



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 9TH SEPTEMBER 2016

SUBJECT: 'CHOOSE THE HIGH STREET' STORIES

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Town Centre Management Group of a new phase of the successful 'Choose the High Street' initiative through the development of publicity of the stories behind many of our town centre retailers, in order to support the County Borough's five managed town centres.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 During the summer, the Council's Town Centre Management team launched a new element to the 'Choose the High Street' brand was launched called 'Stories'. The initiative was designed to highlight the diversity of businesses across the five managed town centres. It also sought to raise awareness about the importance of consumer choice and encouraged people to make a conscious decision to support local businesses. The scheme consisted of articles featuring stories about local businesses, which were uploaded onto the GO2 website and also posted on the Council's own Facebook page. The 'Stories' initiative has drawn positive responses from the retailers who participated in it and also from those who viewed the articles both online and at the library exhibitions.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 "People, Businesses and Places". The proposals within the strategy are based on a number of regeneration principles, one of which is "Strengthening Town Centres".
- 3.2 "Prosperous Caerphilly" is identified as one of the key outcomes in the Council's "Single Integrated Plan". The Implementation of the *Unique Places* model of Town Centre Management in the County Borough's principal town centres is one of the actions identified to achieve this outcome.
- 3.3 "Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015" sets out seven Well-being Goals which aim to make a positive impact upon the social, economic, environmental or cultural well being of the area or community concerned. This report aligns with the following Well-being Goals:
- A prosperous Wales - the retail sector is a significant employer within the County Borough and a substantial number of those retail businesses and jobs are located in the town centres.
 - A Wales of cohesive communities - the scheme highlights the importance of town centres to the local communities.
 - A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language - the Stories exhibitions were produced in a bilingual format.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 To reflect some of the history of the County Borough's five managed town centres, the Town Centre Management team created a new initiative called 'Stories' under the 'Choose the High Street' brand. The project follows on from last year's successful 'Past & Present' initiative by telling the stories of the people behind the shop fascia.
- 4.1.1 The overall aims of the scheme are to:
- a. Help to maintain town centre footfall over the summer period;
 - b. Encourage people to make a conscious decision to support local businesses;
 - c. Generate renewed interest in town centres as a location for new business ideas;
 - d. Raise the profile of the town centre businesses;
 - e. Increase footfall in town centre libraries.
- 4.2 The businesses that make up the County Borough's town centres each have their own story. Some have been run over generations by a single family, whilst others are new businesses started by someone excited about beginning their own story with a fresh idea. What all of these stories confirm is that the high street is still a place for new business ideas and remains at the heart of the communities they serve.
- 4.3 The aim of the 'Stories' are to make local retailers feel valued and encourage people to make a conscious choice to support local businesses as part of their weekly shopping. Importantly, the Town Centre Management team aim to use this initiative to further promote town centres as windows of opportunity for new businesses.
- 4.4 The 'Stories' initiative was launched on 27th May 2016 at Glanmor's Bakery in Caerphilly town centre by the Cabinet Member Cllr. James along with the bakery's owners. To date a total of 56 stories have been uploaded onto the Go2Mytown. In addition, the articles were also posted on the Council's corporate *Facebook* page.
- 4.5 Those businesses featured on the Go2Mytown website were asked to complete a short questionnaire in order to provide feedback and gauge reaction to the scheme. The results are set out in Appendix 1 and 2.
- 4.6 Over the summer a series of exhibitions were held of the 'Stories' in local libraries:
- Bargoed 25th July for two weeks;
 - Blackwood 8th August for two weeks;
 - Caerphilly 22nd August for two weeks;
 - Risca 5th September for two weeks;
 - Ystrad Mynach – due to refurbishment a date in October will be arranged.
- 4.7 As part of the exhibitions visitors were asked to pledge to support local business on weekly shopping trips whenever possible.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The project's success to date and the positive feedback from both retailers and the public alike, exceeded expectations. The comments from retailers who shared their 'Stories' show how highly they valued the initiative and the focus that it brought to their individual businesses and the contribution they make to the life, diversity and vibrancy of the town centres.
- 5.2 The 'Stories' published on the Go2MyTown site have had over 8,000 unique page views, with visitors to these articles also viewing other town centre related content on the site. The Go2MyTown Facebook page recorded over 27,700 views of 'Stories' posts. Some of the 'Stories' were also posted on the Council's own Facebook page, these posts obtained an average reach of 7,500 followers, with the most popular reaching an audience of 23,700 (Howard's Butchers Easter Campaign).

The posts received extremely positive feedback from followers, the highest level of engagement (likes, shares and comments) was 285 individual interactions (Rossi Café, Bargoed).

- 5.3 The scheme and its online publicity generated a number of enquiries directly to Town Centre Management from potential new businesses.
- 5.4 It is difficult to quantify footfall increases in the libraries, however Librarians reported many people who visited the libraries took time to look at the exhibitions and enjoyed reading the Stories.
- 5.5 Due to the popularity of the initiative and the number of retailers who still want to have their stories featured, Town Centre Management intend to extend the initiative and continue to post them on the Go2Mytown web site.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

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

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct personnel implications.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 For members to note the contents of the report.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 This report is for information only.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Andrew Highway, Town Centre Development Manager
Consultees: David Whetter, Interim Head of Regeneration
Cllr. K. James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development
Allan Dallimore, Team Leader Urban Renewal
Hayley Lancaster, Senior Communications Officer
Geraint King, Digital Media Officer
Steve Wilcox, Assistant Town Centre Manager

Appendices:

Appendix 1	Questionnaire Responses
Appendix 2	Questionnaire Comments