



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19TH FEBRUARY 2013

SUBJECT: TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENT GROUP 2012

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information on the progress made within the Town Centre Improvement Group during 2012.

2. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 2.1 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".
- 2.2 It is vital that the retail areas within each of the four principal town centres in the County Borough - Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly and Risca, are well maintained and project a positive image. Areas that are uncared for can appear dangerous or dirty, deterring visitors and stifling private investment.
- 2.3 The work of the Town Centre Improvement Group links directly to the Regeneration Objective in the Community Plan of supporting town and village regeneration.

3. THE REPORT

- 3.1 A Cabinet report was submitted in November 2004 recommending that a Town Centre Improvement Group be established with appropriate representation from all relevant service areas. Consequently, the group began meeting in early 2005.
- 3.2 The remit of the group is to:-
- Improve the environment within the four principal town centres; Caerphilly, Blackwood, Bargoed and Risca.
 - Benchmark the performance of CCBC services in the four town centres;
 - Demonstrate the commitment of CCBC as an authority to the environmental improvement of the four town centres;
 - Aid the 'Wales In Bloom' entry for Caerphilly, by showing continuous environmental improvements to the town centre;
 - Provide an internal forum for CCBC to address issues that blight town centres, such as graffiti, fly posting, anti-social behaviour, retail theft and auto crime.

- 3.3 The group includes representatives from all the relevant parts of the Council, in addition to the four Police Inspectors whose responsibilities include the town centres of Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly and Risca.
- 3.4 The purpose of the Town Centre Improvement Group is to ensure that there is a responsive and co-ordinated approach to the maintenance of the town centres, through the process of an Environmental Audit. In addition, the Town Centre Improvement Group addresses items raised within the meetings of the four Town Centre Management Groups.
- 3.5 It should be seen as complementary to the four Town Centre Management Groups, ensuring that environmental and maintenance matters, which are the responsibility of CCBC, are addressed in an effective and expeditious manner.
- 3.6 In 2012, a total of 126 issues across the four town centres were actioned through the Town Centre Improvement Group. This year has again seen the group continue to develop a mindset of collaborative working across the various council departments, providing a forum for officers to exchange information.

Caerphilly

- 3.7 The long awaited regeneration project to refurbish the street scene in Pentrebane Street took place in October. The scheme involved closing the road for three weeks in order to resurface the carriageway and complete the building out of the pavements. The new kerb line formalised the café culture trail that successfully took place in the street. The project was a partnership between Town Centre Management, Urban Renewal, Highways and Transportation.
- 3.8 The parking bays along Cardiff Road, Clive Street and Pentrebane Street have a range of different waiting and loading times, coupled with some disabled parking bays. This can make interpretation of the restrictions confusing and enforcement time consuming. Therefore, it was proposed by Town Centre Management that the bays were changed to 30 minute waiting, whilst still retaining some loading provision. After consultation with local members, retailers and the Police, the changes were agreed. Importantly, the new waiting times should offer drivers with blue badges more opportunity to find a parking space, this is in addition to the Stockland Street disabled parking bays which remain unchanged.
- 3.9 Once again the Council committed to entering the 'Wales in Bloom' competition. In preparation for the judge's visit to support colleagues in Parks Services, the Environmental Audit process was employed to address issues that could detract from the marking. To this effect, the 'Highways Two Man Team' undertook a complete repainting of the town's street furniture. The Cleansing department addressed graffiti issues through its collaboration with the Probation Service, instigating a 'deep clean' of the town centre on judging day itself. This approach was reflected in Caerphilly been awarded a 'Silver Gilt' medal, finishing second by just 1 point, behind the winners Prestatyn.

Blackwood

- 3.10 Across the UK the need to generate more footfall is something that all town centres are considering. The council's response, lead by Town Centre Management, has been to create a dedicated event site in each town centre. The Town Centre Improvement Group provided a valuable way to coordinate the process of agreeing the terms and conditions for use of these sites. The excellent cross directorate relationships that exist within the group made this process achievable. Once the terms and conditions were agreed the first site was completed in Blackwood on the public realm area of the Northern Retail Park.
- 3.11 Since the full closure of High Street was implemented in 2009 the issues relating to car cruisers in the town centre have declined dramatically. However, there continues to be problems which still occur as a direct result of car cruisers using the town centre. Two of

these have successfully been resolved in 2012 by the Town Centre Improvement Group. The first concerns persons still using the ASDA car park in an evening. The second also relates to the use of another store car park, this time Aldi. The Town Centre Improvement Group successfully resolved both of these, with Council officers working in conjunction with Police officers.

Bargoed

- 3.12 The Greater Bargoed Regeneration scheme branded as the 'BIG Idea', comprises a number of different facets. Over the last year, the Town Centre Improvement Group meetings have been used to provide officers not directly involved in the project with updates and information on the latest progress. This has encouraged collaborative working, which has assisted in the management of the change that the town is undergoing.
- 3.13 The main schemes that have been brought to the group in 2012 are:-
- Utility diversions on Hanbury Road
 - 'The Plateau' development - construction of the Morrisons Store
 - Construction and lettings of the new shops on Lowry Plaza
 - Phase 2 and 3 of the public realm works program
 - Artwork program
- 3.14 In the town centre, the focus has been on keeping Bargoed 'open for business' whilst the work on the different phases of the regeneration program is undertaken. The detailed 'Development and Design Group', set up by the Urban Renewal team, has drawn together officers already familiar with each other from working together in the Town Centre Improvement Group. The Development Group has over the last year worked through a number of issues relating to the regeneration scheme and this partnership approach has enabled solutions to be both identified and delivered.

Risca

- 3.15 After the initial launch of the Councils Town Centre Management service into Risca, the model of 'Unique Places' Town Centre Management began to be implemented. The regular auditing of the town centre highlighted a number of issues, which were resolved through the Town Centre Improvement Group. These included:
- Repair the exterior of the toilet block in Tredegar Park and provision of new signage
 - Install additional litter bins and benches outside the Palace Cinema development
 - Repair blocked drain which caused flooding in Commercial Street
 - Erect new Pontymister and Risca entrance signs
 - Install cigarette bins by the Bus Stops to deter littering
- 3.16 Over the last few years, the principal town centres of the County Borough have successfully used events to build awareness of the town centre amongst the local community and increase its weekly footfall. In Risca, no dedicated event space existed, although Tredegar Grounds Park has been well used over the years by various community groups to stage a variety of events. The main problem at this location has been that it is very much weather dependent. In order to create an opportunity for town centre events to be staged, Urban Renewal and Town Centre Management officers worked together on a project to construct a dedicated all weather event site in Tredegar Park adjacent to Tredegar Street. The project also secured funding from the Transportation section to replaced the old bus shelter at the site with a new one. The new event site is an important addition to the town centre and opens up opportunities for more community-based events to be staged.

Town Centre Issues

- 3.17 Attached is Appendices containing a detailed breakdown of the issues resolved in each of the town centres over the past twelve months. The appendices are evidence of the commitment of individual service areas and shows the diverse nature of issues addressed by the group.
- 3.18 The support of the managers who make up the group is highly valued and their willingness to recognise the importance of the town centres is key to the group's success. The active participation of senior Police Officers significantly adds to the group's effectiveness. The Police commitment, irrespective of personnel changes or altering shift patterns, is a real example of partnership working. As it enters its ninth year, the group can highlight substantial positive contributions that it has made to the appearance and development of each of the County Borough's principal towns. The success of the Town Centre Improvement Group over the last eight years has enabled the Town Centre Management Groups to move forward in both the content and quality of the meetings.
- 3.19 The objective in 2013 is to continue to provide a high level of service in the principal town centres, despite growing financial constraints on council services. The wider economic situation means that town centres are under immense pressure to retain their customer base as consumer spending weakens. The aim is for the Town Centre Improvement Group and the process of Town Centre Management to continue to demonstrate to retailers that the Council strives to provide a well-maintained environment in its town centres, even when economic conditions are challenging.

4. ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

- 4.1 The Community Assets Budget in 2012 / 2013 allocated £40,000 for work in the four town centres. The Town Centre Development Manager and the Urban Renewal Team Leader manage this budget, which has helped to fund some of the issues resolved by the Town Centre Improvement Group this year. The primary use of this allocation is to deliver projects that add value to the street scene and offer a visible improvement to the town centre. The money has been split between the towns so that each has received a number of worthwhile projects that otherwise may have not been progressed within existing service area budgets.
- 4.2 The expectation of retailers and shoppers is for clean, well maintained, managed town centres. In order to attract additional investment into the towns; the street scene should be continuously improved. A number of schemes within the four towns have already been identified, should this funding be allocated in the 2013 / 2014 budget.
- 4.3 Each year, monies from the Area Forum Budget are allocated to each of the Town Centre Management Groups; these allocations have been used to fund projects, which further improve the town centres. Individual departments within the authority have also allocated resources from their core budgets to tackle specific issues in the town centres.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the council's EqIa process does not need to be applied.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct personnel implications, although the 'Two Man Team' from the Engineering Services Division, funded through the Core Maintenance Budget, has been an invaluable asset to the process of improving the appearance of the town centres.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 To inform members of the work of the Town Centre Improvement Group.

9. STATUTORY POWER

- 9.1 Local Government Act 2000.

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Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Matrix Of Issues Resolved – Summary
Appendix 2 Matrix Of Issues Resolved – Bargoed
Appendix 3 Matrix Of Issues Resolved – Blackwood
Appendix 4 Matrix Of Issues Resolved – Caerphilly
Appendix 5 Matrix Of Issues Resolved – Risca