



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP - 28TH FEBRUARY 2017

**SUBJECT: BUSINESS REPORT BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE 2016 - FOR
INFORMATION**

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides information on the number of businesses opened and closed in Blackwood town centre throughout 2016.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report gives a business overview of Blackwood town centre over the past year and details every retail business opening and closing within the town during 2016. In addition, it also provides an assessment of the annual footfall data collated in the town centre using the ShopperTrak Footfall electronic pedestrian counting system. Finally, the report sets out details of a number of initiatives that have been developed to support and promote existing businesses and attract new ones to the town centre.

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 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 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
 - A healthier Wales
 - A Wales of cohesive communities
 - A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
 - A globally responsible Wales.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 Blackwood Retail Overview 2016

In the first quarter of 2016 Blackwood town centre saw a number of businesses close. However, following the opening of *Costa Coffee* in April, a host of new retailers opened including: *Twinkle Tots*, *RBM Discounts*, *Bettys Boutique*, *Rebel Clothing*, *Profile* and *Lextan*. There was a particular trend towards independent clothes shops, although some of these were initially on short term leases. The area of High Street in the vicinity of the Blackwood Miners Institute saw three businesses open: *Exclusive Tiles & Bathrooms*, *Zam Zam Stores* and *Pizza Hut*. All of these have invested in their respective properties leading to an overall improvement in the areas appearance.

In August, value retailer Store 21 closed many of its UK stores including the one in Blackwood. As a result the building, which has the largest retail space on High Street, was sold. Town Centre Management quickly instigated a dialogue with the new owners and it is hoped that after modifications to the building new tenants can be secured.

During the latter part of 2016, the owners of The Market Place Shopping Centre began the refurbishment of the former Somerfield store. The immediate priority has been the buildings roof, but due to the length of time the unit has been vacant urgent works are also needed to the interior before it can be occupied by a new tenant.

A number of key issues could potentially affect town centres in 2017. The much anticipated business rates review was conducted last autumn; this led to some businesses having their rates reduced, whilst others had them increased. Small independent retailers in those towns where the business rates have been reduced are expected to be better placed to survive the challenging economic conditions. Following last summer's BREXIT vote, consumer confidence has faltered. It is still too early to predict the wider implications of the decision but whilst economic stability continues and consumer confidence remains volatile the long-term commitment of many multiple retailers to smaller town centres is uncertain.

4.2 Retail Property Directory

4.2.1 The *Retail Property Directory* provided through Town Centre Management is an online resource listing all retail properties to rent or buy in the five managed town centres. The Directory is designed to encourage businesses to open in one of the County Borough's town centres. In addition, Town Centre Management proactively engages with property agents both nationally and locally to secure new tenants for vacant town centre units.

4.3 Choose the High Street – Stories

4.3.1 The 'Stories' initiative ran throughout the summer months and involved telling the stories of the people behind the shop fascia. At the close of 2016, 75 stories have been published on the Go2MyTown website and shared on social media. Due to the popularity of the scheme the initiative will continue in 2017. Over the summer a series of library exhibitions were staged displaying some of the stories and asking people to sign a pledge to shop locally. The initiative was extremely well-received by both businesses and the public alike.

4.4 Choose the High Street - Christmas Voucher Booklet

4.4.1 The 'Choose the High Street' initiative once again featured a Christmas Voucher Booklet in 2016. The campaign is designed to provide local businesses with an opportunity to capture consumer spend during the Christmas period and also to market the diverse retail offer contained in the town centres. Retailers across the five managed town centres were given the opportunity to participate. In total 112 offers were received across the County Borough, which is an increase of 7 on 2015. A total of 30 of these were from businesses in Blackwood town centre.

4.5 Go2 MyTown Web Site

- 4.5.1 The Go2MyTown web site is an online platform for the Council's business support services. Town Centre Management have utilised the site in order to make key pieces of information and data available online. These include: weekly footfall data, Property Directory, Town Centre Gazettes and 'Pop Up Shop' Guide. In addition, the site contains information on each of the five managed towns as well as featuring different elements of the 'Choose the High Street' campaign.

4.6 GovDelivery

- 4.6.1 In response to retailers' requests to receive footfall data by email, a GovMail delivery account was created for Town Centre Management enabling footfall data to be disseminated each week. The platform is also used to periodically issue a general news update.

4.7 Events

- 4.7.1 The town centre events programme provides local retailers with an opportunity to engage with a wider customer base. The increase in footfall numbers also has the potential to generate repeat visits to the town centres throughout the year.

4.8 Business Comparison

- 4.8.1 The Town Centre Management Team 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 methodology of the data collection.

Blackwood Business Comparison			
	2016	2015	LFL Comparison
Businesses Opened	13	14	1 less business opened
Businesses Closed	9	11	2 fewer businesses closed

4.9 Blackwood Footfall

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

Blackwood Footfall Comparison			
	2016	2015	Difference
Highest Number	46,230 (19/12/16)	39,429 (26/10/15)	+6,801
Lowest Number	23,259 (25/01/16)	23,527 (09/11/15)	-268
Average Footfall	29,141	32,562	-3,421
Please note that the camera was offline for 19 weeks during 2015			

4.10 Town Centre Gazette

- 4.10.1 The Town Centre Management Team supports retailers by producing regular *Town Centre Gazettes*, which are bespoke to each town centre. In 2016 five editions were produced. In line with the provisions of the new Welsh Language Act the Gazettes were changed to a bilingual format.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 This report contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above in the following ways:

- *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 healthier Wales* – visiting a town centre promotes physical exercise and encourages social interaction.
- *A more equal Wales* – town centres should strive to celebrate diversity and promote equal opportunity for all people regardless of their background or circumstances.
- *A Wales of cohesive communities* – relevant, accessible and well managed town centres are vital to sustaining vibrant communities.
- *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language* – town centres contain significant elements of the nation’s architectural and cultural heritage. They are also places where the Welsh language can be taught, used and promoted.
- *A globally responsible Wales* – providing communities with local shops and services potentially reduces the necessity and frequency of vehicle use and promotes public transportation links.

In addition, the report is also consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act:

1. Long Term - Investment in town centres contributes to the sustainability and viability of local communities. It is accepted that the role and nature of town centres may change in the coming decades, but the challenge is for them to remain places which are relevant to how people live their everyday lives.
2. Prevention – The management and promotion of town centres through the ‘Unique Places’ model of Town Centre Management aims to prevent the decline of town centre and retain them as focal points of community life.
3. Integration – The continued vitality of town centres is integral to the Act by contributing to the prosperity, health and cultural identity of Wales.
4. Collaboration – Town Centre Management draws on different service areas within the Council to work towards achieving the well-being goals in respect of town centres. It also works in partnership with outside organisations such as Town & Community Councils, local charities and retailers to encourage and promote community engagement.
5. Involvement – The County Borough’s town centres serve a wide range of people across many different communities. They strive to be places of social interaction which celebrate diversity and promote equality.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 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.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no personal implications.

9. CONSULTATIONS

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

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 It is recommended that Members note the contents of the report for information.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 2000.

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