



## BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 27TH FEBRUARY 2008

**SUBJECT: EXPERIMENTAL CLOSURE PROPOSAL FOR HIGH STREET,  
BLACKWOOD IN RESPONSE TO THE ON GOING 'CAR CRUISER'  
PROBLEM**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek views on a proposal for the evening closure of High Street as a temporary experimental Traffic Regulation Order to assist the Police in dealing with the ongoing 'Car Cruiser' problem.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Blackwood town centre and the surrounding area has suffered harassment from a rise in number of so called 'car cruisers' in recent months. At its height over 300 cars and over 500 people have been congregating in car parks in the town centre and driving up and down the High Street from late evening until the early hours of the morning, usually on a Thursday night.
- 2.2 Over this period Gwent Police have tried to engage with these individuals to reduce the nuisance to the local community. They have had to use traditional policing methods and since October 2007 have been enforcing a dispersal notice. This has had a significant impact but still leaves a persistent group of around 40 car cruisers still visiting the town.
- 2.3 In order to address this hard core element, Gwent Police have requested that the Council, as part of the multi agency task force, consider closing the High Street during the evening hours (as and when required only) on a temporary and experimental basis to be enforced by the Police.

### 3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 To work towards a safer environment through positive measures to reduce road accidents and particularly by protecting and providing for vulnerable road users.
- 3.2 To represent and safeguard highway users' interests against activities and development detrimental to road users.

### 4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In recent months Blackwood town centre and the surrounding area has suffered from a rise in the number of so called 'car cruisers' coming to the town. The sheer numbers cause considerable harassment to residents and businesses in the area. At its height over 350 cars and over 500 people were congregating in car parks in and around the town and driving up

and down the High Street.

- 4.2 During the summer of 2006 Gwent Police initiated a multi-agency task force with the Council and a policing plan was formulated to deal with the issue of anti-social driving and behaviour on a short to long term basis and positive action was taken, using traditional policing methods, under the operational name of Operation Sabre.
- 4.3 During winter (2006) and spring (2007) the police and their partners carried out an enforcement campaign during which over 300 people were dealt with for various offences. Vehicles were still attending the area but due to the large Police presence, offending behaviour decreased as did the number of calls to the police. The usual gathering time is Thursday evenings and the majority of cars were from the south east Wales area but some were coming from as far afield as London and the Midlands.
- 4.4 To tackle the continued presence, the Police applied for a dispersal notice. This came in to force in October 2007 and 227 cars and 583 individuals have so far been dispersed together with three arrests for returning to the location after being dispersed. Following a recent assessment of the impact of the dispersal notice the number of car cruisers has reduced to a hard core of around 40 vehicles congregating in the car parks and driving the High Street circuit.

## **5. PROPOSAL FOR HIGH STREET**

- 5.1 In the run up to the summer it is anticipated that the problem will reoccur causing further disruption to the town and nuisance to residents and businesses unless further action is taken.
- 5.2 The Council, in partnership with the Police, wish to seek views on an 18 month experimental proposal to close the High Street to traffic in the evenings. The key elements proposed include:
1. Closure of the High Street to general traffic from around 7pm up to 4am between the junctions of Bridge Street and the access to the KFC restaurant. The implications of these proposals will need to be fully discussed.
  2. The problem so far has occurred on a Thursday evening but the Police would need the flexibility to implement the closure any day of the week but only if required.
  3. Signage only to indicate closure of the road enforced by Police officers present on site.
  4. Exceptions for disabled drivers, taxis buses and servicing vehicles.
- 5.3 Given the sensitivity of this issue it is recommended that some form of public engagement/consultation exercise be undertaken. An article for the March edition of the Council's Newline newspaper is being prepared but advice is sought from Members and the Group as to what form of public engagement is most appropriate to ensure that the proposal is properly presented and discussed, so that a general consensus of support is achieved.
- 5.4 Concerns about such a proposal have already been expressed. These include access requirements to the High Street during the closure (e.g. Mecca Bingo, taxis, residents and businesses), and that the 'car cruisers' may use an alternative route and travel on residential roads such as Gordon road, Attlee Road and Coronation Road. These issues need to be debated with the local community and taken account of/addressed as far as possible.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 A budget of £15,000 has been set aside from the Traffic Management budget to process the Traffic Regulation Order and provide and install the required signage.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 None for the Council. The Police have undertaken to provide resources to enforce the closure as part of their task force activities to deal with the car cruisers.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 Officers seek the support of the Blackwood Town Centre Management group to develop detailed proposals for the closure of High Street (as described in 5.2 above). These proposals are then to be discussed with the local community in a manner agreed with the ward Members.
- 8.2 Subject to full consultation, it is proposed to progress these proposals for implementation in the summer of 2008 as an 18 month experimental Traffic Regulation Order. This process will offer a formal period for members of the public to comment in addition to any public engagement organised as identified in 8.1 above.

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Background Papers:  
None

Appendices:  
None