



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 27TH FEBRUARY 2008

SUBJECT: RETAIL JOB CREATION BLACKWOOD 2007 – FOR INFORMATION

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides information on the number of jobs created and lost in Blackwood town centre throughout 2007.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The attached appendix gives details of every store opening and closure within Blackwood during 2007. The numbers of jobs created and lost are also provided for information. The Town Centre Development Manager compiled these figures during weekly town centre visits over the course of a 12-month period. It should be noted that they are as accurate as possible given the method of data collection.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Council has agreed to a ten-year regeneration programme entitled "The Smart Alternative". The proposals within the plan are based on 6 regeneration principles, one of which is "to re-establish town centres as a focus of economic activity".

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Last year saw the final piece in the transportation infrastructure for Blackwood completed with the opening of the new Interchange Bus Station. The building process necessitated the relocation of buses onto High Street, consequently, this led to widespread concern amongst retailers over its possible detrimental affect on pedestrian footfall numbers. From analysis of the data gathered by the electronic pedestrian counter, footfall numbers appeared to have remained constant, and since the Chartist Fair event in the summer have increased.
- 4.2 Nationally, the retail climate has been very difficult, this has led many multiple retailers to move away from a smaller store format and look for potential store closure options across the UK. In addition a number of mergers in the retail sector in 2007 have led to some stores entering 2008 with a question mark over their future. Therefore, 2007 was always going to be a challenging year for towns such as Blackwood. The focus, through Town Centre Management and the Town Centre Improvement Group, remains on creating a town centre environment, which is attractive to national retailers and encourages new independent businesses.
- 4.3 The Town Centre Development Manager has continued to support retailers both national and independent and provide them with details of current works and the town's future plans. independent retailers were offered the chance to have a 'retail mentor' work with them to

develop their businesses by providing free advice. Through the councils *Bisnet* team independent retailers were also given the chance to build a web site and begin to trade online. Sadly few retailers took up these offers.

- 4.4 The figures in the appendix show that a total of 42 jobs were gained and only 26 were lost in 2007; this was compared to 67 jobs gained (of those 34 were at the new Focus on Blackwood Gate Retail Park) and 6 lost in 2006. It should be noted that 16 of these job losses in 2007 were at Somerfield, due to a chain of events that overtook the retailer nationally. There is no indication that this closure was in anyway connected with the town's retail performance. The jobs created showed that the town continues to attract a wide cross section of retailers both national and independent. Its strength has always been in the independent retail offer and this continues to be the case. The capture of Halfords was the big jobs gain, but its location on the town's periphery does put it slightly off pitch and reduces the possibility for crossover between customers visiting the store and the rest of the High Street. Disappointingly the town lost a few retailers from the independent sector last year, this only highlights how tough the current retail market is.
- 4.5 The town begins 2008 with a strong customer base but the retail successes or failures this year may be largely dictated by the wider national economic climate. However, Blackwood has developed into a town that is attractive to retailers, with vacant retail units, particularly on High Street, being highly sought after. The next 12 months will be very difficult, but the footfall numbers show that for the people of its catchment area, Blackwood is an increasingly popular retail destination.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no personal implications.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The report is submitted for the perusal and information of the members of the Blackwood Town Centre Management Group.

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