

TOWN CENTRE  
TASK & FINISH GROUP  
OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
(ECONOMY & ENVIRONMENT)



TOWN CENTRE TASK & FINISH GROUP REPORT

Final Report

27 November, 2007

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(Economy & Environment)  
The Vale of Glamorgan Council  
Civic Offices  
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## **FOREWARD**

I am pleased to present the report of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee's Town Centre Task & Finish Group.

I would like to thank all those involved in the work; elected Members, and more specifically, the Council officers and local shop and business owners. In-depth discussion was possible only as a result of their comprehensive knowledge and expertise contributed both on-site and within Group meetings.

There is little doubt of the huge potential of the Town Centre particularly since the development of the Town Hall, Library and Square. How we capitalise on the opportunity afforded us will impact upon the long-term future of the Vale of Glamorgan's largest town.

The recommendations provide a range of options, some aspirational and others possible, even within a limited budget. They provide opportunities for the future regeneration of Barry Town Centre, an area of key importance to the Vale of Glamorgan. In addition it is hoped that the method / approach used by the Group is transferred to allow consideration of the other Town Centres within the Vale.

### **1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK & FINISH GROUP**

Councillors Ms. L. Burnett (Chairman), J. Clifford, E. Hacker, Mrs. M. Kelly Owen, Mrs. A.J. Moore, Mrs. S.I. Sharpe and S.T. Wiliam.

### **2. INTRODUCTION**

The Town Centre Task & Finish Group of the Scrutiny Committee (Economy and Environment) was established on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2006 to facilitate in-depth discussion of town centre improvement and regeneration and to make recommendations for improved service delivery to the Scrutiny Committee. At its first meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2006 the Town Centre Task & Finish Group agreed, given the particular pressures in Barry (being the largest town in the Vale) and the current opportunities in terms of there being a draft regeneration plan in place, to focus on Barry Town itself (Holton Road) and consider other town centres at a later date.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

A check list for Scoping the ad hoc review had been considered and agreed by the Scrutiny Committee with the following focus:

- to assist in the development of an holistic approach to the regeneration of Holton Road by examining:
  - (i) the identity to be created for the area
  - (ii) the barriers to attracting and retaining vibrant businesses in the area of Holton Road under consideration
  - (iii) the accessibility of Holton Road given the need to minimise retail leakage and maximise investment and consequently footfall
  - (iv) to identify potential solutions / remedial measures, the purpose being to identify the roles and responsibilities of the Council, to evaluate how efficiently and effectively the Council responded to its roles and responsibilities and to have regard to local views whilst adopting a realistic approach to what could and could not be achieved.

#### **4. MEETINGS HELD**

The Task & Finish Group met on three occasions – 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2006 where it agreed the scope for the review, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2007 where it considered statistics and performance information, retail rankings, the Barry Retail Report, the catchment population map and a summary report. On 26<sup>th</sup> March by Members and officers of the Vale of Glamorgan undertook a tour to apprise themselves of the issues at hand and consider regeneration issues, which was followed by a meeting of the Group with invitations extended to local retailers and officers of the Vale of Glamorgan.

#### **5. RESEARCH**

The Task & Finish Group received considerable retail information on a number of issues surrounding town centres in the Vale and in general:

- (i) information in respect of the current vacant properties within town centres, including Holton Road, for the years 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006
- (ii) pedestrian counts that had been undertaken at Barry Town Centre within 15 minutes duration during certain days of the week between 2004 and 2006.
- (iii) a comparison of the rental value of retail outlets within Wales in order

that Barry could be compared with other areas.

- (iv) Town Centre Retail Rankings list throughout Wales.
- (v) the requirements of retailers in respect of the amount of square feet they would require to locate a property outlet.
- (vi) the Barry Retail Report, a list of the top twenty retailers present in Barry Town Centre to date, together with a list of those not present.

This information was considered by the Task & Finish Group who agreed that the most significant and paramount elements to any regeneration of any town centre should be:

- to establish a Marketing and Events Programme (encouraging new investment by communicating action and challenging perceptions of investors and local residents)
- consideration to attracting and retaining vibrant business.

## **6. INVESTIGATION**

The Group undertook a tour of Holton Road on 26th March, 2007 to ascertain the issues and to consider the best way forward. Three Members attended the Tour, namely Councillors Ms. L. Burnett, E. Hacker, Mrs. M. Kelly Owen and officers from the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Departments within the Vale.

As a result of the tour the Group maintained that in order to achieve the regeneration of any town centre, consideration should be given to raising the profile of the town centre through the identification of an appropriate brand, an innovative marketing and events programme and identifying the barriers for businesses. Further consideration would also be essential in respect of accessibility, mainly public transport and highways issues.

In order to assist in the process, the Group invited representatives from the business community within Holton Road to discuss matters of mutual concern and officers from the Highways, Planning and Transportation Department to discuss accessibility issues.

The following questions were put to the Retail owners by the Group:

- (i) the perception of Barry town from your point of view
- (ii) what did they consider to be the future of Holton Road and what would / should be available in the area

- (iii) what part should traders themselves play in the regeneration of Holton Road
- (iv) advertising within the area
- (v) accessibility issues
- (vi) future regeneration.

The responses were as follows:

#### Growing Number of Residents

There were a number of new developments proposed throughout Barry which could have a significant impact on the number of people visiting / using the town. In addition, the needs of visitors will change with a mix of requirements such as domestic / convenience and leisure. As such a supermarket should be encouraged as there was a need for a convenience store within Holton Road, together with a coffee shop.

#### Car Parking

Even though recent improvements have increased the number of parking places by 70, car parking remains an issue within the Town Centre area. Car parking to remain free of charge but consideration should be given to the Library car park opening after 09:30a.m. to assist the public as a number of people currently using that facility worked in the town, with the result that the car park was being fully utilised all day by employees and the shoppers had difficulty in obtaining space.

#### Funding Opportunities

Consideration to grant funded schemes. The Welsh Assembly Government would be providing grants for various schemes in October 2007, in particular for shutters on shop fronts and shelters. This could be used as a way of encouraging new retailers to the area.

#### Business Rates and Rent

The business rate for properties in Barry was extremely high and a number of retailers had also closed down due to the high rents that they were being requested to pay. Although the business rate was set by Central Government, the Group considered that further lobbying should take place with the intention / possibility that business rates be recommended on a sliding scale for, say, the first five years to encourage retailers to the town.

The Tuesday market within the town was considered to be a bonus for the area and it encouraged people to visit Barry and spend more time in the town.

However local businesses felt that Barry Town Centre offered a range of opportunities which were under-realised. One business reported positive results from a recent advertising campaign.

### Leisure Opportunities Within the Town Centre

Visitors to the Holton Road area tend to be transient as there were limited opportunities to take a break within a visit or shopping trip to the area. The Town Hall / Library provides a focal point for regeneration and attracting visitors.

Many retailers considered that good coffee shops would be a bonus to the area as many shoppers had commented on the lack of such facilities. One business owner commented the area was "Suitable for a Café Quarter but had no café".

## **7. OTHER FINDINGS**

The Group had been advised that potential retailers had difficulty with premises in Holton Road as the majority of the shops were small with inadequate footage. It was suggested that discussions take place with owners with a view to combining some of the shops for marketing premises to meet this need.

Housing was seen as a driver for the regeneration of the area. A number of the premises in Holton Road had significant accommodation above their shops and it was suggested that a number of the establishments could modernise and utilise the accommodation for affordable housing. This would not only encourage footfall within the Town Centre but assist with security issues and provide much needed accommodation within the area. It was recognised that to achieve the development of housing in the area planning requirements for parking and amenities may have to be reviewed.

The impending Waterfront development could also have a potentially significant impact for Holton Road given the increased numbers of people expected to live within the area.

It was proposed that Section 106 money could be utilised to enhance and regenerate the town centre. A town centre living study was also being undertaken which could provide further evidence / information for the Scrutiny Committee (Economy and Environment) in considering regeneration of all town centres within the Vale of Glamorgan.

Regeneration of areas adjacent to the Town Centre through a WAG funded renewal area would also have a direct impact on the potential level and type of use made of the area.

The Group discussed potential branding of the area and agreed that the Town Centre should reflect that of the Skoda car “Stylish but inclusive” rather than exclusive.

## **8. Conclusions**

The Group considered that Holton Road should be looked at as a convenience town / leisure town and advertising the area was essential. In particular the new services of the Town Hall and Library could be advertised widely to encourage the public to visit, car parking to remain free until regeneration of the Town Centre was completed.

## **9. Recommendations**

Having considered the needs of the Town and the information presented, the Group made the following recommendations:

- (i) that the number of retail outlets vacant in the Barry Town Centre be considered with different marketing techniques being employed
- (ii) that the Scrutiny Committee (Economy and Environment) recommend to Cabinet the lobbying of Central Government in respect of business rates and the possibility of introducing a sliding scale for new businesses
- (iii) that Cabinet consider how it could assist local businesses within the area, in particular relating to advertising and the development of an Events Programme for the Town Hall, Library and the Town Hall Square
- (iv) that consideration be given to trimming the trading area of Holton Road
- (v) that the use of grants to assist business start-up and retention in the area be explored
- (vi) that car parking charges remain free until further regeneration of the area takes place
- (vii) that accommodation above retail outlets be recommended for conversion to residential use
- (viii) that future literature on the town be encouraged to include details of all the new facilities available within the town
- (ix) that the outcome of the town centre living study be presented to the Scrutiny Committee when available

- (x) that the Town Centre Manager continues to encourage retailers into the area by advising of the strengths of the area and outlining the proposed future developments
- (xi) that a supermarket be encouraged to the area
- (xii) that a report outlining options for the establishment of a coffee shop / tea room within Holton Road be presented to Scrutiny Committee (Economy and Environment)
- (xiii) that Barry Town Centre be linked to any promotions that the Vale of Glamorgan as a Council undertakes throughout the Vale
- (xiv) that promotional material for Barry move towards a re-branding of the Town Centre along the lines of “Stylish but inclusive”
- (xv) that the Scrutiny Committee maintains a watching brief on the future regeneration of the town.