



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP - 16TH OCTOBER 2015

SUBJECT: SOUTH EAST WALES TOWN CENTRE VACANCY RATES

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides information on the property vacancy rates within principal town centres across South East Wales, compared with Caerphilly County Borough's figures.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report gives details of the percentage of vacant units within principal town centres across South East Wales, including Caerphilly County Borough's principal towns. The report also provides information on the proactive steps that the Council's Town Centre Management Team takes to keep the number of vacant units low.

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 Model of Town Centre Management

- 4.1.1 The Council's model of Town Centre Management – "Unique Places" – aims to enhance and maintain the principal town centres by focusing existing Council and partner organisations budgets and resources on issues affecting the town centres. These resources are redirected by using the Environmental Audit process, which is considered by the Town Centre Improvement Group. The results are town centres that look and feel well-maintained for visitors and businesses alike.
- 4.1.2 Unique Places also utilises a variety of platforms to actively market and promote the principal town centres. Examples of this marketing include lamp column banners, business window stickers and investment portfolios.

4.2 Vacancy Rates Across South East Wales

4.2.1 Vacancy rates within Caerphilly County Borough's town centres are collated and monitored by the Council's Strategic Planning department. Data from neighbouring Authorities is also collected (when available) for comparison analysis purposes.

4.2.2 The current vacancy rate data for Caerphilly County Borough's towns and comparable town centres in other Local Authority areas are outlined in the table below:

Town	Local Authority Area	Vacant Units (%)	Survey Date
Abergavenny	Monmouthshire	5	October 2014
Porthcawl	Bridgend	8	2013
Cowbridge	Vale of Glamorgan	8	2014
Caerphilly	Caerphilly	9	October 2014
Risca	Caerphilly	9	October 2014
Chepstow	Monmouthshire	9	October 2014
Aberdare	Rhondda Cynon Taf	9	January-March 2015
Pontypridd	Rhondda Cynon Taf	9	January-March 2015
Ystrad Mynach	Caerphilly	10	October 2014
Ebbw Vale	Blaenau Gwent	11	April 2015
Barry	Vale of Glamorgan	11	2014
Maesteg	Bridgend	12	2013
Blackwood	Caerphilly	14	October 2014
Bridgend	Bridgend	14	2014
Porth	Rhondda Cynon Taf	14	January-March 2015
Merthyr Tydfil	Merthyr Tydfil	16	April 2014
Mountain Ash	Rhondda Cynon Taf	18	January-March 2015
Tredegar	Blaenau Gwent	19	April 2015
Tonypany	Rhondda Cynon Taf	19	January-March 2015
Bargoed	Caerphilly	22	October 2014
Abertillery	Blaenau Gwent	23	April 2015

4.2.3 Based on the data above, it can be seen that three of Caerphilly's town centres (Caerphilly, Risca and Ystrad Mynach) are in the 10 lowest ranking towns for vacancies. These three towns also have vacancy rates below the regional average of 13%, with Blackwood only slightly above at 14%.

4.2.4 In an attempt to keep vacancy rates as low as possible, a variety of methods are utilised as part of the Town Centre Management function.

4.3 Retail Property Directory

4.3.1 One aspect of the Town Centre Management process is the Retail Property Directory, which is an online directory that lists all of the properties for sale or to let in the managed town centres. This resource is used to direct potential new businesses to Caerphilly County Borough's town centres and allow existing businesses to look at additional or larger premises in which to expand. The overall aim of the Directory is not only to attract new businesses, but to keep vacancy rates within our town centres as low as possible by filling units quickly.

4.4 Town Centre Improvement Group & Environmental Audit

4.4.1 The Town Centre Improvement Group (TCIG) is an Officer-based working group, which meets every eight weeks, with a primary objective to act as a mechanism of action. The TCIG comprises of representatives from various departments including: Highways, Planning, Cleansing, Environmental Health, Parks and Regeneration. Managers who attend the TCIG have staff and budgetary responsibility enabling them to make key decisions within the meetings.

4.4.2 The town centre Police Inspectors and the Town Centre Management Group Chairs attend the TCIG. The TCIG meetings revolve around an Environmental Audit for each town, which is compiled by Town Centre Management. The audit contains problems and issues within each town centre for which the Council and partner organisations have responsibility. The Audit process ensures that the Council's commitment to maintain, enhance and develop each town centre is conducted in an accountable and transparent way. The Environmental Audit also provides a record for town centre stakeholders.

4.5 **Investment Data**

4.5.1 The Town Centre Management Team has paid for a variety of investment data for each of the managed towns to support potential businesses. The data includes Drivetime Maps (which show the population figures within a 10, 20 and 30 minute journey radius), CACI Market Summary Reports (these show each town's demographic and its place in the "retail hierarchy") and the Experian FootFall electronic pedestrian counting system data.

4.5.2 In addition to the detailed investment information, each town centre has been given its own brand, giving the town centres and the businesses therein a sense of place and identity. The branding assists in identifying each town as a unique place within the County Borough, making it stand out to potential business investors.

4.6 **Lamp Column Banners**

4.6.1 In each of the managed town centres, lamp column banners are placed on street lighting columns within the principal town centre boundary. The banners are not only to look attractive and add to the vibrancy of our town centres, but serve to make drivers and pedestrians aware that something has changed along their route – they are now in the heart of one of our town centres.

4.6.2 The lamp column banners are primarily generic welcome designs, but each town centre has a bespoke set of banners that bear its individual branding. Banners are also produced for regular events (such as The BIG Cheese in Caerphilly) and for long-term campaigns such as "Choose the High Street" (see below). A large stockpile of designs has been established over time, which allows for each banner design to be displayed in each town centre just once every few years, adding to the vitality that they bring. At present, the banners are displayed for 9-months of the year, with three changeovers per annum. The banners are removed during the winter months to protect them from inclement weather and allow for the Christmas illuminations to be erected.

4.7 **"Choose the High Street" Campaign**

4.7.1 In 2014, the "Choose the High Street" campaign was launched by Town Centre Management. Intended to be a long-term campaign, the initiative aims to encourage shoppers to "choose the high street" for at least part of their weekly shop and for businesses to "choose the high street" rather than opening in out-of-town locations.

4.7.2 As part of "Choose the High Street", a "Pop-up Shop Guide" was created. This short and simple guide provides advice on how to open a short-term business in a vacant commercial unit. The intention behind the guide is to support businesses or community schemes that want to test the market before making a long-term commitment to a shop unit. Whilst it is hoped that a short-term use would prove successful and become long-term, even a short-term use adds vibrancy to a town centre. A pop-up shop is also beneficial to landlords as it provides a tenant and highlights their property to potential long-term tenants.

4.7.3 During Christmas 2014, another element to the campaign was added with the "Choose the High Street @ Christmas" voucher booklet. This customer loyalty scheme attempted to encourage local spend in the vital Christmas period, with retailers invited to participate. The voucher booklet was given out free to the public in the weeks leading up to Christmas and tried to support local businesses during the busy Christmas trading period to reduce potential business closures and increase footfall in the town centres.

4.8 Town Centre Events

- 4.8.1 Each year, the Council's Events & Marketing Team stages summer and winter events in each of the town centres. Not only do the events add an element of diversity and vibrancy to the town centres, but they also promote the towns to people who may not otherwise visit. This promotion is invaluable in increasing footfall to support existing businesses, but also to highlight Caerphilly County Borough's town centres to potential new businesses.

4.9 Conclusion

- 4.9.1 The economic climate continues to prove very challenging for businesses within our town centres. Although the Local Authority cannot prevent businesses from closing, by taking the proactive steps outlined above to look after our town centres, support existing businesses and attract inward investment from new businesses, Caerphilly County Borough Council will strive to keep its town centre vacancy rates as low as possible.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report is for information purposes only, so the Council's Equalities Impact Assessment process does not need to be applied.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications of this report as the activities outlined are incorporated into existing budgets.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personal implications associated with this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been incorporated into this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

10. STATUTORY POWER

- 10.1 Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Steve Wilcox, Assistant Town Centre 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
Andrew Highway, Town Centre Development Manager
Rhian Kyte, Team Leader Strategic & Development Planning