



RISCA TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 17TH OCTOBER 2017

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON MATTERS RELATING TO RISCA TOWN

REPORT BY: TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

1. NEW UNIQUE PLACES

A new version of the 'Unique Places' document has been produced. The latest version for the first time includes details of Ystrad Mynach town centre and also features a revised text in respect of Bargoed town centre reflecting the changes in the town due to the BIG Idea regeneration scheme.

The document is predominately used as an inward investment tool to respond to enquires relating to the five managed town centres. It is also a key element in Town Centre Managements proactive engagement with multiple retailers in respect of town centre vacancies and forms the basis of the 'Welcome Pack' supplied to new town centre business.

2. CHOOSE THE HIGH STREET CHRISTMAS VOUCHER BOOKLET

The 'Choose the High Street' Christmas Voucher Booklet has proved very popular with the public and retailers and will again be produced in 2017. The aims of the scheme are twofold:

1. Provide local businesses with an opportunity to capture consumer spend during the Christmas period
2. Market the diverse retail offer contained in the town centres.

Retailers in the five managed town centres will have the opportunity to be included in the booklet. The booklets will be given out in local supermarkets, libraries and at other key locations.

3. SECTION 106 MONIES

When Tesco's was built, monies were set aside for the development of a pedestrian footbridge to link the Tesco store with Risca town centre. The bridge was to straddle the river from behind the Tesco petrol station over to land next to the Lidl store.

Due to a myriad of problems encountered over the actual dynamics of building the structure between these land parcels, it was decided by Cabinet to take the monies allocated for the bridge and use them for other beneficial projects in the town. The S106 legal document dictates how the monies can be spend if a bridge is not built and outlines how its use is restricted for environmental, security and transport improvements within a tight boundary around Risca and Pontymister centres.

Officers have been tasked with using the S106 monies to prioritise unlocking development sites in the town and this has been reflected in the draft working action plan that has seen certain sites prioritised for intervention.

The S106 agreement states that the monies need to be 'committed' by March 2018. Legal advice has been taken on what constitutes 'committed' and their interpretation is that the Council need to have entered in to a binding /contractual agreement for a project's implementation.

A draft Cabinet report has been written which advocates selective demolition of vacant buildings at the Council owned Brooklands Road site and also the partial demolition and recladding of the eyesore which is the former swimming pool building at Longbridge Baths. These projects have been chosen because they can be delivered within the necessary timescale and come with fewer unknowns than other projects that could bring delays and put the funding in jeopardy.

Views of Risca Town Council and Risca Community Council were sought and have been reflected in the reports narrative.

There is likely to be a residual S106 amount left over and the draft cabinet report advocates that officers work with the local community to develop schemes that could benefit.

4. MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON CANAL ADVENTURE TRIANGLE UPDATE

CCBC have been working collaboratively with Torfaen Borough Council to develop a suite of projects centred along the existing canal corridor for submission to Visit Wales for external European funding. The CCBC projects cluster around the northern part of the canal at Cwmcarn scenic drive.

The business plan which is basically the bid submission document has been forwarded to Visit Wales for approval. Match funding for the CCBC projects comes in the shape of core CCBC capital being used to undertake improvement works to the canal infrastructure.

The WEFO Business Plan and supporting info was revised and re-submitted to Visit Wales on the 22nd September 2017 after extensive dialogue with Visit Wales staff. The info submitted included a letter of support/funding from CCBC Corporate Finance in line with the July 2017 CCBC Cabinet Report.

Overall the project activities (Canal Restoration / Cwmcarn Forest/ Mynydd Maen and Twmbarlwm projects) remain the same as reported to Cabinet in July.

Planning permission for most of the Cwmcarn Forest elements has now been conditionally received, the only outstanding planning approval relates to the expansion of the Twrch Trail (Cross Country Cycle Trails).

The collaborative suite of projects requires an element of funding from Welsh Government to make them stack up financially. In the past European projects have been supported by Targeted Match Funding (TMF) from Welsh Government and CCBC and Torfaen are again looking for this funding to allow the projects to be implemented.

This however appears to be holding the collaborative project up as the TMF element has yet to formally go to the WG Regeneration Panel for a decision. A number of dates for the project to go before the panel have been set and in every instance Welsh Government have decided to pull the project due to the requirement for additional information. It is hoped that the panel will now meet shortly although a date is yet to be set

5. SUMMER AND CHRISTMAS EVENTS UPDATE

Stall applications have been sent out with respect to the Risca Christmas event and staff are now going through the process of allocating stall pitches which takes place on 25 November. The event includes a parade around the park and carols around the Christmas tree.

6. CHOOSE THE HIGH STREET PROPERTY INDEX

Following the closure of the Go2 My Town website earlier this year a new version of the 'Retail Property Index' has been developed and is available to view online via the Council's website. The Property Index lists every property for sale or let in Caerphilly, Blackwood, Bargoed, Risca and Ystrad Mynach town centres.

7. PROCUREMENT OF FOOTFALL COUNTER

The new footfall counters were installed in mid-August by our new provider – *PFM Footfall Intelligence*. The systems have been successfully calibrated and validated and are sending back data.

To ensure continuity with all historical footfall data, the new equipment has been installed in the same location as the existing counters. The only exception to this is the Bargoed (North) counter, which has been decommissioned as part of the department's Medium Term Financial Plan savings. This change also provides consistency throughout the town centres as they all now have one counter.

8. PARKING ENFORCEMENT

The issue of Civil Parking Enforcement is currently being considered by the Council. As part of this process officers are working alongside colleagues in neighbouring authorities and Gwent Police to explore the various options available. The matter is included on the draft forward work programme of the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Committee will consider and confirm its forward work programme at its next meeting on 20th September 2017. At present the Authority's future proposals are being developed and still remain to be finalised. It is anticipated that the proposals will be subject to a wider consultation with Members prior to seeking Cabinet confirmation and Council approval.

Author: Andrew Highways – Town Centre Development Manager