

## **BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP - 20TH FEBRUARY 2013**

**SUBJECT:       JOB CREATION / JOB LOSSES IN BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE 2012-  
FOR INFORMATION**

**REPORT BY:    CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### **1.       PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1       This report provides information on the number of jobs created and lost in Blackwood town centre throughout 2012.

### **2.       SUMMARY**

- 2.1       The attached Appendix gives details of every store opening and closing within Blackwood town centre during 2012. 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 five-year regeneration programme entitled "People, Businesses and Places". The proposals within the strategy are based on a number of regeneration principles, one of which is "Strengthening Town Centres".

### **4.       THE REPORT**

#### **4.1       UK Retail Overview 2012**

- 4.1.1     For retailers, Christmas 2011 was better than expected following on from very weak autumn sales. In a resolutely tough climate, the Christmas spend came late and consumers waited longer, looking for bargains. The big losers were brands occupying the middle ground, whilst those at the premium and value end of the spectrum did relatively well. The message from retail chiefs going into 2012 was to prepare for a year of austerity.

- 4.1.2     As the year began to unfold consumer confidence continued to slide. In response, seasoned retailers focused on sharpening their price points as they continued to endure punishing trading conditions. This resulted in a host of household names entering administration, including value fashion giants *Peacocks* and *Bonmarche*, *Clinton Cards*, *Game* and electrical chain *Comet*. In April, the UK slipped back into recession followed by the wettest summer on record. The widely predicted sales bounce from Euro 2012, the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the London Olympics was limited and towns and cities across the UK recorded a drop in footfall numbers rather than an increase in spend.

4.1.3 As the year closed, cost became the key factor for consumers forcing a renewed emphasis on price. The wider economic picture was a source of concern, in particular the fact that the UK economy fell into a 'double dip' recession, the first since the turbulent years of the 1970's. Another concern was that the Euro Zone was proving to be turbulent and unpredictable as a trading environment. These factors, combined with a tranche of store closures, left many retailers facing an uncertain future.

## **4.2 Blackwood Retail Overview 2012**

4.2.1 The town's core retail offer still remains strong with anchors stores *Argos*, *Store 21*, *Poundland* and *Wilkinson's*, underpinned by quality independent retailers. In 2011, there was a changing of the retail guard amongst the town's independent retailers, with the much-lamented closure of *Bolwells* and *Jeans of Blackwood*. To some extent this continued in 2012 with the closure of *Browns the Butcher* and the proposed sale of *Lamberts*. Although new independent retailers *Graces*, *Tantastic*, *Wow What a Bargain* and *Blackwood Ink Tattoo Studio* have opened, their longevity remains to be seen. Significant changes have taken place in the town during 2012 on some key sites. The former *TA* building has being refurbished and opened again as *The Flourmill*. *Rathbone Cymru* have opened in the former Job Centre offices and the small unit next to *Barclays Bank* has undergone a complete refit and houses a new take away food business. In the centre of the town, *Halifax* are moving into the former *Bolwells* shop and are undertaking extensive internal and external works. Finally, *Laffan Dental Practice* are expanding into the former *Yarnolds* building at the junction of High Street / Bridge Street;

4.2.2 The Market Place Shopping Centre with its new management team in place continues to struggle with high vacancy rates and over the last 12 months there has been little movement on new lettings. The former *Somerfield* site remains a key vacant property in the town centre. Despite this, vacancy rates on Blackwood High Street are still comparatively low, when compared to other town centres in the UK and in particular South Wales.

4.2.3 A *Blackwood Retail Partnership* was established in 2011 and remains an important tool for retail engagement. Under the excellent leadership of its chair Huw Edwards and with the support of the Town Council it represents the views of a significant number of retailers both independent and multiple.

4.2.4 For all town centres in the UK, the concern in 2013 is that the wider economic situation and ongoing fall in consumer confidence will affect national retailers and dictate a rationalising of their store portfolios.

## **4.3 Retail Property Directory**

4.3.1 The *Retail Property Directory*, provided through Town Centre Management, enables prospective businesses to start looking for retail properties to rent or buy in the town online. This initiative provides a service, which actively encourages people to open a business in one of the County Borough's four principal towns.

## **4.4 Unique Places Christmas Card**

4.4.1 This year, Town Centre Management launched an ambitious Christmas loyalty scheme. The 'Unique Places Christmas Card' was given out free to the public in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Retailers in the four principal towns of Caerphilly, Blackwood, Bargoed and Risca were offered the chance to participate as a way to sustain and grow their sales over the vital Christmas trading period. In Blackwood, 25 retailers signed up to the scheme.

## 4.5 Go2 Blackwood

- 4.5.1 The Go2 Blackwood town centre website (<http://www.go2blackwood.co.uk>) lists local businesses for free along with special offers, events and community news. The scheme also offers businesses up to 50% financial support towards the cost of a website and hosting. Go2 Blackwood is linked to 6 other town centres via [www.go2mytown.com](http://www.go2mytown.com). The Go2 team regularly visit Blackwood businesses to get them connected and trading online.

## 4.6 Events

- 4.6.1 The staging of a Christmas Market, Summer Market and St David's Day event allowed the towns retailers to engage with a wider group of potential customers. The events run by the Council's Business Enterprise Support Team are proving vital to the continued success of the town centres, particularly in the current economic climate as customers seek to gain more from their town centre visit than just shopping.

<b>Blackwood Business Comparison</b>			
	2012	2011	LFL Comparison
Businesses Opened	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1 fewer business opened</b>
Businesses Closed	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12 fewer businesses closed</b>

- 4.6.2 The figures in the Appendix provide a detailed breakdown of the jobs created and lost in Blackwood town centre in 2012.

## 4.7 Blackwood Footfall

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

<b>Blackwood Town Centre Footfall Comparison</b>			
	2012	2011	Difference
Highest Number	<b>55,080 (17/12/12)</b>	<b>54,896 (19/12/11)</b>	<b>+184</b>
Lowest Number	<b>26,986 (04/06/12)</b>	<b>31,950 (03/01/11)</b>	<b>-4,964</b>
Average Footfall	<b>37,107</b>	<b>37,600</b>	<b>-493</b>

- 4.7.2 The focus, through Town Centre Management and the Town Centre Improvement Group, remains to create and maintain a town centre environment that is attractive to national retailers and encourages new independent businesses.
- 4.7.3 The Town Centre Management Team has continued to support retailers. Each month every business in the town centre receives a copy of the *Town Centre News* and those who provide an e-mail address are also sent the Footfall data electronically. A *Retail Survey* was again undertaken across the four principle town centres in 2012. However, the results proved to be statistically unreliable due to the very low response rate - just 17 replies in Blackwood. Nevertheless, a report summarising the survey results was still made available to all retailers.

## 5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no potential equalities implications of this report and its recommendations on groups or individuals who fall under the categories identified in Section 6 of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan. As such, there is no requirement for an Equalities Impact Assessment Questionnaire to be completed for this report.

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no personal implications.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 It is recommended that Members note the content of the report for information.

## **9. STATUTORY POWER**

9.1 Local Government Act 2000.

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