



BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP - 20TH MARCH 2015

**SUBJECT: BUSINESS REPORT BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE 2014 - FOR
INFORMATION**

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides information on the number of businesses opened and closed in Blackwood town centre throughout 2014.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report gives a retail overview of Blackwood town centre over the past year and details every retail business opening and closing within the town during 2014. In addition, it also provides an assessment of the annual footfall data collated in the town centre using the Experian Footfall electronic pedestrian counting system. Finally, the report sets out details of a number of initiatives that were developed to support and promote existing businesses and attract new ones to the town centre.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Council has agreed to a five-year regeneration programme entitled "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.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 Blackwood Retail Overview 2014

- 4.1.1 The town's retail offer reflects how high streets across the UK are changing. The established family businesses, which for so long provided Blackwood with its distinctiveness, have been replaced by more transient independent businesses. Whilst the loss of long standing independent retailers undoubtedly affects the quality of the shopping offer, the fact that new business see Blackwood as an opportunity is a cause for optimism and ensures that the vacancy rates compare favourably with other similar towns in South East Wales. The nationwide growth in the number of charity shops opening is reflected in Blackwood with *Barnardos*, *British Red Cross*, *YMCA* and *Greyhound Rescue Wales* all opening new shops.

These charities have all spent money on the building fabric in order to open their shops and in so doing are investing in the future of the town centre.

4.1.2 The opening of the new five screen *Maxime Cinema* has had a very positive effect on footfall numbers and is drawing people from a wide demographic area into the town. Some businesses have noticed an uplift in their sales due to people visiting specifically for the cinema in the late afternoon. In addition, the opening of *Preachers Lounge Bar* in Hall Street has added further value to the towns night time economy.

4.1.3 Looking ahead to 2015, the concern remains that multiple retailers and service providers, such as banks, will continue to cut operating costs by rationalising their assets in town centre locations across the UK. The susceptibility of town centres to strategic decisions by national businesses reinforces the importance to the local economy of independent retailers. However, many small businesses are now finding the high street a difficult place in which to trade with the continued fall in consumer spending.

4.2 Retail Property Directory

4.2.1 The *Retail Property Directory*, provided through Town Centre Management, enables people to start looking online for retail properties to rent or buy across the five managed town centres. This initiative actively encourages people to open a business in one of the County Borough's town centres.

4.3 Choose the High Street

4.3.1 During the summer period a new promotional campaign was unveiled, which aimed to raise awareness of the importance of shopping locally. Using the strap line 'Choose the High Street' it encouraged people to favour using their local high street for at least part of their weekly shop and highlighted that customers have a choice in where they shop. To convey the message a variety of marketing platforms were utilised. The initiative also encouraged new businesses to open in the town centres by proactively engaging with local banks, enterprise agencies and grant providers.

4.4 Choose the High Street @ Christmas

4.4.1 Over the last two years, in the lead up to Christmas the 'Unique Places Discount Card' scheme has run as a way to help retailers generate sales. In 2012 a total of 60 offers were submitted and in 2013 that number rose to 80. After assessing the feedback provided by retailers, it was decided to take a different approach for Christmas 2014. Instead of using a discount card, a printed voucher booklet was produced. Retailers in the five managed town centres were invited to submit an offer for inclusion in the booklet with the level of discount being set by the retailer. In total 92 offers were received, a total of 27 of these were from retailers in Blackwood town centre.

4.5 Pop Up Shops

4.5.1 In October 2014, a 'Pop-Up Shop Guide' was launched to encourage people to explore opening a Pop-Up shop or community project on the high street. The guide provides an explanation of what a Pop-Up shop is and explains the process for setting one up.

4.6 Events

4.6.1 The town centre events staged by the Council's Events Team provide a chance for retailers to engage with a wider customer base due to the increase in footfall numbers they attract.

4.7 Business Comparison

4.7.1 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 method of data collection.

Blackwood Business Comparison			
	2014	2013	LFL Comparison
Businesses Opened	19	7	12 more businesses opened
Businesses Closed	14	14	Level

4.8 Blackwood Footfall

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

Blackwood Town Centre Footfall Comparison			
	2014	2013	Difference
Highest Number	47,444 (15/12/14)	49,519 (16/12/13)	-2,075
Lowest Number	25,745 (05/05/14)	22,735 (29/04/13)	+3,010
Average Footfall	32,455	34,546	-2,091

4.8.2 The Town Centre Management Team continues to support retailers by producing regular *Town Centre Gazettes*, which are bespoke to each town centre. In addition, a summary of FootFall data is made available electronically on a weekly basis.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 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.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no personal implications.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 No there are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

10. STATUTORY POWER

10.1 Local Government Act 2000.

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