



RISCA TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 13TH MARCH 2018

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON MATTERS RELATING TO RISCA TOWN

REPORT BY: TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

1. BUSINESS REPORT

1.1 The strength of Risca town centre lies in its ability to successfully service the local community by combining a retail offer which caters for essential shopping needs, with a strong service provision in the form of Pharmacies, Opticians and Estate Agents. A number of new businesses opened in Risca during 2017 these included: *Howlers and Growlers*, *Risca Wills & Estate Planning* and *Return2Chic*. Of great concern going into 2018 is the continued rationalisation of property portfolios by national banks. As part of these programmes the town has already lost its branch of *HSBC* which closed in 2016 and now has only has one bank remaining in the town centre *Barclays* located in Tredegar Street.

Overview 2017

1.2 In the next year it is expected that the current vogue for more experiential shopping will continue to grow. In the County Borough's town centres there remains a strong emphasis on core retail and service provision which may lessen the impact of any consumer migration towards the leisure sector. Looking ahead, there are some wider issues, such as the rise in interest rates and the implications of Brexit, which are expected to have an impact on consumer's ability to maintain their present levels of spending in 2018. Any reduction in consumer confidence will impact directly on the retail sector both independents and multiples. The concern is that these economic factors will begin to influence the long-term commitment of some multiple retailers and banks as they reassess their need to retain a presence in smaller town centres. The other challenge which makes town centres vulnerable in 2018 is the continued growth in online shopping and its focus on low price points.

Risca Business Comparison			
	2017	2016	LFL Comparison
Businesses Opened	12	6	6 more businesses opened
Businesses Closed	7	5	2 more businesses closed

Risca Footfall Comparison			
	2017	2016	Difference
Highest Number	10,501 (03/04/17)	10,504 (23/05/16)	-3
Lowest Number	4,294 (25/12/17)	6,395 (28/12/15)	-2,101
Average Footfall	8,572	9,326	-754
Note:	Footfall data was unavailable for 11 weeks during 2017 due to the changeover in provider and equipment.		

2. CHOOSE THE HIGH STREET CHRISTMAS VOUCHER BOOKLET

- 2.1 The 2017 “Choose the High Street Christmas Voucher Booklet” saw a total of 105 offers being presented from retailers across the five managed town centres and beyond. An initial print run of 25,000 was distributed across the County Borough with the generous aid of the Council’s Community Safety Wardens. Following the positive reception of the booklet and a larger number of Caerphilly retailers wishing to distribute the booklets during the Pwll-y-Pant roundabout works, an additional 5,000 booklets were printed.
- 2.2 A feedback survey was sent to all participating businesses in January 2018. 96% of respondents feel that schemes such as this highlight the importance of shopping locally and 83% would consider taking part in this (or a similar discount scheme) in the future. One new business added “As a struggling new business, we found the booklet brought customers to us didn’t know we were here”.
- 2.3 During previous years, a variety of publicity methods have been utilised to promote the scheme. These have included bus advertising, billboard posters, adverts in local press and posters for participating retailers. In light of budgetary pressures across the Authority and the departments MTFP savings, publicity of the scheme was done primarily by social media, some online advertising and the Council’s Newslite publication during 2017. As a result, 52% of businesses didn’t feel the scheme was well-publicised, with six businesses specifically commenting that they didn’t see any publicity this year and feel the scheme needs better promotion.
- 2.4 Should the scheme be run again in 2018, a balance between budgetary constraints and the need for publicity and promotion of the scheme will need to be carefully balanced in order to address the concerns of last year’s participants. In general, the scheme is growing year-on-year and continues to be positively received by businesses and residents of the County Borough alike.

3. S106 MONIES

- 3.1 When Tesco was built, monies were set aside for the development of a pedestrian footbridge to link the new store with Risca town centre.
- 3.2 Due to a myriad of problems encountered over the actual dynamics of building the structure, it was decided by Cabinet to take the monies, circa £425,000 allocated for the bridge and use them for other beneficial projects in the town.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 The S106 agreement states that the monies need to be ‘**committed**’ by March 2018. The Council’s interpretation of ‘committed’ has been that the Council need to have entered in to a binding /contractual agreement for a project’s implementation.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 The views of Risca Town Council and Risca Community Council were sought and it has become apparent that they do not unanimously support the proposed activities presented in the report.
- 3.7 Officers have been tasked with liaising with Tesco to establish if the S106 deadline could be extended in order to buy time to resolve these conflicts.

- 3.8 During these discussions, officers presented Tesco's with an opinion that the Council had already committed the monies - in that the S106 resources had been earmarked for a programme of selective demolition and for the implementation of a number of community environmental projects.
- 3.9 This opinion has been accepted by Tesco. This means that the deadline of March 2018 is no longer applicable and officers have more time to develop the programme of works to be funded by the S106 monies.

4. MONMOUTHSHIRE AND BRECON ADVENTURE TRIANGLE UPDATE

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 Overall the project activities (Canal Restoration / Cwmcarn Forest/ Mynydd Maen and Twmbarlwm projects) remain the same as reported to Cabinet in July.
- 4.4 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).
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 In early February 2018 the Council was informed verbally that the TMF funding will now be unlocked for the suite of projects.

5. CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT

- 5.1 A Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) 'Stage 1' report was presented to Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on the 12th December. Members provided recommendations to be reported to Cabinet that they were in favour of adopting CPE and that the authority should retain in-house enforcement and collaborate with one or more other local authorities (LA's) to provide the back office support. The report and recommendations are being presented to Cabinet on 28th February.
- 5.2 A meeting took place with Gwent Police prior to Christmas to discuss the current situation with regard to parking enforcement. Gwent Police confirmed that they would continue to provide the service until December 2018 and that they hoped LA's would be in a position to transfer powers at that point in time. They also stated that they would work with any LA's who could not meet this date.
- 5.3 If Cabinet grant approval to proceed with transfer of powers, officers will undertake the relevant procurement exercises needed to try and meet the January 2019 deadline. There are many aspects that need to be taken forward but the two main requirements will be a full review of the existing Traffic Regulation Orders along with putting together an application to Welsh Government to request a transfer of the relevant powers to the authority.

6. CAPITAL REGION UPDATE

- 6.1 There are a number of separate regeneration initiatives that the Council is playing an active role in progressing. The highest profile of which is the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal which involves £1.2 billion worth of investment. The City Deal aims to deliver up to 25,000 new jobs and secure £4 billion of private sector investment. Whilst not every town or village may benefit directly, the region itself will benefit from more jobs, better transport, increased skill levels and more assistance towards businesses growth.
- 6.2 Central to the Cardiff Capital Region is the METRO scheme led by City Region Transport Authority. METRO will bring a more efficient rail service to the South Wales valleys with trains running at fifteen minute intervals and linking with an improved bus service as ticketing and timetables are integrated.
- 6.3 The 'Our Valleys Our Future' project, led by a Welsh Government Ministerial Taskforce, aims to empower people in communities throughout the South Wales Valleys.
- 6.4 Finally, a Foundation for Success, currently in draft form, is the Council's new regeneration strategy (2018-2023) setting out how the County Borough can economically transform over the next five years.

Author: Andrew Highway – Town Centre Development Manager
Steve Wilcox – Assistant Town centre Manager
Allan Dallimore – Team Leader Urban Renewal
Councillor S Morgan – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy,
Infrastructure and Sustainability