



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 24TH FEBRUARY 2010

SUBJECT: JOBS CREATED AND LOST IN BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE 2009

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 2009.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The attached Appendix gives details of every store opening and closing within Blackwood town centre during 2009. 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. In addition, the report provides an assessment of the Footfall data collated in town centre over the year.

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 Retail Sector 2009

- 4.1.1 The past year has been one of consolidation for major retailers. The shock of seeing an established household name such as *Woolworths* going into administration has continued to resonate through the industry in 2009. Many of the large multiple retailers took steps to protect themselves against the prevailing tide of economic uncertainty. Store portfolios were trimmed, supplies squeezed and administrative costs cut wherever possible. In a challenging market, the only retailers who were able to consider expansion plans were those operating within the 'value' sector. Retailers such as *B&M Bargains*, *Home Bargains*, *Iceland*, *Ethel Austin*, *Peacocks* and *Poundland* all snapped up the vacant *Woolworths* stores in prime locations which unexpectedly came onto the market in the wake of the retailers collapse. However, many secondary locations were left unoccupied and town centres had to cope with empty premises, often in their primary retail areas. By November, approximately 75% of the 800 former *Woolworths* stores had found new owners. *Woolworths* was by no means the only familiar name on the High Street to run into difficulties, *Threshers*, *Principles*, *Zavvi*, *Birthdays* and *Boarders* all followed it into administration.

- 4.1.2 The last quarter of the year, the lead up to Christmas, is a crucial one for all retailers irrespective of the area they operate in. In South East Wales, this trading quarter in 2009 was dominated by the opening of the new St David's Shopping Centre in Cardiff with its *John Lewis* anchor store. Such a high profile scheme, close to the town centres of the County Borough, was always going to have an affect on the footfall in the towns. However, the impact that it has had, from analysing the Footfall data, particularly in Caerphilly and Blackwood, has been greater than expected.
- 4.1.3 In anticipation of this new development in Cardiff, a new strategy for the County Borough's three-principle town centres was launched in September. 'Town Centres...Unique Places' replaced the 'Window of Opportunity' strategy originally launched in 2006. 'Unique Places' aims to show that each town centre has its own individual identity and character, which tells the story of the local community. It also highlights that in addition to shops, town centres offer a wide range of services and community activities.

4.2 Blackwood Retail

- 4.2.1 Although the country has experienced a period of recession, Blackwood is in the enviable position that on its main high street, which is the primary retail area, there are limited vacant units. Despite losing a number of businesses over the last year the town has successfully attracted a number of new retail and service businesses. The general perception of Blackwood from those outside its locality is that it is a busy, thriving town and the level of interest by retailers in relation to the town is still high. The *Woolworths* site has only remained empty due to the stores ongoing administration process and the unwillingness of the landlord to take on a new tenant until this has been concluded. The agents acting for the store, *Cooke & Arkwright*, continue to have positive discussions with a number of prospective tenants. It remains for the landlord to decide when he is ready to let the shop again. Over the year Blackwood has attracted some very good independent retailers in particular, *Homestyle Of Blackwood*. The night-time economy has been boasted by the opening of the aspirational *Vanilla Bar* in Hall Street.
- 4.2.2 The strength of the town is that it continues to deliver a shopping offer that successfully mixes independent and multiple retailers. The expectation for 2010 is that provided the overall economy continues a slow and steady recovery, the high occupancy rates in the town can be maintained.

Blackwood Jobs Comparison			
	2009	2008	Summary
Jobs Created	46	121	75 fewer jobs created
Jobs Lost	13	71	58 fewer jobs lost

- 4.2.3 The figures in the Appendix provide a detailed breakdown of the jobs created and lost in Blackwood town centre in 2009.

4.3 Blackwood Footfall

- 4.3.1 Footfall in the town centre is measured outside *Boots* on High Street.

Blackwood Town Centre Footfall Comparison			
	2009	2008	Difference
Highest Number	51,156 (14/12/09)	58,234 (15/12/08)	- 7,078
Lowest Number	29,869 (02/02/09)	34,501 (24/03/08)	- 4,632
Average Footfall	37,662	41,039	- 3,377

- 4.3.2 Throughout the year, the focus, through Town Centre Management and the Town Centre Improvement Group, has been to create and maintain a town centre environment that is attractive to national retailers and encourages new independent businesses.

4.3.3 The Town Centre Development Manager has worked to support retailers, supplying them with information through a *Town Centre News, Retail News and Footfall Index*. In addition to these, a *Retail Survey* was undertaken across the three principle town centres. Its aim was to provide retailers with some idea as to how others within the sector were perceiving the recession and its affect on their business. A summary of the survey results was given to the retailers in Blackwood.

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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