop, holistic therapist, cinema and baby shop.

4.3.4 Question 3 - The final question was included at the request of the Council’s Strategic Planning Team and forms part of the wider consultation process on the new Local Development Plan.

Number of Entry Forms for the High Street Voucher Competitions				
Ystrad Mynach	Bargoed	Risca	Blackwood	Caerphilly
6	15	35	17	62

4.3.5 The five exhibitions took place as follows:

- Ystrad Mynach - April (two weeks)
- Bargoed - May (four weeks)
- Risca - June (four weeks)
- Blackwood - July (four weeks)
- Caerphilly – August/September (eight weeks)

4.4 **Canvas Shopping Bags**

4.4.1 The Council supports Welsh Government’s long term commitment to reduce the amount of single use carrier bags. A total of 5000 ‘Choose the High Street’ - Past & Present canvas bags were given out free across the five town centres and also in the Urdd Eisteddfod. The provision of these canvas shopping bags encourages shoppers to use a reusable bag, rather than buy a new plastic one.

4.5 **Street Galleries**

4.5.1 ‘Street Galleries’ were set up in each of the five town centres prior to the exhibitions. Each Street Gallery comprised of a series of black and white photos from the Council’s Winding House archive, these were displayed in shop windows throughout each town centre. The images were printed on Foamex board in an A3 format and set in a picture frame design.

4.6 **Social Media**

4.6.1 The Council’s Social media platforms *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Flickr* and *YouTube* were all utilised in various ways to raise awareness of the scheme and in particular to generate interest in the library exhibitions.

4.7 **Web Site**

4.7.1 A dedicated page for the Past & Present initiative was created on the Councils web site. The page attracted 1,753 views over a five month period (Data correct 22nd September 2015).

4.8 **Flickr**

4.8.1 The increasingly popular social media portal Flickr was used to show whole albums of historic photographs.

Flickr Gallery Data					
	Ystrad Mynach	Risca	Caerphilly	Blackwood	Bargoed
Photo with Highest No: of Views	Merged Photo – Bedwlwyn Road	Merged Photo – Palace Cinema	Merged Photo – Cardiff Road	Merged Photo - Zaks	Merged Photo – Hanbury Square
	719	718	705	858	685
<i>Data correct 1st September 2015</i>					

4.9 **Schools Involvement**

- 4.9.1 Local Primary Schools were encouraged to get involved in the exhibitions by submitting children's artwork. The number of schools who actually took part was disappointing, with only artwork from Ty Sign Primary School in Risca being displayed.
- 4.9.2 At Blackwood Comprehensive School, as part of their Business Studies Course, students entered a 'Dragons Den' style competition to find the best new business idea. Many of these ideas related to businesses that could potentially be started up on Blackwood High Street. A short YouTube film was made by the Council's Communications Team in which a number of the students and their teacher explained how the potential new businesses could work in Blackwood town centre.

4.10 **Urdd Eisteddfod**

- 4.10.1 During the Urdd Eisteddfod, Town Centre Management took space within the Council's corporate marquee to promote the 'Choose the High Street' brand and explain the 'Past & Present' initiative. The event was seen as an important opportunity to highlight to visitors the individual character of each of the five principal towns and encourage them to visit the town centres whilst staying in the area for the Urdd Eisteddfod.

4.11 **Conclusion**

- 4.11.1 The 'Past & Present' initiative succeeded over a five month period in helping to re-establishing many peoples sense of connection with their local town centre. The library exhibitions were visited by large numbers of people and very well received; with a number of local residents requesting to buy the photos and maps displayed (these were provided on request at no cost).
- 4.11.2 The questionnaires which were completed provided a number of important pieces of information. It was particularly encouraging to read the positive reasons why people choose to shop on their local high street. Some of the key themes which emerged were: the desire to support local businesses, the convenience of the town to where people live and the importance of the social aspect of visiting a town centres. The businesses that people indicated they would like to see return to the high street showed that there is a still an appetite for more traditional retail outlets which have been lost as the retail sector has evolved. These responses identified some potential gaps in the retail offer in the town centres, which will assist officers as they work with new start-up businesses.
- 4.11.3 The Street Galleries proved to be extremely popular with retailers who enthusiastically engaged with the initiative and displayed photos prominently in their shop windows. Many commented on the positive responses that the photo had drawn from their customers.

4.11.4 The only disappointing aspect to the initiative was the lack of participation by local Primary Schools despite strenuous efforts by officers to encourage schools to become involved. However, the work with pupils at Blackwood Comprehensive as part of a Business Studies course offered an unexpected opportunity to engage pupils in the debate about how high street evolve in the future.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the council's Eqla process does not need to be applied.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The campaign is funded through the Town Centre Management core budget.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct personnel implications.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 No there are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 This report is for information only.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Andrew Highway, Town Centre Development Manager
Consultees: Pauline Elliott, Head of Regeneration & Planning
Cllr. K. James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development
Allan Dallimore, Team Leader Urban Renewal
Rhian Kyte, Team Leader Strategic Development & Planning
Hayley Lancaster, Senior Communications Officer
Nick Rutter, Website Editor
Paul Cook, Team Leader Sustainable Development & Planning
Steve Wilcox, Assistant Town Centre Manager
John Poyner, Connecting Communities Manager