



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 20TH MARCH 2018

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON MATTERS RELATING TO BLACKWOOD TOWN

REPORT BY: TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

1. CLARIFICATION OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1.1 The Chairman will be selected from those County Borough Councillors who are eligible to attend. Each County Borough Councillor will have one vote selecting the Chair. In addition, the Cabinet Member will be entitled to vote, in the event of a tie the Cabinet Member will have the casting vote. The selection of a Chairman will take place in May and run for a period of twelve months. An existing Chairman may stand for re-election.

2. BUSINESS REPORT

- 2.1 During 2017 Blackwood town centre continued to evolve as a district centre and as part of this saw some longstanding 'pop-up' shops replaced by independent retailers. Among those who have opened and in doing so invested in the appearance of their premises are: *Le Beau*, *H&W Insurance*, *Woodies* and *Tailor Made Travel*.
- 2.2 The presence of *The Maxime Cinema* on the High Street is seen as an opportunity by businesses to cater for customers visiting Blackwood to see a film. Well known High Street names *Pizza Hut* and *Papa Johns* both opened franchises last year and in the autumn independent café bar *McKenzie's* opened directly opposite the cinema providing a dining experience which added value to the evening economy.
- 2.3 Following its change of ownership *The Market Place Shopping Centre* embarked on a proactive letting strategy which saw a number of long standing vacant units being let. New tenants included *Clear Sky Recruitment*, *Welsh Air Ambulance* and independent children's boutique *Little Things*. The ongoing refurbishment the former *Somerfield* store was given fresh impetus with the letting of some of the space to a lifestyle gym.
- 2.4 There remains in the town centre two sites which potentially provide an opportunity to extend Blackwood's retail/service offer. The owners of the former *Store 21* building continue to assess how the site could be used in the future. Whilst the agents for the former *Poundstretchers* site remain optimistic this may soon be brought back into a beneficial use following the fire.
- 2.5 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.

Blackwood Business Comparison			
	2017	2016	LFL Comparison
Businesses Opened	17	13	4 more businesses opened
Businesses Closed	6	9	3 fewer businesses closed

Blackwood Footfall Comparison			
	2017	2016	Difference
Highest Number	48,571 (18/12/17)	46,230 (19/12/16)	+2,341
Lowest Number	21,889 (25/12/17)	23,259 (25/01/16)	+1,370
Average Footfall	28,450	29,141	-691
Note:	Footfall data was unavailable for 11 weeks during 2017 due to the changeover in provider and equipment.		

3. CHOOSE THE HIGH STREET CHRISTMAS VOUCHER BOOKLET

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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”.
- 3.3 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 Newsline 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.
- 3.4 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.

4. SITE VISIT RED LION – SITE VISIT ORGANISED 20TH MARCH 2018 2PM

- 4.1 Site visit organised 20th March 2018 at 2pm.

5. POUND STRETCHERS

- 5.1 Officers continue to maintain an active dialogue with the persons acting for the owners of the former Poundstretchers site in High Street in Blackwood town centre. At present the situation remains unchanged with negotiations over the site continuing with the insurers following the fire which destroyed the Poundstretchers building.

6. CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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 the Welsh Government to request a transfer of the relevant powers to the authority.

7. CAPITAL REGION UPDATE

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 The 'Our Valleys Our Future' project, led by a Welsh Government Ministerial Taskforce, aims to empower people in communities throughout the South Wales Valleys.
- 7.4 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.

8. EVENTS – BEACH PARTY

- 8.1 Stall applications have been sent out for the Blackwood Beach Party and staff are currently processing application forms prior to allocating pitches for the event. Blackwood Town Council are in discussion with the event officers to agree the location of a music stage within the event site for the two days of the event.

9. FIRST WORLD WAR MEMORIAL GARDEN

- 9.1 Blackwood Town Council and British Legion have both made a promise of a financial commitment to this project. However given the somewhat astronomical cost quoted by CCBC for their assistance with this project the Town Council are now actively seeking alternative quotes.

The front runner at the moment being Groundwork Caerphilly.

We will of course be looking to get the local schools involved and make this a real Community Project.

Urban Renewal officers met with local members and representatives of the Town Council on site in October at Gordon Road to consider the options for some form of commemorative landscaping scheme. Following this meeting officers developed an initial brief which was provided to the Town Council in January. The cost identified in the brief was an indicative one based on a provisionally understanding of the type of commemoration the Town Council was looking for and the constraints of the site. Officers now await conformation of the available budget in order to design a suitable scheme within budget.

10. BICENTENARY EVENT 2020

- 10.1 Proposed Bi Centenary Celebrations planned for 2020. Blackwood and District Heritage Association have been in discussion with several local individuals and organisations and have received positive responses regarding involvement in the celebrations in some form.

It is hoped that the Association will meet with Town Council within the next month for a further update and perhaps we will then be in a position to report to the next Blackwood Town Centre Management Group Meeting at a future date.

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