



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 12TH MARCH 2009

SUBJECT: RETAIL JOB CREATION, BLACKWOOD 2008 – 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 2008.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The attached Appendix gives details of every store opening and closing within Blackwood town centre during 2008. 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 It has been a period of unprecedented turmoil in the global financial markets, leading to the old certainties regarding banking and financial services, being swept away. In turn, this has caused a worldwide economic downturn that has affected every retailer in the UK, both large and small, independent and multiple. These challenging market conditions have led to major names in the world of retail simply disappearing from our high streets, whilst others have been taken over by new owners. Even established retail giants have struggled to generate sales as customers have been forced to rein in their discretionary spending. The rise in the cost of living means that in real terms, today's shopper now has less money in their pocket to spend.
- 4.2 As a consequence of the global economic climate, it has been an extremely difficult year for retailers in Blackwood town centre. Although, the overall picture in Blackwood town centre is still encouraging, as in 2008 there were still more jobs gained than were lost. However, if you take out the figures for jobs created at the *Bumble Bee* and *B&M Bargains*, the number of lost and gains jobs is about even, which is to be viewed in a positive light in view of the wider economic situation. Particularly pleasing is that in 2008 the town added to the strength of its core retail offer, which is the diversity of its independent shopping offer. A couple of the gaps in the towns shopping offer were filled - *Blackwood Bookshop* became the County Borough's only bespoke book retailer and *Smarty Pants* diversified to include a toy range. Other additions to the independent retail offer were *Heaven Sent Brides* and *Bojangles*. The

opening of *Zaks* on High Street and the refurbishment of *Mayberry Pharmacy* sent out a powerful signal that retailers are prepared to carry out extensive work to improve the interior and exterior of their premises. By far the biggest impact on the town in terms of job losses was the closure of the *Woolworths* store in December. The local store fell victim to the deeper problems of the *Woolworths* brand. Over recent years the retailer slowly lost touch with its core market as a big store in a small town, this resulted in a chain of events that eventually led to the company being placed into administration after 99 years on the High Street. For a town the size of Blackwood to lose a store such as *Woolworths* leaves a big gap in the retail offer.

- 4.3 Footfall in the town has remained constant and during the final quarter of the year some particularly healthy weekly footfall numbers were recorded. This culminated in peak of 58,234 visitors recorded in High Street in the week commencing 15th December 2008.
- 4.4 A comprehensive town centre study by Urbanists Powell Dobson has identified Blackwood's core retail areas and also highlighted sites where the towns' retail offer could expand in the future.
- 4.5 Throughout the year, the focus through Town Centre Management and the Town Centre Improvement Group has been to create and sustain a town centre environment that is attractive to national retailers and encourages new independent businesses. The Town Centre Development Manager has worked to support retailers, supplying them with information about developments in the town and assuring them of the towns long-term future. A monthly *Town Centre News* has also been introduced to promote a sense of community amongst those who work in the town. This has been extremely well received by retailers.
- 4.6 The figures in the Appendix show that in Blackwood 121 jobs were gained and 71 were lost in 2008; this was compared to 42 gained and 26 lost in 2007. It is encouraging to see new retail jobs being created even in these economic conditions. Amongst them are some good business ideas run by enthusiastic and experienced retailers. The world of retail in 2008 has been a difficult one, the aim through Town Centre Management, has been to react and respond to the new challenges in the sector and provide support and encouragement to retailers.

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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Appendices:
Appendix 1 – Jobs Gained and Lost in Blackwood in 2008