

## **BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP - 26TH JULY 2007**

**SUBJECT: CHARTIST FAYRE SPECIAL EVENT**

**REPORT BY: ANDREW HIGHWAY - TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide information on the Chartist Fayre special event, which was staged in Blackwood on 8th and 9th June 2007.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 In late 2006 a working group was set up to develop a Chartist Fayre concept for Blackwood town centre. This event would necessitate the closure of High Street to traffic for at least two days, allowing full pedestrian access and bringing to the town a commemoration of the 19th century Chartist movement with a Continental Market, Funfair and Craft Fair. The aim of the event was to achieve three primary objectives:-

1. Attract additional visitors to the town.
2. Provide an opportunity for retailers to increase sales.
3. Evaluate the concept of a pedestrian High Street in Blackwood.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 3.1 The Smart Alternative sets out Authorities 15 year strategy for regeneration. Principle 5 'Re Establish Town Centres as a foci of economic activity' sets out the overall objective of Town Centre Management.

### **4. HIGH STREET ROAD CLOSURE**

- 4.1 There were no major issues to report concerning the closure of High Street to vehicles for the event. Council officers concluded that from an operational perspective, the road closure was a complete success. The decision to place temporary Police cones on the local diversionary route worked particularly well and helped to keep the 'pinch points' clear of parked vehicles for buses and goods vehicles. The signage contractor NCS Caerphilly were called out to replace signage that had been deliberately moved, but this was a minor incident. In order to assess the impact of the closure of High Street, Traffic Management officers undertook a monitoring exercise on some of the roads around Blackwood town centre which diverted traffic was expected to use. No major rerouting problems were identified.

### **5. TRANSPORTATION**

- 5.1 Islwyn Borough Transport, Harris Coaches and Stagecoach all reported that the event and the associated diversion routes had presented them with no major problems for their services.

The companies and their drivers concluded that in terms of traffic flow, it was far better than they had expected. Passenger Transportation officers have received no negative comments from the public with reference to the revised bus routes.

- 5.2 With regard to the park and ride service that was provided, an additional bus was requested for the Saturday to supplement the open top bus, as it was anticipated that demand for the service would be very high. Islwyn Borough Transport provided a low floor vehicle, which was fully accessible to wheelchair users.

## **6. CAR PARKS**

- 6.1 There was one complaint regarding Thorncombe Road car park not being fully utilised by 'blue badge' holders on the Friday. At no time on either the Friday or Saturday, was the Thorncombe Road car park full. Due to a misunderstanding, a security guard and a couple of stallholders from the Craft Fair, were issued in error with parking tickets in council car parks. Officers have subsequently cancelled these tickets.

## **7. THE EVENT**

- 7.1 The staging of the Chartist Fayre was judged by the working group, which was set up to coordinate the event, to have been a great success. The inclusion of funfair rides, as part of the event was the cause of much debate amongst the town's retailers. However, it is important to note that content was largely dictated by budget constraints. The Continental Market and the funfair both generated an income and were essential elements for the event to have been financially viable. If the budget had been larger, there would have been less reliance on a contribution from the funfair and therefore it would have been possible to include less rides. The budget for the Chartist Fayre was approximately £10,000, in order for an event to rely less on the income generated by funfair rides, the budget would need to be in the region of £15,000.
- 7.2 The funfair operator had been asked to provide only children's and family rides, this they did, with only one ride on site which could have been classed as suitable for teenagers. Although the bigger rides were not universally welcomed, they did act as a draw to the public and proved popular, particular with teenagers. A number of retailers expressed concerns about the location of the rides; some felt that they could have been sited differently, perhaps at the North or South of High Street instead of in the centre. However, it was the position of the loading bays that determined the location of the rides as they provided extra width to allow emergency vehicles to pass.
- 7.3 The only operational issue was on the Saturday when Cleansing officers had to carry refuse bags to the end of the High Street, as they were unable to get their vehicle onto the street due to the crowds. Some waste oil was left behind on High Street; this required treatment and a discarded metal jack needed collection.
- 7.4 A complaint was also received that the public toilet block at High Street was padlocked shut at 6pm on the Friday whilst the event was still taking place.

## **8. RETAILERS REACTION**

- 8.1 The reaction from retailers in the town has been a mixed one. Many retailers were very positive about the concept and particularly the number of people the event attracted to the town. Others were deeply unhappy about the placement of rides and stalls and the disruption to their businesses.

- 8.2 The Market Place Shopping Centre reported that there were some issues with HGV vehicles accessing the centre from the diversion routes, as drivers had found access roads to Woodbine Road particularly narrow. The Continental Market operators had only sought permission for parking their vans in Somerfield's car park on the day of the event; this resulted in too many vehicles in the area. Unfortunately this was the only suitable location for them to use. Despite these issues the manager of the Market Place felt that the event was 'highly successful'.
- 8.3 The Blackwood Independent Traders reported that initial comments from their members indicated that positioning of the rides was a problem, particularly where the back of a ride was facing a store. Noisy generators had also been an issue, although officers from Environmental Services were present for the event, monitoring exhaust emissions and noise; they reported no breach in the legislation.
- 8.4 The individual comments from retailers varied enormously, some retailers commented that some of the rides were a bit too large and crude in the centre of the town and had blocked their frontages. Whilst others were very positive and enthusiastic about the concept of the event and some dressed up in costume and ran special promotions to attract new customers.

## **9. SURVEY**

- 9.1 In order to gain a balanced view, a survey was delivered to every business in High Street and The Market Place, inviting retailers to comment on the impact of the event on their business. It was hoped that by analysing the data provided, a consensus of opinion could be formed.
- 9.2 The survey showed that the retailers were divided in their opinion of the event, when it was viewed as whole. A total of xx questionnaires were returned, from these xx viewed the event as 'positive', xx viewed it, as 'negative' and xx had 'no opinion'. There was a favourable response to the pedestrian zone that the closure of High Street created. xx respondents indicated that they liked the pedestrian zone, whilst xx indicated that they did not like it. When asked whether the days of the event (Friday and Saturday) had been right ones, there was a mixed response. Xx retailers indicated that they were the right days and xx indicated that they were not. Space was given on the survey sheet for respondents to write down some comments, these were generally related to the areas that the questions addressed. Although not all were polite, they must still be viewed as a valuable source of data. Other areas that comments related to were the positioning of the fairground rides, the communication of information, car parking problems and requests to hold another event next year. A summary of the survey results is attached in the appendix.

## **10. FOOTFALL**

- 10.1 The pedestrian footfall statistic did not rise by as much as anticipated, predominantly because the main pedestrian flow was on the Eastern side of High Street due to the placement of the rides. Where as the Footfall counter is situated on the Western side of High Street. Therefore the figure should be viewed in light of this fact and any analysis must take this into account when drawing conclusions. Anecdotal and photographic evidence showed that the number of visitors who attended far exceeded the numbers expected; the number was estimated as high as 20,000. Photographs of the event attached in the appendix evidence the number of people on High Street.
- 10.2 The town centre footfall figure is provided by Footfall using an electronic counter situated outside Boots in High Street. The figure on Friday 8th June was 7,538, this represented 18% of the total weeks footfall in Blackwood (week commencing 4th June). The figure was a drop of 345 people on the previous Friday (1<sup>st</sup> June). The footfall figure for Saturday 9th was 9,245 this represented 22% of the total weeks footfall in Blackwood (week commencing 4th June). The figure was an increase of 1332 people on the previous Saturday (2nd June).

- 10.3 The footfall for the Market Place Shopping Centre is collated using a manual counting matrix. When compared against the corresponding Friday and Saturday of June 2006, the footfall in the centre on the Friday and Saturday of the Chartist Fayre increased by 91%.

## **11. POLICING**

- 11.1 The presence of the Community Safety Wardens was well received by members of the public. The wardens were able to work closely with their Police colleagues, this collaboration helped to strengthen links between the two agencies and improve communication. The Police received no complaints concerning crime in Blackwood town centre over the duration of the event, other than one of damage to a ride. There were no alcohol related incidents, nor any complaints reference the new tables and chairs scheme at 'Colors Bar' on the Hall Street dais.

## **12. MEDIA**

- 12.1 Post event press coverage contained mixed reports on the Chartist Fayre. On Friday 8th June *The Argus* carried a negative article, but this was redressed with more positive piece on the Saturday. *The Campaign* featured a double page spread of photographs from the event, which was extremely positive. *The Argus* also had a web page where public comments could be logged; one of the general themes was that at the event there had been a lack of information on the Chartist movement itself. The idea of a Chartist flag idea had been particularly well received by people at the event and provided numerous photo opportunities.

## **13. 'GO WILD' EVENT**

- 13.1 The Go Wild event, which is biannual, was staged over the same two days as the Chartist Fayre in the grounds of the councils Council's Pontlanfraith Offices. The two events worked well together and produced a steady stream of people flowing between them. The organisers of the event believe that the Chartist Fayre attracted extra people to the 'Go Wild' event due to both events taking place simultaneously.

## **14. FIRST AID**

- 14.1 Although not originally intended, Paramedic cover was deemed necessary for the Saturday due to the high volume of people in attendance and the particularly warm temperatures. Only one injury was reported, a child using 'The Buzz' ride in High Street received a deep laceration to the forearm. The Health & Safety Executive was informed and as it could not be ascertained how the injury to the child had been caused, the duty Police Sergeant took the decision to close the ride.

## **15. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 Collaborative working was the key to the events success; Caerphilly County Borough Council through the Chartist Fayre Working Group coordinated the main event. The cross-departmental working together with the support of the Police and Blackwood Town Council, enabled the various and sometimes complex issues, to be considered and actioned. The individual commitment, enthusiasm and dedication of the officers who formed the working group allowed the difficult logistical challenge of a full road closure of High Street to be successfully achieved. It is important to acknowledge the financial contribution that the Blackwood Town Council made to the event and also the sponsorship contribution by Arrow Ford. Without this support the Chartist Fayre could not have taken place.

## **16. CONSULTATIONS**

- 16.1 A copy of the event proposals was sent to; the manager of the Market Place Shopping Centre, the Town Council and the Blackwood Traders Association. The respective parties were invited to be part of the working group to work in partnership with officers in the planning for the event.

## **17. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 17.1 The decision to close High Street to traffic and stage a one off special event on the public highway presented a substantial logistical challenge. With the support of the bus operators it was possible to create a temporary pedestrian space for the first time on High Street. The Chartist Fayre successfully attracted large numbers of visitors to the town and presented retailers with an opportunity to engage with an enhanced customer base. The combined Continental Market, Craft Fair and funfair, brought together in a Chartist theme, succeeded in connecting the town with its historical past and caught the public's imagination. The press coverage given to the event raised the profile of Blackwood as a successful town across South East Wales and attracted people who had not been to Blackwood for some period of time. The event did have some problems, the challenge of accommodating the necessary room for the funfair rides and meeting retailer's operational needs was not always successfully resolved and lessons can be learned. As a whole the event must be judged to be a success, as it was very well received by the public and also by a majority of retailers in the town. A decision on the future of the event will be made in September when the event programme for 2007 is reviewed by The Head of Economic Development.

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Appendices:  
Appendix 1 Survey results sheet  
Appendix 2 Photographs of the event