

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2019

REFERENCE FROM ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE: 4<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2019

“916 BARRY TOWN CENTRE SUMMIT (REF) -

For this item the Committee welcomed the Operational Manager for Regeneration and the Principal Tourism and Marketing Officer.

The report had been referred by Cabinet for the Committee’s consideration. It outlined the challenges and issues facing Barry town centre as discussed at the recent Barry Town Centre Summit held in November 2018, in light of the challenges facing high streets throughout the UK.

The Summit, set up in partnership with Barry Town Council, was held to address many of the issues currently affecting Holton Road, in particular given the recent closures of a number of large national stores.

The Summit was attended by representatives from across the business community in Barry Town Centre, Councillors from The Vale of Glamorgan Council and Barry Town Council, Officers from the Vale of Glamorgan Council and Barry Town Council, The Police, The Mosaic Partnership (consultants) and landlords (a full list of attendees is included in the attached report).

The summit format was based on workshops to identify and discuss opportunities to improve the viability of the town centre, which would feed into to the new Town Centre Framework document. A full report was attached at Appendix 1.

In providing some context to the report, the Operational Manager for Regeneration highlighted the challenging times that existed for high street retailers. These included rising costs, such as business rates, and an increase in the shop vacancy rates, which for Barry was currently 12.9%. This compared to the Welsh average of 9% and the UK average of 6%. Penarth and Llantwit Major vacancy rates were below the UK national average, but Cowbridge was similar to Barry.

The Operational Manager for Regeneration stated that footfall in Barry had recently improved as a result of the new B&M shop on Holton Road, but it had been recognised that a more innovative approach was required in order to attract new shops to the town centre. He then referred to the 2014 Town Centre Framework document that focussed mainly on the physical appearance of town centre areas. This was now outdated, and so, a new document was required that reflected the need for a more creative approach. The Operational Manager outlined that the Council was one of a string of partners such as traders and the police that needed to work together. He stated that he wanted to work jointly with partners to ensure that

the right approaches were being adopted, and so the Council had to be careful with how it invested its funding. Key priorities would include meeting the challenge of empty properties and how to attract new uses for space.

Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson, not a member of the Committee, but with permission to speak, outlined that the Barry Town Centre summit was well attended and the major issues that was highlighted by the businesses was for there not be any car parking charges. Councillor Johnson added that there needed to be ongoing discussions with landlords, to identify what the Council could do to reduce the number of empty properties, and the key challenge was in attracting the right type of shop to Barry. He stated that all stakeholders needed to work together. He also stated that there was no point of introducing car parking charges when proposals for Barry would not generate any income, so the parking strategy needed to be looked at in more detail by all partners.

Councillor S. Perkes, not a member of the Committee, but with permission to speak, called for a working group to be established in order to progress ideas. The group needed representation from the Vale Council, Barry Town Council, Traders and other local interested parties. Such a working group would be tasked with looking at the viability of options, such as split units, new events, and how to attract new businesses to the town.

In referring to the idea of split retail units, a Committee Member stated that this was a concern, and it would be better for the Council to purchase units and buildings so that it could regulate the rental market. This idea had already been used by some other Local Authorities, but would require capital investment by the Council. The Member also advised that putting residential flats above shop units would be a “disaster”.

A Committee Member agreed with the previous comments regarding split units, and the Member stated that Barry required a total rebranding. He added that he wanted Barry to be a town that people wanted to visit, and he referred to implementation of the ‘Sense of Place’ programme and called for there not be any car parking charges in the town.

In providing his initial thoughts, another Committee Member stated that he agreed with what had already been said. He added that a big challenge facing towns were out of town shopping centres and on-line shopping, with most people under the age of 50 now buying more through the internet. The Council needed to change the habit of shoppers by encouraging them to visit their local towns, and all partners needed to work together in order better promote and market Barry. The Member stated that this was same for Llantwit Major, which struggled with the number of shops, and he stated that car parking charges for towns was “ridiculous”.

In picking up a previous comment regarding ‘Sense of Place’, the Principal Tourism and Marketing Officer advised that this was very integral to Council plans. She stated that a new staff member had been appointed to progress work and actions. She also stated that there had been a lot of discussion in relation to setting up craft units in Holton Road that would use local skills and people. In addition, the Operational Manager for Regeneration stated that there were some quick wins, such

as visual improvements for vacant shop fronts that improved the look and character of high streets. He added that capital funding was available to make improvements, adding value with grant funding where possible. He welcomed the comments made by Councillor Perkes, as this was a joint responsibility and so it was important to achieve the best outcomes possible.

A Committee Member referred to the creation of a Barry Business Improvement District (BID) that was part of the discussion back last year. The Principal Tourism and Marketing Officer advised that the Council had been successful in requesting Welsh Government funding to look at the feasibility of Barry becoming a BID. The Council was committed in pushing this onto to next phase. She added that the BID would be driven by local traders and business, and it would be these partners that would decide what the priorities were. Further to this, the Operational Manager for Regeneration confirmed that it would be up to business to decide where any BID funding would be spent. He also referred to 'pop-up shops' and the challenges that existed with some landlords who understood loopholes that helped them to avoid paying rates. The Council was therefore looking at best practice and what other Local Authorities had done. He stated that Kings Square in Barry was a real asset, so the Council needed to look at what themed events could be held there.

From the perspective of traders, a Committee Member stated that he could not see what sort of visitor experience was being offered, and as the Town Centre Framework had been adopted 4 years ago, the Member asked whether it had been reviewed. In reply, the Operational Manager for Regeneration agreed that the visitor's experience needed to be considered. He advised that the Town Centre Framework was reviewed annually, which mainly focussed on the physical appearance of town centres. He stated that he wanted to work with stakeholders everyone in partnership to see how best to improve Barry town centre.

The Committee also queried whether the Council had considered its level of borrowing to invest in town centres. In reply, the Operational Manager for Regeneration stated that the Council was in the process of reviewing its assets and looking at different funding models, but it was important to consider what the Council could do legally.

Subsequently the Committee

#### RECOMMENDED -

(1) T H A T Cabinet agree to the setting up of a working group, to include representatives of the Vale Council, Barry Town Council, Traders and other local interested parties, in order to agree town centre improvement priorities and to progress actions.

(2) T H A T the Committee receives a report regarding funding models open to the Council for investment.

#### Reasons for recommendations

(1) In order for the Cabinet to consider the Committee's request for a working

group of interest parties to be established, that would look at and progress improvement priorities for Barry town centre.

(2) For the Committee to consider the Councils investment strategy as a way of improving retail high streets.”