

Originally established in 1880 and in continuous existence since 1909.

ABERDARE AND DISTRICT CHAMBER OF TRADE AND COMMERCE

Postal address: Broniestyn House, Trecynon, Aberdare,
Rhondda Cynon Taf. CF44 8EF
tel: 01685 872453
e-mail TomsG@Tiscali.Co.UK



Honorary President
Bourke A. Le Carpentier
DareSpin@AberdareSpinners.Co.UK
Honorary Secretary
Mrs Judith Toms
TomsG@Tiscali.Co.UK
Honorary Treasurer
Graham Marsh
Sales@TheValleysGroup.Co.UK

16th October, 2011

Christine Chapman, A.M.
Mountain Ash
RCT

Dear *Christine*

Re Town Centre Regeneration

We understand that now that you realise that we were not directly invited to take part in the input into an exercise by Wales Assembly Government to establish how to regenerate our Town Centres you have volunteered to personally take our observations through to the relevant Minister.

We thank you for that. As you know from the various meetings we have had with you over several years, we have been worried about the continuing demise of Town Centre shopping and the particular problems facing the Valleys who have not had the high powered promotion afforded to Cardiff and where out of town shopping has leached away significant footfall.

We trust that the points we raise in our input will be taken to heart – we have been careful to be accurate rather than guided by emotion on the matter. Unlike so many exercises of this nature where people and groups are anxious to flag up the problem without suggesting any answers, we have suggestions to make regarding Planning Policy which could help to stem the current haemorrhage from the High Streets and afford the smaller farmers the means of having outlets for their produce as well as smaller manufacturers who do not have the huge capacity to attract supermarket contracts.. assisting these smaller manufacturing enterprises could help the general economy in Wales.

Our affiliation with the South Wales Chamber of Commerce (to whom we are affiliated) and contacts with the Federation of Small Business establish that we are not alone in our fears for the Town Centres in Wales.

May we ask you to request a meeting for us to discuss these ideas with the relevant Minister for Planning matters and to meet with the Sustainability Committee in order to appraise them of the problems.

Yours sincerely

B A Le Carpentier

Bourke A. Le Carpentier (President) *Jul pp*
Judith Toms (Hon Sec)

HC. Regeneration Documents

Wales Action for Sensible Planning

An outreach arm of the Aberdare & District Chamber of Trade & Commerce
Honorary President, Bourke A. Le Carpentier of Aberdare Spinners
Honorary Secretary, Mrs Judith Toms of Gaudy Welsh Replicas
e-mail: TomsG@Tiscali.Co.UK

Tel: 01685 872453

Town centre regeneration.

October 2011

The Welsh Assembly appear to be asking for input into a programme for Town Centre Regeneration.

They already have a framework in place in general terms to assist in such regeneration, with each Authority making decisions at local level regarding approaches. Both the Assembly and Local Authorities are, in principle, bound by Planning Policy as it pertains to retail in these matters.

The Welsh Assembly Manifesto notes a commitment to regenerate Town Centres stating that Planning Policies aim to breathe new life into Town Centres by safer and better quality design and developing family friendly environments and mixed use developments.

They state that retail forms only part of a wider framework of regeneration and policy areas include housing, social issues, heritage and tourism.

Evidence to the Business and Enterprise Committee on Town Centre Regeneration has been submitted by the Minister for Housing, on Regeneration and Heritage and can be accessed on the Assembly website. <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/org/ieListDocuments.aspx?cld=228&Mid=511&Ver=4>

As an example.

The work being undertaken in Aberdare is taking place with funding from Welsh Government through the European Regional Development Fund, Heads of the Valleys Programme and targeted Match Funds. The remainder comes through Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Cadw and the Private Sector.

The official stated aim is

1. To bring vacant buildings back into use and to fill gaps in the townscape to create continuity in the built fabric.
2. Establish the public realm as an integral part of the townscape
3. Create a legible hierarchy of the Town Centre public realm
4. Strengthen the pedestrian environment
5. Strengthen the role of Aberdare's great architecture
6. Emphasise the links into the countryside
7. Shop front improvements (this is offered through the THI from the Heritage Lottery Fund which offers financial support to business and property owners to make external and internal building improvements to enhance the quality of the premises and bring disused space back into use.

* HOWEVER. It is important to note that in this list Shop Front Improvements is the last item on the list and that item 4 which aims to strengthen the pedestrian environment can mean, in practise, banning more cars from using the town centre (in which travel our customers) and/or banishing parking spaces in the town centre to allow extra footfall. This can be counterproductive as people need to park in order to enjoy the pedestrianised area and they resent long trecks to and from paid parking lots.

It is anticipated that some buildings maybe altered to provide town accommodation – it will be important to ensure that there is adequate financial grant backup for such activity

We accept that there has to be mixed use for our Town Centres but essentially people come to town to shop – the most important “draw” to a town is a balanced mix of consumer goods in a variety of shops and good parking at a low cost or free in order to compete with the supermarkets who offer free parking on the doorstep.

There is no mention in the plan for Aberdare of the lack of a central Art based project which can engage culturally with the public and create jobs which we understand in other entire Town Centre projects has been considered a key element.

Any aim to enhance Town Centres has to take into account the current financial state of the economy, which is dire by any standard with the IMF warning of a very bleak two years AT LEAST to come and the fact that the Welsh manufacturing economy is in deep crisis (Western Mail Front page article and pages 4 and 5 on Tuesday 2 August), 2011 Without the means of generating extra cash into the spending economy any efforts to enhance Town Centres in Wales while supermarkets are allowed to continue their relentless onslaught will be useless.

Although the Heritage Lottery cash is supposed to allow for retailers to enhance their properties with substantial financial aid Aberdare Market have advised that the process is difficult and even officials are having difficulty in making sense of the forms and formats to access this cash; that clearly needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

Although WAG extended the Rates Relief, and that was to be applauded, there needs to be a realistic overhaul of the rating structure since the Town Centre is still paying rates at a premium on the now outdated premise that this is the best place to trade. With supermarkets hogging over 85% of food shopping and unashamedly boasting that they aim to stock everything under one roof, the Town Centres cannot be expected to pay rates at the current level. In early July 2011 BBC News told us that there had been a rise in food prices of 6% - supermarkets account for 85% of food retailing. This is a substantial increase in their margin which must act as a buffer, a luxury denied the High Street retailers.

There is a very real danger with the economy so deflated and likely to remain so for an extended period, that independent landlords will cut their losses and simply walk away from premises – we have an example in Aberdare and another in Mountain Ash (adjacent Town Centre) already where the Council have had to pay to have premises demolished. Not only will there no longer be any rates coming back into the public purse for these two premises, but this could easily become a pattern across Wales (and further afield) unless steps are taken to curb the power of the supermarkets.

This can be done through adjustments to the Planning Policy which will encourage Councils to be more thorough in processing the likely economic affects of major developments; i.e. rigorous evaluation of Impact Study Material.

. Aberdare & District Chamber of Trade & Commerce have shared discussion with the South Wales Chamber, to whom they are affiliated, on possible changes to Planning Policy which could lead to this better accountability. It is quite clear from the rate of vacancy in the High Streets that the current Planning Policy stating that “no new venture should affect the vitality and viability of an existing Town Centre “ is completely inadequate – it sounds good on paper but adherence to that by Planning Officers when considering new proposals does not take place. Suggest this document accompanies any responses and/or that we ask for the opportunity to put the case to the Sustainability Committee at Wales Assembly Government..

Our Secretary is on the Committee with the Federation of Small Business and we have sanctioned sharing of information from our organization which may help with their discussions.

NATIONALLY (Independent on Sunday pages 84 and 85 Sunday 25th September 2011) these are some of the problems facing the High Street.

The 30% or more falls in the number of independent grocers, butchers, bakeries and fishmongers is linked to the growth of supermarkets

Half of Town Centres now compete with five or more supermarkets within a two mile radius

Internet retailing account for 10 per cent of retail sales

11 per cent of empty shops are there for the long term

Worst towns have 40 per cent shops empty.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS (within the article)

National Planning Policy should retain a strong emphasis on town centres.

Reduce the amount of shops and change some to housing in Town Centres.

Reduce Business Rates in Town

Free Car Parking in Town.

This article examines Llanelli as an example of the way in which Town Centres are being actively undermined by some planning decisions. Wales has its own Planning Policy and does not have to wait for Westminster to wake up. We should seek to work with other interested bodies to get alterations to ensure better accountability.

In the Valley Town Centres there is no mileage in suggesting that niche marketing will work some magic to alleviate the situation as the area is impoverished and it is simple day to day living goods which people need to access – if and when we get better economic times and tourism can be extended that may alter but that is not in the foreseeable future.

In Aberdare there is a strong Chamber of Trade who speak on behalf of the retailers but although they attend the Town Centre Forum Meetings which are convened by Rhondda Cynon Taf they have been told they cannot discuss Planning. There needs to be some format found where such organizations can have access to Ministers and Officers at Welsh Assembly level in order to air concerns and put forward suggestions for improvement.

ANY SCHEME BY GOVERNMENT which seeks to clearly understand the concerns of any particular batch of people should start by notifying all groups who have stated concern on the topic as a first measure, then posting notification in newspapers, as well as posting notification on the websites of Assembly Members. It is our understanding that there have been gaps in the first element IN THIS PARTICULAR EXERCISE and that groups who have over many years expressed concern have not been notified. We trust that this is an oversight.

Our own Assembly Member, Christine Chapman has assured us that our observations will be added to incoming information on this vital topic. She has discussed the problem with us over a period in excess of fifteen years.

Up to date news.... Fareshare a charity dealing with distribution of food to poorer families has reported a 20% increase in uptake. They give statistics of three million tons of food wasted each year. This is a tangible declaration of a Nation going downhill – less to spend on the High Street.

Friday 14th BBC Wales News. It is estimated that a further 20,000 jobs could go within the next four years. Less spending power – more burden on the public purse.

On the day that Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England announced a further tranche of Quantitative Easing (£75 billion) in an interview with Stephanie Flanders it was made clear that it was not expected that this would find itself being spent on the High Street as it was intended to shore up public confidence in the City

Tesco's Philip- Clarke in a recent interview maintains that Tesco is seeing the first downturn in 20 years – a period of NO GROWTH with spending power lower than in 2005. If Tesco with all their enterprises is finding present retail circumstances that difficult it is imperative that some tough measures are instigated to protect the more vulnerable small scale retailers.

Justin King, Chief Exec of Sainsbury in a recent news interview reported weak growth . It was recognized that spending power was stalling.

We are attaching a précis of the Tonight programme for September where retail trends were part of the content on High Street Problems.

TONIGHT PROGRAMME SEPTEMBER ON ITV
HIGH STREET REVIVAL AND PROBLEMS

Programme claims that vacancy in the retail sector has trebled since 2008 with a quarter of all existing shops vacant in some towns.

This is very disturbing as the High Streets are not only the pillar of our cultural identity but generates £300 billion per annum employing 3 million people so this is of National importance.

With 25 shops closing per day it is noted that no one is immune and shops in the centre of cities are as affected as in towns.

When asked 49% of people said they were proud of their town centres but most were not interested

An Urgent Review is needed.

In 2008 Mary Portas was encouraged by Government to look at the problem – her report is due out this November.

When she started there was 15% vacancy rates – this has now escalated to 30%

She surveyed 365 towns and found 83 in a distinct downhill spiral

In Blackpool 27% of shops are empty (even with their tourism aspect)

In many towns there are now £1 shops, pawnbrokers, charity shops and bookies where once there was a full mix of retail experience.

Rotherham was highlighted with significant problems – it has Meadow Hall a huge supermall only four miles away which boasts 25 million shoppers per annum and a smaller mall even nearer

Parking in the town centre costs £2.50p for two hours – a huge disincentive.

Planners feel pressurised by supermarkets often being offered planning gain.

The Council have instigated a scheme which offers grants to open shops investing £178 million in such start up schemes but footfall is still dismal.

High rents and rates on the High Street are also to blame for the demise
13% of rents continue to rise despite the downturn.

Biggest threat to the High Street is the Internet – it already accounts for £60 billion sales annually

And is still growing – it currently accounts for 10% of all sales and could double in a year to become a VIRTUAL HIGH STREET

SKIPTON A TOWN WHICH HAS BUCKED THE TREND HAS A GOOD BALANCE OF SHOPS BIG AND SMALL - they have an Ambassador scheme to ensure tourists feel comfortable and welcome in their town but, significantly, the nearest supermarket is thirty miles away.

British Independent Retailers underline that encouragement is needed.

Mary Portas will underline in her report that free parking and lower rents should be considered and empty shops brought back into use.

The uniqueness of each town is important and she suggests that bigger retailers |MAY support smaller outlets.

RETAIL INFORMATION NOVEMBER 2009

Retail information combining current news reports and Federation for Small Business
Information on line within Manifesto material
Recorded to inform the debate on
WELSH DIMENSION OF HIGH STREET PROBLEMS.

Background fact. WALES HAS SEPARATE PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE
BECAUSE IT IS RECOGNISED THAT IT HAS DIFFERENT NEEDS TO
ENGLAND .

I M P O R T A N T!!!! THOSE DIFFERENCES ARE CLEARLY REFLECTED
IN FSB STUDIES WITHIN KEEP TRADE LOCAL MATERIAL by FSB

ALL DECISIONS ACROSS WALES ARE CURRENTLY BEING MADE
AGAINST FOLLOWING UPDATED INFORMATION ON THE ECONOMY.

Information from newnight and news BBC Stephanie Flanders.
JOBS CRISIS Aug to November 2009-11-08
Current recession longest in modern times
Mervyn King, Governor of Bank of England warns of VERY LONG SLOW recovery.
Recovery has now SLOWLY started

Jobs lost 8,5 manufacturing jobs
Retailing 7% down likely to be 15% by 2009 December
Small independents hit very hard
Begg question what will happen when public sector schemes
dry up ?

23rd October 2009 BBC News; economy continuing to shrink with
10% of workforce out of work

IMPORTANT WARNING. Recent News report The Times warns that between 12%
and 15% of out of town sites are now empty and developers are pressuring for the
restrictions on use which pertained when the original plans were passed to be lifted to
allow for cut price shopping in direct competition with the High Street shops.
BBC News 28TH Oct 2009 We are the only country still in recession the VAT cuts are
about to be lifted putting pressure back on small businesses. There is pressure for
manufacturing to get more support.

11th November 2009 BBC NEWS WALES.

Half of job losses are from Wales.

14,000 extra job losses between July and September this year

In total now 125,000 out of work

At Budget update in Pontypridd NOVEMBER 2009 Aberdare Chamber of Trade are told WITHIN A PRESENTATION FOR THE BENEFITS DEPARTMENT that figures to date this year show a 30% increase in those claiming benefit. This suggests that approx 30% of customers will now have less to spend in the High Streets of RCT.

.SIGNIFICANTLY FSB PROCUREMENT MANUAL STATES THAT 8.3PENCE OF EVERY POUND SPENT WITH A LOCAL BUSINESS GOES BACK INTO THE LOCAL ECONOMY and they are seeking ways to simplify the route for small businesses to secure more of the public procurement budget..

Federation for Small Businesses are fighting hard to get the Government to drop business rateable values ;.they have had limited success to date but continue to pressure. The Keep Trade Local Campaign “seeks to unite communities, businesses and residents associations, across the Country that find themselves under threat from the range of problems currently driving small independent retailers out of our High Streets.”

INFORMATION FROM FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES KEEP TRADE LOCAL. MARCH 2008 Overall membership figures of 215,000

FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES

MEMORANDUM TO HOUSE OF COMMONS.



Says...

KEEP TRADE LOCAL

Keep trade Local campaign

Post Offices survey material.

Accountancy firm BDO Stoy-Haywood say

120 small firms shutting per day

Same report STATISTICS TAKEN FROM POINT 47 An FSB Survey on line for two weeks February 2009-11-09 brought replies from 5,500 members which showed that 72.8% of respondents were micro-businesses with 0 to 4 employees.

INFORMATION FROM THE PLANNING AGENDA FSB

One third of small businesses – 31% are home based

One quarter of small businesses - 23% based in retail shop unit

22% of small businesses are in Town Centres

14% are from village centres

IN GENERAL TERMS A VERY LARGE MAJORITY OF SMALL BUSINESSES SERVE MARKETS IN THEIR LOCAL AREA AND ARE CLOSELY DEPENDENT ON THEIR LOCAL MARKET FOR A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF THEIR ANNUAL SALE.

WELSH CHARACTERISTICS

Businesses in Wales are MORE LIKELY TO DEPEND ON LOCAL AREA MARKETS FOR A MAJORITY OF THEIR ANNUAL SALES than for the U.K. as a whole.

THE HIGH STREET SHOPS DESERVE A BETTER CRACK
OF THE WHIP
THE FEDERATION FOR SMALL BUSINESSES IS STRATEGICALLY
PLACED TO ENSURE THAT HAPPENS

REGENERATION AND MANUFACTURING

16th Oct. 2011

The regeneration of the High Streets relies MAINLY ON THE ABILITY OF THE PUBLIC TO SPEND MONEY IN THE SHOPS.

Western Mail. Business page 5 on Wednesday 23th October, 2011 headlines –
MANUFACTURING SHRINKS AMID FEARS OF ECONOMY STAGNATION.

Without the wealth creating sector in better health we cannot expect significant regeneration of the retail sector in the Town Centres.

WE URGE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE THIS MATTER VERY SERIOUSLY.

We note that the article underneath has headlines saying that Sainsbury plans to create 50,000 jobs.

Any expansion of supermarkets at this stage will, naturally erode the ability of the High Streets to regenerate and make investment through Government in regeneration practically useless.