



## BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 23RD NOVEMBER 2006

**SUBJECT: BLACKWOOD INTERCHANGE**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise members of the progress to date in relation to the Blackwood Interchange and to advise on proposals in respect of the temporary bus-stops on the High Street from December 2006.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The commencement of the Blackwood Interchange scheme was originally postponed until after Christmas 2005 following concerns by the local traders. Subsequent concerns in respect of the operations involved in the demolition further delayed the project and the work could not be commenced until March 2006, which meant that the scheme would not be fully complete until after Christmas 2006. Mindful of the significance of the Christmas period on trading the Council has endeavoured to obtain partial completion of the scheme in order to reinstate bus services onto the bus apron and off the High Street.

### 3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Draft Deposit Unitary Development Plan.
- 3.2 Local Transport Plan.
- 3.3 Community Strategy regeneration theme.
- 3.4 Regeneration Objective, the 'Smart Alternative'.

### 4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The commencement of the Blackwood Interchange project was intentionally delayed until after Christmas 2005 following concerns from the local traders that the project would be detrimental to local businesses. Further negotiations with the local traders following that Christmas period were required due to concerns over the operations involved in the demolition and construction phases of the contract and their impact on the market, which further delayed the project. Demolition of the old bus-station was carried out between the 16th March and the 10th April 2006, which was the Council's earliest opportunity to undertake the work. Construction commenced on the 10th April 2006.

- 4.2 During the contract buses have been decanted onto the High Street and a temporary layover area was created at the bottom of Sunnybank Road in lieu of the facilities at the old bus-station. Traders within the Market Place were concerned over the loss of footfall that this arrangement would cause through the Market Place.
- 4.3 The period for the construction contract was such that works would be ongoing over the Christmas 2006 period thus causing further concern to the local traders. It was therefore stated in April 2006 that through best endeavours the contractor would work towards a partial completion of the bus apron in order that bus services could be re-introduced to the site from the 1st December 2006.
- 4.4 The contractor was made aware of the intention to re-introduce buses onto the site from the 1st December 2006 at the pre-contract meeting and the contractor's subsequent programmes have always shown that the apron will be ready in some form by this date.
- 4.5 Monthly progress meetings have been held between the Client, Consultant, Architect and the Contractor. Regular ad-hoc meetings have also taken place on more or less a day-to-day basis between the Client and the Consultant.
- 4.6 At a meeting in October 2006 it became apparent that the whole of the proposed bus-apron would not become available for the operation of all bus services for Blackwood Town Centre. This was due to the need for a 4m safe working area adjacent to the proposed covered canopy, necessary to undertake works at high level throughout December 2006. This restricted the potential to operate all bus services within the available space. Urgent meetings were then arranged between the two main bus operators, Islwyn Borough Transport (IBT) – the local operator and Stagecoach – a more regional service.
- 4.7 Both operating companies had reservations regarding using the available area within the site due to the limited services that could be accommodated. It was therefore agreed to prepare a 'mock-up' of the available area at IBT's depot at Penmaen on the 7th November 2006. The mock-up showed that approximately 5 bays and 2 layover areas could be accommodated from the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006. This would not cater for all services through Blackwood but it would cater for one of the bus operators to use the facility. The Council's proposal therefore was to split the operators between the Bus Station and the High Street.
- 4.8 Whilst the experiment on site showed that a service could be provided within the available space at the site it was noted that this was within a controlled environment, i.e. no delivery vehicles, pedestrians etc. IBT, whose service is more frequent than Stagecoach, were very concerned how their service could operate in live conditions. Officers of the Council also shared those concerns.
- 4.9 It is vitally important that, whichever service is chosen through agreement with the bus operators, the service must operate reasonably without any need for further amendment or re-advertisement as this would cause further disruption and confusion to the passengers and thus have a protracted detrimental effect on visitors to the town centre.
- 4.10 It is therefore proposed that IBT will continue to operate from the High Street from the 4th December 2006 whilst all of Stagecoach's operations will be from the partially complete Bus Station. Stagecoach's service is less frequent than IBT and there is confidence that the service can reasonably be operated from the partially complete bus apron. This will relieve the High Street from 15 departures an hour, leaving the remaining 19 departures to operate as is existing.
- 4.11 At a recent IBT Board Meeting, it was agreed that the company should remain operating from the High Street.

- 4.12 The decision to split services as described above is considered, on balance, to be the most reasonable and achievable proposal under the current circumstances. This decision takes into account the requirements of the Traders, the Bus Operators and the Shoppers and Passengers.
- 4.13 At the most recent progress meeting held at the site offices on Thursday, 9th November 2006 the Contractor confirmed that the latest programme shows a completion date of March 2007. The original tender programme gave a completion date of late January 2007. Delays have occurred mainly due to the unforeseen condition of the existing retaining wall. Other delays have occurred due to other legitimate design issues, which are outside the contractor's control.
- 4.14 Further regular progress meetings will take place and the project team will endeavour to mitigate against the projected delays in order to achieve an earlier completion date if at all possible.

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