

# Public Document Pack

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### CABINET

**TUESDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2023**

### **SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA**

Please find attached supplementary papers relating to the above meeting, as follows:

<b>Agenda No</b>	<b>Item</b>
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- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 12. | <b><u>HITCHIN, LETCHWORTH AND ROYSTON BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) RENEWALS</u></b> (Pages 3 - 96) |
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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

To obtain Cabinet's endorsement of proposals to progress to renewal ballots for the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) for Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston.

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<b>CABINET</b> <b>19 SEPTEMBER 2023</b>
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<b>PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT</b>
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TITLE OF REPORT: Hitchin, Letchworth, and Royston Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) Renewal

REPORT OF: The Economic Development Officer

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Keith Hoskins – Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts

COUNCIL PRIORITY: A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 To obtain Cabinet's endorsement of proposals to progress to renewal ballots for the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) for Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Cabinet:

- 2.1. Consider the BID renewal proposals for Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston, appended in A, B and C and instructs the Returning Officer to hold the BID renewal Ballots;
- 2.2. Delegate the Council's voting rights in the BID renewal process to the Service Director – Customers.

## **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. The Council is under a legal duty to comply with the BID arrangements under section 44 of the Local Government Act 2003 ("the Act"). This includes compliance with the Act and The Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004 (as amended) ("the Regulations") in respect of receipt of any BID renewal.

## **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 Given the legal requirements to consider BID proposals under the Regulations, none is considered appropriate.

## **5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- 5.1. Consultation has been undertaken by the respective BID Managers, steering groups and their member bodies, business representatives and town centre retailers.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report contains recommendations on a key decision which was added to the Forward Plan on 10th June 2023.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1. The concept of BIDS was introduced through Part IV of the Act and is further governed by The Regulations 2004/2443. The legislation provides for BID proposals to be made to a relevant Billing authority and, subject to meeting certain Regulation requirements<sup>1</sup>, for this to be put to a ballot of relevant non-domestic ratepayers to be liable for the BID levy described in the BID proposals on the establishment or renewal of a BID, within a defined business area.
- 7.2. The BID, once established or renewed, has the power to levy an additional charge on Business Rate Payers within that BID area for the purpose of funding projects within the BID area. The purpose of the funding must be set out in the BID Proposal, which is to include a 'business plan', consultation (with those who are liable to the proposed BID levy), the financial management arrangements for the BID body, and arrangements for periodically providing the relevant billing authority with information on the finances of the BID.
- 7.3. For the purposes of BID proposals (including renewals) Members are asked to note that there are three relevant organisations/people that are required to fulfil certain roles and responsibilities in relation to the BID application. These organisations/people are as follows:
1. The BID Proposer;
  2. The Billing Authority;
  3. The Ballot Holder.
- 7.4. The BID Proposer is obliged to draw up the BID proposal, the Billing Authority is obliged to consider the proposal and determine whether the BID proposal is in conflict with any of its policies and the Ballot Holder is (subject to compliance with Regulation requirements) obliged to run a ballot process in which all of the business ratepayers within the BID proposal area (as at the date the notice of ballot is published) are entitled vote.
- 7.5. Within the attached 2023 proposals for Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston BID renewals, the current BID companies are the BID Proposer, the Council is the Billing Authority and the Council's Returning Officer in respect of elections is the Ballot Holder.
- 7.6. The Authority's support in helping to sustain and continue BIDs within its towns is seen as very positive and whilst it increases costs to businesses marginally, the benefits to the local business community are immeasurable. The ongoing work and support of the BIDs have also contributed significantly to an increase in footfall within the towns and provide a wealth of events that boost social value within the District.

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<sup>1</sup> Regulations 4, 5 & Schedule 1 Proposal sent to the relevant Billing Authority (consultation, business plan and financial management arrangements, and notice in writing requesting the Billing Authority to instruct the Ballot Holder to hold the BID ballot, evidence of sufficiency of funds



- 7.7. The Council, as the Billing Authority, must be satisfied that the projects detailed in each of the BID proposals are not in conflict with its own adopted objectives or existing strategies, rather than to carry out a detailed analysis of the whole 'business plan' document. Earlier sample and draft versions of the proposal documents appended at A, B and C were received by the Council from the Royston BID on 16th July 2023 and forwarded onto the relevant Service Directors and Managers. The Letchworth and Hitchin BID Outline Proposals were received on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> August 2023 respectively and subsequently circulated. Therefore, it is important to note that there has been limited time to consider these latter proposals. Cabinet will be updated with any comments at the meeting, where applicable.
- 7.8. Officers from all relevant services have reviewed and provided comment in regard to the alignment of aspirations to existing strategies and for future proposals.
- 7.9. Where a Billing Authority is of the view that the BID renewal proposals conflict with a policy formally adopted by and contained in a document published by the Authority, it shall, as soon as reasonably practicable after receiving the proposals, notify the BID proposer or BID body in writing explaining the nature of that conflict<sup>2</sup>. There is also a potential ability for the Billing Authority to veto any proposal but only under specific statutory circumstances set out in the Act and Regulations.
- 7.10. There is general agreement that the proposals and business plans attached as Appendices A, B and C are in accordance with both existing and known planned works for all three towns.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1. The Council is required to demonstrate a significant degree of involvement in this process, and across a range of its services, with the following responsibilities:
- a. Each BID Proposal that complies with the Regulations must be considered by the Billing Authority to ensure that it is not in direct conflict with any of the Council's own adopted policies.
  - b. The BID Proposals are to be self-funding, i.e. paid for from the levy as collected, and may include paying for enhancements (the 'additionality' element) to services already provided by the Council.
  - c. Government Guidance<sup>3</sup> suggests that the most successful BIDs were those who have established close and positive engagement with the local authority, and the Government appears to encourage this using Service Level or Baseline Agreements between the Council and the BID Organisations (although at this stage it is not mandatory). Such Agreements, if formalised, would also recognise and monitor the 'additionality' the BID funding brings over the five year BID term. Baseline Agreements are currently being considered by the NHC Legal Department.
  - d. The Billing Authority is required to instruct the Returning Officer to conduct the ballot, with one vote assigned per business rate payer unit, subject to any exemptions that the BID companies agree, within the defined area of their BIDs.

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<sup>2</sup> Regulation 4(4) of the Regulations

<sup>3</sup> DCLG Business Improvement Districts Guidance And Best Practice March 2015 DCLG Business Improvement Districts Guidance And Best Practice March 2015

- e. The Billing Authority has the right of Veto under s51 of the Act and Regulation 12 after the ballot if it conflicts with Policy adopted by the Authority; or would bring significant disproportionate financial burden.
- f. If the BID proposals are approved by the relevant business rates payers (see below and legal implications), the Billing Authority must bill, collect, enforce, and account for the BID Levy. Under the Regulations, the Council can charge for elements of this service but has opted not to do so for the existing BIDs; the same principles will apply to this renewal. (See financial implications below).
- g. The only entities exempt from the BID Levy are public libraries, religious organisations, public toilets, magistrates' courts, individual single parking spaces, communication masts, advertising hoardings and Police/fire/ambulance stations.
- h. For the Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, and Royston BID renewals, NHC is of course entitled to vote and would continue to pay additional charges for its own car parks; for property which the Council leases out within each of the BID boundaries, it is for lessees to pay the additional charge.
- i. Charitable organisations will not be exempt from the BID Levy, unless they can demonstrate that their presence in each town is by way of 'head office' or direct delivery, i.e. the giving of information or physical support, rather than as a 'trading' or commercial entity – such as a charity shop.

8.2. The Bid ballot can only succeed if it can meet two tests (a and b) which are;

- a. A simple majority of those who vote must register a 'Yes' AND
- b. The aggregate of the rateable value of those that vote 'Yes' must be greater than that of those that vote 'No'

These are not exclusive since both tests must be achieved. The system is intended to ensure that there is a degree of parity in a town centre populated by larger multi-nationals and smaller, specialist shops.

The BID ballot is statutory and binding and will apply to all businesses inside the BID areas regardless of whether they intend to vote and how they might vote. The ballot is a postal ballot and this time the whole process has been outsourced to an external company, Civica.

- 8.3. The Council's Revenues Team has reviewed the proposed BID areas contained within the business plans and has been able to identify the commercial properties which lie within each of the respective the BID area, and their rateable value. A review of the contact for each business has also been undertaken by the BIDs to ascertain the appropriate person to whom the ballot paper will be addressed, and the vote cast on behalf of their company, as many businesses have changed hands during the past five years.
- 8.4. Maps denoting the BID areas are included within the proposals documents as Appendices A, B and C to this report.
- 8.5. The BIDs renewal proposal and business plans are attached at Appendices A, B and C.

8.6. Hitchin BID Renewal – Summary of Vision and Objectives

**“VIBRANT**

**SUMMER DISPLAYS**

We will organise a wide variety of floral displays across the town centre and erect the bunting during the summer season in various locations.

**WINTER DISPLAYS**

We will organise the town centre festive lighting displays and Christmas tree in the Market Place. The 25 static floral displays will be replanted and maintained over the winter months.

**TOWN CENTRE EVENTS**

We will enhance and adapt the town centre annual events programme. Focusing on business support and footfall to maximise the benefit to the local business community.

**TRAILS AND ACTIVITIES**

Looking at the wider town centre, we will deliver a number of trails and family friendly activities to spread footfall and highlight businesses on the periphery of the Hitchin BID area.

**CLEAN AND SAFE**

**THE DAY RANGER TEAM**

The Rangers undertake vital work behind the scenes to ensure the town centre remains a clean and safe environment for businesses and visitors to enjoy. They operate 6 days a week working with a wide variety of local businesses. The Rangers are one of the most valued assets which we will be continuing into the new 5-year BID term.

**NIGHT RANGERS**

The BID will continue to fund the Night Rangers on Friday and Saturday nights from 10pm to 3am. They play an important role in public realm security as well as assisting the public and reporting issues.

**OUR CLEANER TOWN**

We will continue to remove graffiti using specialist equipment as well as taking down flyposting. There will be chewing gum and deep cleaning carried out in the main streets in the town centre and new initiatives introduced such as the cigarette ballot bins.

## **CRIME REDUCTION**

The BID will continue to work alongside the Police and Councils to reduce crime. We will facilitate PubWatch, the ShopWatch WhatsApp group and continue to offer businesses radio links. Our extended CCTV and the anti-shoplifting measures undertaken by the BID will ensure Hitchin remains a safe place for the day and evening economy.

## **PROMOTED**

### **HITCHIN INFORMATION**

The Information Centre is a valued asset in our community. It provides a place for local residents to obtain information, Hitchin gifts and tickets. The BID will work alongside Hitchin Initiative to jointly fund its existence.

### **TOWN TOURISM**

Using the newly developed Destination Management Plan, the BID will continue to strategically promote Hitchin as a destination. We will work on raising the profile of the town and develop the experience economy.

### **PUBLICATIONS & PROMOTIONS**

The BID will continue to produce publications to promote the town centre, its businesses and attractions. We will maintain the lamppost banner flags and work on new promotions activities.

### **ONLINE PROMOTION**

We will continue to develop the towns online presence through the new VisitHitchin website, online advertising and social media activities.

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT**

### **CARDBOARD & COFFEE RECYCLING SCHEME**

We will continue to provide all businesses with free cardboard, paper and coffee grounds recycling using our dedicated Recycling Ranger team. Our Rangers collect from over 200 businesses per week and recycle over 300 tons of cardboard and coffee per year.

### **H-TOWN POUNDS**

The BID will continue to support the H-Town Pounds scheme which is aimed at promoting local spend in over 80 independent businesses.

### **BUSINESS REPRESENTATION**

We will remain the collective business voice on key issues. The BID will lobby for and represent business ensuring Hitchin gets the investment and backing it needs.

## HITCHIN REGENERATION

The BID will form a new group to look at short and long-term projects in the town as well as new income streams. This will allow an expansion of the projects we deliver as well as new investment opportunities and improvements.

## TRAINING OUR TOWN

The BID will deliver a series of statutory and marketing training to equip businesses with the skills and knowledge to thrive and prosper.

### 8.7 Letchworth GC BID Renewal – Summary of Vision and Objectives

#### **Aims and Objectives – 2024 – 2029.**

The proposal is to keep the 3 broad objectives for the next 5 years, with different underpinning aims. The main focus of the aims is to concentrate on those that the BID has direct responsibility for but also some that the BID can influence by working with partners.

The 3 objectives are:

- **Lively and well promoted.** – *To create a place which is lively and has a strong sense of identity and awareness.*
- **Welcoming, attractive and accessible.** – *To provide a welcoming, attractive and easily accessible environment for customers, visitors, workers and residents to explore and enjoy.*
- **Businesses working together.** – *To represent the collective voice of businesses in the town centre to ensure that it continues to develop into a great place to do business and meets the needs of those who visit, live, work or do business in Letchworth.*

#### **Objective 1 – Lively and Well promoted.**

- Annual calendar of events.
- Regular campaigns and street entertainment.
- Develop shop local promotional opportunities and loyalty schemes.
- Increase awareness of Letchworth as a business destination, including events, shopping experience and visitor attractions.
- Work with others to define and promote the brands of Letchworth and Love Letchworth.
- Work with others to develop the night-time economy.

Performance Indicators.

- *Footfall data.*
- *Regular surveys.*
- *Social media feedback.*
- *Event attendance numbers and feedback.*
- *Website analytics.*
- *Number of businesses actively involved in BID activity.*

- *Loyalty scheme sign ups.*
- *Car park statistics.*

### **Objective 2 – Welcoming, attractive, and accessible.**

- Ensure that the BID planters are of the highest quality.
- Lead a partnership group responsibility for the remaining town centre planters.
- Lead on a town centre crime and anti-social behaviour group.
- Be a central partner in the Town Centre Recovery group and associated planning group to improve signage, car parking opportunities and shop fronts.
- Work with landlords and their agents to improve the shop fronts and reduce shop vacancies.

#### **Performance Indicators.**

- *Survey and general feedback for planters and the general street scene.*
- *Monthly crime and ASB data.*
- *Survey data and statistics from car parking data.*

### **Objective 3 – Businesses working together.**

- Development of the web site and social media outlets to promote Letchworth and the BID businesses.
- To run regular shop local campaigns and events to improve the business opportunities.
- Develop further communication opportunities with and between businesses e.g. social media, newsletters, networking meetings.
- Offer a wide selection of courses for BID businesses to improve their business capabilities.
- Develop and manage projects to reduce business overheads and promote sustainability. E.g. cardboard recycling.
- Encourage and support 3<sup>rd</sup> party events and campaigns managed by BID businesses.
- Work with landlords to encourage and influence them to maintain and improve shop fronts and fill vacant premises.

#### **Performance Indicators.**

- *Website and social media analytics.*
- *Footfall data.*
- *Shop vacancy levels.*
- *Business and customer surveys.*
- *Networking meeting attendance figures.*

## **8.8 Royston BID Renewal – Summary of Vision and Objectives**

The Royston BID Plans to continue their activities such as :

- Free after 3 parking,
- Christmas and other street decorations
- Street Deep Cleaning and pigeon proofing of streets

And augment them with:

- More Summer decorations and events
- Digital Signage with free advertising for local businesses
- Footfall and other localised statistics to help businesses make decisions
- Signage in the Industrial Area
- Shop Safe App for consumers
- Youth Employment Scheme
- Training programmes for business
- Police Partnership
- Quarterly Member Networking Events
- Sponsorship of local organisations and events
- Royston First Business Awards Scheme

8.9 The BID proposals in their current format have been agreed by the respective BID Steering groups, and therefore the intention is that they will ultimately form the document on which votes will be sought.

8.10 Each BID has proposed the geographic area it wishes the BID to cover for the next 5-year term:

8.10.1. Hitchin BID have proposed an expansion of the BID area to cover the current BID geography and the areas of Butts Close and Walsworth Road to the Verulam Rd / Highbury Rd Roundabout.

8.10.2. Letchworth Garden City BID wish retain the current BID geography.

8.10.3. Royston BID propose to retain the existing BID geography less the area to the north-east of Melbourn St and Kneesworth St/Lower King St.

8.10.4. Each BID Proposal must define the percentage of rateable value to be used to calculate the BID Levy.

8.10.5. Hitchin's existing BID levy is currently set at 1.85% plus inflation. It is proposed that as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, the levy will increase to 2.2%. Businesses newly incorporated in the BID area will be on 1.5% and 1 business on Queen Street will remain on 1.2% which equates to an annual amount of £260k.

8.10.6. Letchworth's existing BID levy is currently set at 2.0% plus inflation. It is proposed that the levy remains at 2% plus inflation for the next 5-year period. This equates to annual income of £204k in Year 1 of the next 5-year period.

8.10.7. Royston's existing BID levy is currently set at 1.5% plus inflation. It is proposed that the levy will increase to 1.75% for the next 5-year period which equates to an annual amount of £229k.

9 **TIMETABLE FOR BID RENEWAL** - The Regulations underpinning the development of Business Improvements (statutory instrument – Business Improvement Districts 2004 – No 244) lay down a very specific timetable for progressing to ballot.

9.1. At least 84 days before the Day of Ballot - Notice given in writing, by the BID proposer to the billing authority (NHDC) and the Secretary of State of the intention to request a ballot.

9.2. NHDC Cabinet to consider progress to Ballot.

- 9.3. Publication of Notice of Ballot (At least 42 days before day of ballot). This will be posted on NHDC's website and mailed to all eligible voters by Civica.
- 9.4. Eligible voters will also be sent a request to confirm their voter details and an application form to appoint a proxy if they wish.
- 9.5. Ballot packs issued to hereditaments entitled 28 days prior to day of Ballot.
- 9.6. Last date for proxy appointment 10 days prior to day of Ballot.
- 9.7. Issue of replacements after 5pm on 4<sup>th</sup> day before day of Ballot.
- 9.8. Day of ballot (day 28 of the ballot period)
- 9.9. Any last-minute sealed votes not posted to Civica by day of ballot can be handed in at the Council Offices, North Hertfordshire District Council, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 3JF up until 5.00pm on the third last working day before the relevant Ballot Day. These will be verified and sent onto Civica for inclusion.
- 9.10. Declaration and Results Announced the working day after Ballot Day.
- 9.11. Exact timetables of each BID can be found within the attached Appendix D.

## **10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 BID arrangements are not to come into force unless proposals for the arrangements are approved by a ballot of the non-domestic ratepayers in the proposed BID are that are subject to the levy, having followed the provisions in the Regulations, as per section 49, and section 54 of the Act. The BID approvals are then not regarded as approved by a ballot unless (1) the majority of persons voting in the ballot have voted in favour of the BID proposals; and (2) the aggregate of the rateable values of each hereditament in respect of which a person voting in the ballot has voted in favour of the BID proposals exceed those in the same positing voting against the proposal; as per section 50 of the Act.
- 10.2 The Billing Authority is required by law to conduct the renewal Ballot and to administer the BID billing, collection, enforcement and accounting if the ballot is successful, in accordance with Part IV of the Local Government Act 2003 (The Act). This is further governed by the Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004 (The Regulations).
- 10.3 Regulations 4, 5 and Schedule 1 set out what a BID proposal must include. The Regulations state that a valid BID proposal, including renewal, must contain the following information:-
  - 10.3.1 a statement of the works or services to be provided, the name of who will provide them (the name of the BID body) and the type of body the provider is (whether a local authority, a company under the control of the authority, a limited company or a partnership);
  - 10.3.2 a statement of the existing baseline services (if any) provided by the relevant billing authority or other public authority;



- 10.3.3 a description of the geographical area (including a map showing that area) in which the proposed BID arrangements are to have effect;
  - 10.3.4 a statement of whether all non-domestic ratepayers in the geographical area or specified class of them are to be liable to the BID levy, an explanation of how the amount of the BID levy to be levied is to be calculated and an explanation of whether any of the costs incurred in developing the BID proposals, holding of the ballot or implementing the BID are to be recovered through the BID levy;
  - 10.3.5 a statement of the specified class of non-domestic ratepayer (if any) for which and the level at which any relief from the BID levy is to apply;
  - 10.3.6 a statement of whether the BID arrangements may be altered without an alteration ballot and, if so, which aspects of the BID arrangements may be altered in this way;
  - 10.3.7 a statement of the duration of the BID arrangements; and a statement of the commencement date of the BID arrangements.
- 10.4 As indicated in the report, the Act and Regulations also require a Billing Authority, to determine whether BID proposals conflict with a policy formally adopted by and contained in a document published by the authority (whether or not the authority is under a statutory duty to prepare such document).
- 10.5 The Council, as Billing Authority, may in prescribed circumstances, veto the proposals within such period from the date of the ballot, and must give notice to those entitled to vote in the ballot, detailing reasons and right of the appeal (and sent a copy of the notice to the Secretary of State), as per the requirements of section 51 of the Act. The Billing Authority can only do so, having considered a number of factors (including although not limited to level of support in the ballot), if the BID arrangements are likely to:
- 10.5.1 (a) to conflict to a material extent with any policy formally adopted by and contained in a document published by the authority (whether or not the authority is under a statutory duty to prepare such document); or
  - 10.5.2 (b) to be a significantly disproportionate financial burden on any person or class of persons (as compared to the other non-domestic ratepayers in the geographical area of the BID) and–
  - 10.5.3 (i) that burden is caused by the manipulation of the geographical area of the BID or by the structure of the BID levy; and
  - 10.5.4 (ii) that burden is inequitable.
- 10.6 The Council is entitled to vote in the ballot relating to the attached BIDs renewals proposal. In the past this was the previous Service Director for Customers, and it is recommended that this delegation be renewed as per recommendation 2.3.
- 10.7 Otherwise, the legal requirements are contained within the body of the report.

## **11 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The Council's additional financial responsibilities fall into four categories;
- The cost of running / outsourcing the ballot
  - Administration costs
  - The cost of the council's own BID levy on its town centre premises and land holdings
  - Any additional costs incurred by agreed additional works of the Authority in regard to events and car parking etc.

- 11.2 All expenditure incurred by the Returning Officer in relation to holding the BID ballots are funded by the Council as the relevant billing authority.
- 11.3 Where the number of persons voting in the ballot who have voted in favour of the ballot is less than 20% of the number of persons entitled to vote and:
- the proposals are not approved in the ballot; or
  - the Secretary of State issues a notice declaring the ballot void
- The Council may require the BID proposer or the BID body to pay the costs for arranging and holding the ballot (this includes the expenses properly incurred by the Returning Officer). The Council may recover this amount as a civil debt due to it.
- 11.4 The Returning Officer may appoint by writing one or more persons to discharge all or any of their functions relating to the running of a BID election. It is common for the delivery of BID ballots to be sub-contracted to an external supplier with suitable expertise rather than delivered through the local authority's Electoral Services Team.
- 11.5 Civica Election Services (CES) have been given delegated authority to discharge functions connected with the BID ballots and have quoted the following (excluding VAT): Hitchin (£5,660), Letchworth (£3,920) and Royston (£2,735). This is not the definite amount as there are variables that will affect the final costs which are not yet known such as the number of eligible hereditaments to be balloted, the number of ballots returned (as this is a postal ballot only), outgoing postage impacted by the size/weight of the BID document, set up costs for the design of the BID documents.
- 11.6 In addition, were either of the Ballots to vote for rejection, where the turnout is less than 20%. In this instance, the Council can seek to recover its costs from the BID organisation. The BID Board have been made aware of this small risk and understand that sufficient budget will be set aside as a contingency were this to be the case.
- 11.7 The annual administrative costs per property are de-minimus as this is largely an automated process, which is already being carried out for the three existing BID areas.
- 11.8 As the Council itself pays business rates, it will also have a liability to pay the BID Levy for those properties in which it is in rateable occupation, as it does now. Under the current BID arrangements this equates to:
- £6,961 pa re Hitchin BID
  - £6,545 pa re Letchworth BID
  - £1,905 pa re Royston BID
- The Council's liability under the renewal proposals will be advised at the meeting.
- 11.9 The BID Business Plans refer to the respective BID activities / proposals which if progressed during the new BID term will be in addition to the existing services provided by NHC, not a replacement. The Council also needs to satisfy itself that the BID activities as proposed do not rely in any part on additional services or contributions from NHC (other than the BID levy) over and above resources already committed.

## **12. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 Should the recommendations be approved, as the Council bears no additional financial responsibility for any debts, and the final decision to progress to ballot is that of the BID organisation, the main risk remaining for the authority is that it may be perceived this is an additional sum levied by and retained by the Council, especially so in times of austerity. It must therefore be explicit in promotional material that whilst the Council is responsible for collection, it is not responsible for spending and that all of the money collected passes to the BID company.
- 12.2 Each year, Officers review the risks relating to the Council's involvement in all three BIDs, via the Risk Register. Currently, Officers have assessed the BIDs as being low risk in respect of both impact and likelihood.

## **13. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 13.2 The areas over which the BID companies seek to levy this additional rate is determined by them in consultation with local businesses, and does include all sizes and types of businesses, from multi-nationals to sole traders. The exclusion of certain premises, including those used for faith purposes, removes any additional burden which could be incurred by them, especially as it is questionable what additional benefits they could secure by additional footfall or use of the town in the evening. The BID initiatives seek to indirectly support the aim to foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those that do not.

## **14. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 12.

## **15. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the activities of this report.

## **16. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 16.1 Relevant service areas have been made aware of the intention for all three BIDs of to seek renewal of their existing BID arrangements and have made relevant arrangements to resource review of the business plans, and for outsource the running of the postal ballot itself, as not to conflict with other work commitments.

## **17. APPENDICES**

17.1 This report contains the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Hitchin BID Renewal Business Plan 2024 - 2029
- Appendix B – Letchworth BID Renewal Proposal & Business Plan 2024 – 2029
- Appendix C – Royston BID Renewal Proposal & Business Plan 2024 - 2029

## **18. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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Mel Stimpson, Electoral Services Manager  
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Steven Cobb, Licensing and Community Safety Manager  
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Mark Scanes, Systems & Technical Manager  
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Email: [mark.scanes@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:mark.scanes@north-herts.gov.uk)

## **19. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 19.1 The Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004 & DCLG Business Improvement Districts Guidance And Best Practice March 2015  
[Business Improvement Districts: guidance and best practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/43421/BID_Guidance_and_Best_Practice_March_2015.pdf)

## Appendices

### A Hitchin BID Draft Prospectus



Business Plan  
2024-29 - Final Aug 2

### B Letchworth Garden City BID Draft Prospectus



Business Plan 2023  
V2.0.pdf

### C Royston BID Draft prospectus



Royston First  
Business Plan 2023 6.

## D Election Timetable

Royston have chosen 2<sup>nd</sup> November – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 as their Ballot Period. The timetables is as follows:

Day	Action	Date
44	Suggested Despatch of Notification of Ballot	Tuesday 17 October 2023
42	<i>Statutory (Latest) Date: Notification of Ballot</i>	<i>Thursday 19 October 2023</i>
30	Suggested Despatch of ballot papers	Tuesday 31 October 2023
28	<i>Statutory (Latest) Date: Despatch of Ballot Papers</i>	<i>Thursday 2 November 2023</i>
10	Latest Date to Appoint Proxy	Monday 20 November 2023
5	Latest Date to Cancel Proxy	Saturday 25 November 2023
4	Issue Of Replacements	Friday 24 November 2023
0	Close of Ballot	Thursday 30 November 2023
-1	Issue of Result by 5pm	Friday 1 December 2023

Hitchin and Letchworth have chosen 9<sup>th</sup> November - 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023 as their Ballot Period. The timetables are as follows:

Day	Action	Date
44	Suggested Despatch of Notification of Ballot	Tuesday 24 October 2023
42	<i>Statutory (Latest) Date: Notification of Ballot</i>	<i>Thursday 26 October 2023</i>
30	Suggested Despatch of ballot papers	Tuesday 7 November 2023
28	<i>Statutory (Latest) Date: Despatch of Ballot Papers</i>	<i>Thursday 9 November 2023</i>
10	Latest Date to Appoint Proxy	Monday 27 November 2023

5	Latest Date to Cancel Proxy	Saturday 2 December 2023
4	Issue Of Replacements	Friday 1 December 2023
0	Close of Ballot	Thursday 7 December 2023
-1	Issue of Result by 5pm	Friday 8 December 2023



# **HITCHIN BID BUSINESS PLAN**

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## **2024-2029**



# OUR TOWN

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I was so impressed by the work Hitchin BID did in the town and the difference it made to so many aspects of the town, I became a director in 2018 and am now subsequently Chairman. It benefits the town and businesses in so many ways and on so many levels. You only have to walk through the town and see the incredible flower displays in the spring and summer courtesy of Hitchin BID.

Visitors and residents alike receive a warm welcome as they enter the town from the banners (found on many lampposts) highlighting Hitchin's art and attractions. This complements litter free streets and the BID Rangers providing business services, organising events, and providing security services day and night.

Of course no one can miss the Christmas tree, Christmas Light displays and timetable of incredible events all year round; from Eat Alfresco, to food festivals, ghost tours, the French market and a plethora of events to suit all ages, Hitchin has now become one of the most popular towns to visit, even boasting a town centre beach with real sand in the heart of the summer months. This was reflected in the 2019 Great British High Street Awards where Hitchin was a finalist. This truly evidenced the great work Hitchin BID do and was a great moment for the town.

All of this and so much more can be found on our brand new VisitHitchin.com website which tells you all you need to know about this beautiful market town and whatever you want to do or find out you'll find the answers there. Our town centre office and Information Centre has become invaluable to Hitchin businesses, individuals, and visitors to the town who require information on "everything Hitchin"

On top of this we work in tandem with the Council on many ongoing initiatives, all to benefit Hitchin businesses and visitors. Our work doesn't go unnoticed, evidenced by an invitation to the "Best Towns Awards 2023" hosted at Westminster Palace, where we reached the finals and missed out on the main award by a whisker.

Hitchin BID went above and beyond during the pandemic with many echoing their feelings of warmth and gratitude. I firmly believe we offer incredible value to the town businesses that are currently going from strength to strength and the town would be immeasurably worse off without it.

I urge my fellow businesses to continue supporting the excellent work undertaken by Hitchin BID and Vote Yes to secure a further 5-years!



**Mark Shields**  
Chairman Hitchin BID

**Remember, Hitchin BID is led by businesses for businesses,  
it is owned and operated by you, for you.**



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- 4 Your BID
- 4 The new Visit Hitchin brand
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Hitchin **BID**



# YOUR BID

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**Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) is an independent organisation working to sustain and improve the economic vibrancy of the town centre. This is your chance to benefit from a £1.6 million investment in key projects for Hitchin Town Centre.**

For the last fifteen years, Hitchin has enjoyed the benefits of a Business Improvement District (BID) through which almost four and a half million pounds of additional investment has been spent in our town. This has paid for substantial improvements and projects that have made a tangible positive difference to the cleanliness, vibrancy and safety of the town centre.

However, nothing is forever, and the BID is a fixed-term arrangement, working its way through the fifth and final year of its third term right now. If we do nothing, the BID will end on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 and everything will grind to a halt and then disappear. No Rangers, no cardboard and waste recycling collections, a reduced security presence, no night rangers, no community events, no Christmas lights, no floral displays, the list is substantial.

Of course it doesn't have to be like this. You can renew the BID's term for a further five years, continue the great activities we have all become so used to, and do more on top too!

We already know two-thirds of you want to see the Hitchin BID renewed for a further five years. The following pages detail why and how. Hopefully the few businesses that are undecided or unsure will be reassured by the facts and figures in this document to be sufficiently convinced to add their company names to the substantial list of BID supporters we have already.

In November this year the Council will be issuing ballot papers seeking your formal approval for the renewal of the Hitchin BID through a 28 day postal vote. I know the BID's past record and potential future plans make an immediate "Yes" the only sensible option and I'm sure you will agree with me.

I hope we can rely on your support.

**Tom Hardy**  
Chief Executive  
Hitchin BID



## THE NEW VISIT HITCHIN BRAND

---

Over the past year we've been transitioning to the new 'Visit Hitchin' brand which will replace the Hitchin BID logo. Visit Hitchin will still be run by the Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) with all projects and initiatives delivered, falling under this business plan. We believe this new logo is the best way forward to create a stronger brand for our town centre.





# MEET THE TEAM



Recycling Ranger Team

Tom Hardy  
Chief Executive

Day Ranger Team

Shauna Waugh  
Events & Marketing  
Coordinator

Tracy Hunt  
Tourist & Collections  
Coordinator

Hitchin Information  
Front of House Team



# 15 YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENTS







**£200K**  
Worth of business savings



**63,000**  
Pieces of chewing gum removed



**800 tons**  
of cardboard and paper recycled



**550 tons**  
Of used coffee grounds recycled



**100,000**  
H-Town newspapers delivered



**Over 500**  
Pieces of graffiti & flyposting removed



**Over £15k**  
Of recovered stolen goods



# WHAT WE DO TO SUPPORT OUR TOWN CENTRE



The day  
Ranger team



Cardboard  
recycling service



Enhanced CCTV  
provision



Discount  
commercial waste



Information  
Centre



Social media  
promotion



Deep cleaning &  
gum removal



Floral displays &  
bunting



Town-wide  
Christmas displays



Town-wide  
tourism strategy



Shop & pub  
watch radio links



Reduced  
shoplifting



Marketing  
campaigns



Regular, speciality  
& major events



Graffiti removal



Night Rangers



New website



Flyposting  
removal



Christmas tree



Market Place  
management



Promotional  
publication



Vinyl wrapping  
vacant shops



Townwide  
branding



Business  
representation



Lamppost  
banners



Hitchin basket  
website



PubWatch  
meetings



Reporting  
highways faults



Grit bins  
and gritting



Covid-19  
business support



Coffee ground  
recycling scheme



Hitchin Hub  
website



Monthly  
newsletters



H-Town  
Pounds



Destination  
management plan



In partnership  
with Councils





The Hitchin BID team is crucial to the success of Hitchin. Without the BID team's hard work we would have no Hitchin tourism strategy, no Christmas lights, no cardboard & coffee grounds recycling, no floral displays, the streets would be full of chewing gum/graffiti and the events in the town would be extremely limited. We see all the positive work the Hitchin BID are doing. We urge those businesses and individuals who are not sure what they do, to speak to ourselves or the BID team, to understand further what the money raised for the town is spent on.

**Hannah Vincenti**  
Fabio's Gelato



As a retailer we rely on the support that Hitchin BID gives us. The effort the team makes to bring customers into the town with events, and extra marketing they give to help individual stores is so greatly appreciated. The Rangers in particular are invaluable. The team are always on hand to help with anything. I speak to other retailers in towns of a similar size, and they all say they wish they had a team available like this. I think I speak for all Hitchin businesses when I say the BID has our complete support and appreciation for what they do.

**Kerry Haynes**  
Cloud Nine Baby





# CORONAVIRUS BUSINESS SUPPORT

Although the pandemic seems like a distant memory, we want to remind businesses of the work we undertook. Hitchin BID went above and beyond to support businesses through these unprecedented times. We offered a wide range of support and delivered on a comprehensive reopening plan for the town centre.

## EAT ALFRESCO & OUTDOOR SEATING

Prioritising businesses with limited or no outdoor spaces we offered alfresco dining areas on the Market Place to all businesses in the town centre. This initiative was so successful we continued to bring it back each summer. We also support many businesses in applying for street licences to extend their external spaces.



The BID has proven an invaluable support to the businesses of Hitchin, none more so than during 'the Covid chaos'. Over the years the BID has added to the vibrancy of Hitchin as both a cultural and business centre and brought the town to the attention of the wider local area as a place of interest worthy of a visit. Added to this at a simple level the BID have made the town a more attractive, cleaner, safer place to be at any season of the year.

**Doug Brooker**  
Brookers





## BUSINESS SUPPORT

We delivered a comprehensive reopening plan for Hitchin following the lifting of restrictions. This focused on 4 key areas;

**Reminding** the public what the Town Centre offers  
**Reassuring** the public of the shop safe measures.  
**Encouraging** the public back to the town centre.  
**Promoting** the offer & diverse range of businesses.

## COMMUNICATION

We sent daily emails to businesses on how to access support, who to contact and when support would be coming. The BID liaised with landlords on rent reductions and business banking representative on bounce back loans as well as being in regular contact with the local MP and Councils to relay information on support and changes to the guidance/rules.



## WELCOME BACK CAMPAIGN

Ahead of the partial reopening of businesses in April 2021, we ran a 'thank you for your support' compilation video using 30 town centre businesses. We put up 'Welcome Back' and 'We've Missed You' banners across the town and delivered 15,000 welcome back H-Town Newspapers to all residents in Hitchin.



## REOPENING SUPPORT

We bulk bought face masks, hand sanitizer, 2m floor stickers and wipes for businesses. We secured discount prices for Covid-19 equipment as well as purchasing 10 outdoor hand sanitizer stands for public use around the town centre. There were 2m social distancing boards around the town centre and we delivered free posters to businesses such as 'sanitise your hands before entering', 'clean assured premises' and other Government issued posters. Ahead of businesses reopening we sold discounted packs to businesses which included posters and PPE.



## ONLINE SUPPORT

To help retail and hospitality, we matched up delivery drivers with business that reverted to deliveries over lockdown. We updated and circulated a new Hitchin eateries map for the town and launched Hitchinbasket.com to allow customers to search for over 1000 products, food and services. Using social media we promoted around 7 businesses per day on how the public can support them and buy products over lockdown.



## STREET RANGER PROPERTY CHECKS

Whilst the town centre was in lockdown our Day Rangers performed daily commercial property checks to flag any potential issues whilst business owners and staff were elsewhere.

# CONSULTATION

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**Hitchin BID is dedicated to delivering projects and services that businesses value, and that benefit both them and the local economy.**

In preparation for the new BID term, we launched an extensive consultation process where town centre businesses were invited to give feedback on existing BID services and to highlight their priorities for the future. During June 2023, hard copies of our consultation surveys were hand-delivered to all BID levy paying businesses and those to be added in to the new boundary. We emailed out the online survey, updated businesses on the renewal process via our newsletter and undertook over 400 face-to-face business visits. In August 2023 we delivered a series of business meetings to present new projects and receive feedback.

**Using the survey findings, feedback from face-to-face visits, suggestions made in the business drops-ins and business events, we have set out your priorities.**

## YOUR PRIORITIES FOR BID TERM 4

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**Car Parking** (lobby the Council on installing 'Pay on Exit' car parks, discounted employee parking schemes, investment for new multi-storey sites)

**Safety & Savings** (Day Rangers, Night Rangers, lobby the Police for better security measures, cardboard and coffee collections, commercial waste discount scheme)

**Business Support** (representing the business on trade associations, highways, Police, North Herts Council and Herts County Council)

**Promoting Hitchin** (townwide social media campaigns, publications, enhancing Hitchin SEO using key tourism sites, continue to develop the town website, wider use of the Visit Hitchin brand)

**Appearance** (floral displays, bunting, Christmas lights scheme, chewing gum removal, graffiti and flyposting removal. Lobbying the council on public realm improvements)

**Vibrancy** (maintain town centre events, activities in the wider areas of the town, more business focussed events, new mural and public arts, interactive installations)





We believe that a strong, vibrant and enticing town centre is good for the town as a whole. Over the past ten years the Business Improvement District has tangibly sustained and improved the town centre as a great place to live, work and do business. Without the BID, so much of what we have become so used to having in the town would disappear. I am voting yes in November to ensure we keep all the hugely important projects and initiatives that make the town the vibrant place it is today.



**Gary Walker**  
Hitchin Markets Ltd



# OUR VISION

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We believe that a clear vision is vital for the future economic prosperity of Hitchin. The BID will build upon the success of the last 15 years but will also incorporate new elements after feedback from the business community. We will work with partners to progress and enhance the 4 core objectives as well as more ways to support businesses and the town centre environment.



**New initiatives to encourage the experience economy**



**Increased promotions in quieter areas of the Town Centre**



**Increasing business support on a local and national level**



**Improvement to Town Centre parking and accessibility**



**Force the pace on the Councils Town Centre Strategy**



# OUR 4 OBJECTIVES

Based on the success of the last 15 years Hitchin BID has been in operation and on feedback received, we have chosen to keep the BID's core objectives consistent with those from the initial business plan. For the 2024-29 business plan the objectives will come under the following headings:

**1 Vibrant**

**2 Clean & Safe**

**3 Promoted**

**4 Business Support**

Your dedicated BID team will build upon the strong foundations and partnerships established over the past 5 years. The vast majority of business value the services that Hitchin BID delivers to support business in their day-to-day activities. We work hard to enhance the trading environment and work to provide leadership and business representation as we work towards maintaining Hitchin as one of the most successful towns in the South East.

**There is no replacement body that will deliver the projects and initiatives set out in this business plan.**







# VIBRANT

We intend to ensure that the town centre is a vibrant area and a place people can enjoy all year round. We intend to help build on the success of existing events and to introduce a programme of additional activities to further energise Hitchin and to draw many more people to visit from the local area and further afield.





## SUMMER DISPLAYS

We will organise and pay for a wide variety of floral displays across the town centre and erect the bunting during the summer season in various locations.

## WINTER DISPLAYS

We will organise and pay for the town centre festive lighting displays and Christmas tree in the Market Place. The 25 static floral displays will be replanted and maintained over the winter months.

## TOWN CENTRE EVENTS

We will enhance and adapt the town centre annual events programme. Focusing on business support and footfall to maximise the benefit to the local business community.

## TRAILS AND ACTIVITIES

Looking at the wider town centre, we will deliver a number of trails and family friendly activities to spread footfall and highlight businesses on the periphery of the Hitchin BID area.

I have found the BID an invaluable resource to the overall management of the town. The events they organise attract large numbers to the town benefiting the local businesses. The Rangers are always on call and do an amazing job keeping the area safe and clean. Hitchin is a very special town with a large thriving independent sector. Without the support of the BID I believe the community spirit that knits us altogether would dilute and be damaging to the town centre.



**Karen Bourne**  
Wild Ivy



# CLEAN & SAFE

The BID plan is to ensure that the town centre is an attractive, safe and welcoming place for those who live, work and visit. Importantly, we want to present the best possible appearance to potential investors. The BID therefore pledges to carry out activities that are above and beyond those already being provided by existing organisations.



## CRIME REDUCTION

The BID will continue to work alongside the Police and Councils to reduce crime. We will facilitate PubWatch, the ShopWatch WhatsApp group and continue to offer businesses radio links. Our extended CCTV and the anti-shoplifting measures undertaken by the BID will ensure Hitchin remains a safe place for the day and evening economy.

## THE DAY RANGER TEAM

The Rangers undertake vital work behind the scenes to ensure the town centre remains a clean and safe environment for businesses and visitors to enjoy. They operate 6 days a week working with a wide variety of local businesses. The Rangers are one of the most valued assets which we will be continuing into the new 5-year BID term

## NIGHT RANGERS

The BID will continue to fund the Night Rangers on Friday and Saturday nights from 10pm to 3am. They play an important role in public realm security as well as assisting the public and reporting issues.

## OUR CLEANER TOWN

We will continue to remove graffiti using specialist equipment as well as taking down flyposting. There will be chewing gum and deep cleaning carried out in the main streets in the town centre and new initiatives introduced such as the cigarette ballot bins.







Hitchin BID are invaluable to our town. We share the same passion in keeping our High Street thriving with a variety of great High street brands and small businesses that we adore. There is always something exciting going on in Hitchin and the BID are a fundamental part of that happening. We support the work of Hitchin BID and encourage all businesses to vote yes to secure its existence for a further 5 years.

**Lauren Mcdouall**  
Mint Velvet





# 3

## PROMOTED

The BID plan is to provide greater investment into promotion and marketing of the town to ensure that this is targeted at key catchments. We also propose to work with others to ensure that we jointly and consistently promote Hitchin much more effectively to a local, regional and national audience.

### VISIT HITCHIN BRANDING

Over the past year we've been transitioning to the new 'Visit Hitchin' brand which will replace the Hitchin BID logo. Visit Hitchin will still be run by the Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) with all projects and initiatives delivered, falling under this business plan. We believe this new logo is the best way forward to create a stronger brand for our town centre.





## HITCHIN INFORMATION

The Information Centre is a valued asset in our community. It provides a place for local residents to obtain information, Hitchin gifts and tickets. The BID will aim to continue funding this facility and grow the services and products it provides.

## TOWN TOURISM

Using the newly developed Destination Management Plan, the BID will continue to strategically promote Hitchin as a destination. We will work on raising the profile of the town and develop the experience economy.

## PUBLICATIONS & PROMOTIONS

The BID will continue to produce publications to promote the town centre, its businesses and attractions. We will maintain the lamppost banner flags and work on new promotions activities.

## ONLINE PROMOTION

We will continue to develop the towns online presence through the new VisitHitchin website, online advertising and social media activities.

Over the last 6 years of running a shop in Hitchin we have learnt what an integral part of Hitchin the BID is. Everything from keeping the town clean & free from graffiti, to running events around the town. They are paramount in keeping Hitchin the desirable thriving town that it is!



**Richard Barry**  
Arkley Fine Art





# BUSINESS SUPPORT

The BID plan is to ensure that it remains the voice of its businesses on key issues and representative of their views and opinions to ensure the town is properly supported. We will look to offer businesses a greater choice of cost-saving initiatives to ease the pressure of ever-growing use of the internet and post-pandemic consumer behaviour challenges.



## CARDBOARD & COFFEE RECYCLING SCHEME

We will continue to provide all businesses with free cardboard, paper and coffee grounds recycling using our dedicated Recycling Ranger team. Our Rangers collect from over 200 businesses per week and recycle over 300 tons of cardboard and coffee per year.

## H-TOWN POUNDS

The BID will continue to support the H-Town Pounds scheme which is aimed at promoting local spend in over 80 independent businesses.

## BUSINESS REPRESENTATION

We will remain the collective business voice on key issues. The BID will lobby for and represent business ensuring Hitchin gets the investment and backing it needs.





## HITCHIN REGENERATION

The BID will form a new group to look at short and long term projects in the town as well as new income streams. This will allow an expansion of the projects we deliver as well as new investment opportunities and improvements.

## TRAINING OUR TOWN

The BID will deliver a series of statutory and marketing training to equip businesses with the skills and knowledge to thrive and prosper.



A renewed Business Improvement District will unquestionably be a force for good in Hitchin. Keeping it clean and safe while showcasing and promoting our countless great attractions. I urge all Hitchin businesses to back the BID and guarantee a bright future for our town centre.



**Emily English**  
The Half Moon











# THE BALLOT

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All businesses who occupy or own a commercial premises or Rateable Valued entity will be eligible to vote in the Hitchin BID renewal ballot.

Every 5 years a Business Improvement District is required by law to renew its mandate to work on behalf of levy paying businesses by means of a ballot. The Hitchin BID ballot is scheduled to take place between 9th November and 7th December.

Ballot papers will be issued by post to the person confirmed as having responsibility for casting the vote on behalf of each company or organisation. Your voting papers should arrive via post no later than 9th November 2023 and you will have 28 days to return them in the pre-paid envelope provided (the ballot will close on 7th December at 5pm)

## How is the result calculated?

The ballot will be managed by Civica Electoral Services. A successful result will authorise the continued operation of the Hitchin BID for a further 5 year term, commencing on 1st April 2024. In order for the ballot to be successful the following two criteria must be met.

- The majority of votes counted must be in favour
- The total representative ratable value of votes counted in favour must exceed that of those opposed.

The ballot result will be announced on 8th December 2023

If you have any questions about the ballot, please get in contact with Hitchin BID [tom.hardy@hitchinherts.com](mailto:tom.hardy@hitchinherts.com) or 01462 453335



- The voter list has been developed by Hitchin BID based on National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR) listings provided by North Herts Council and through consultation with businesses. The NNDR listings as of 17/07/2023 show there are 695 hereditaments eligible to vote.
- Voters are identified as the person confirmed to have the authority to cast the vote on behalf of each company/organisation or the person/organisation named on the NNDR list as of 17/07/2023

# MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

Businesses here already benefit substantially from the additional services that the BID delivers. Here's a list of what you could expect over the next five years too:

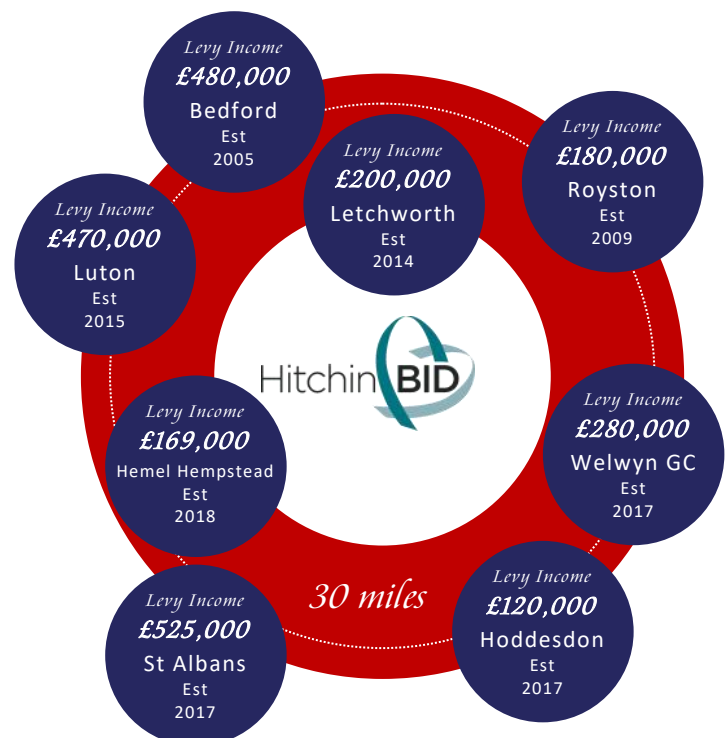
- A cleaner and safer town centre for those who use it.
- Targeting of a larger and more affluent catchment area meaning more visitors and a higher average spend.
- Those currently visiting wanting to do so more often, staying longer and spending more.
- Staff recruitment made easier and existing staff encouraged to remain in employment here.
- A constantly improving 'look and feel' to the town centre environment.
- A more accessible town centre for all forms of transportation, even the car borne visitor who are presently strongly attracted to peripheral supermarkets and out of town 'sheds'.
- A more effective voice for businesses over the management and future development of their trading environment.
- An opportunity to use the BID income to 'pump prime' additional income from external agencies, growing the overall 'pot' and improving return on investment for businesses.

## COMPARABLE BIDS

The BID is an independently run non-profit organisation. There are over 360 BIDs in the UK run under this same concept.

When calculating the levy for Hitchin, we took both the results of the business survey and subsequent consultations with businesses into account.

We also examined the levy rates set by a number of established competitor BIDs for comparison. Unless we generate a level of similar proportion, we will fall behind the investments being made by neighbouring towns.

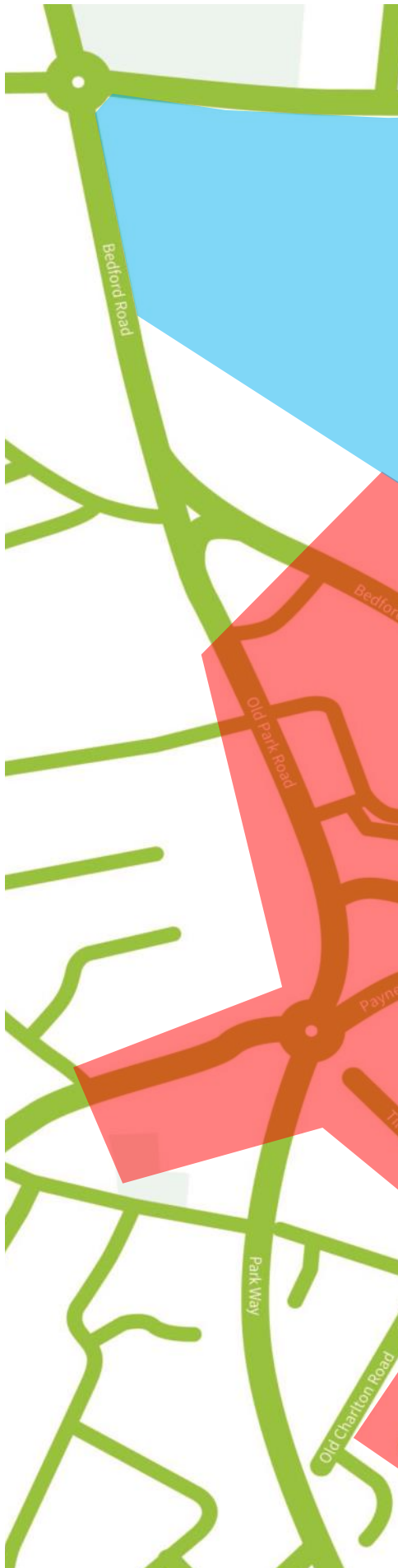
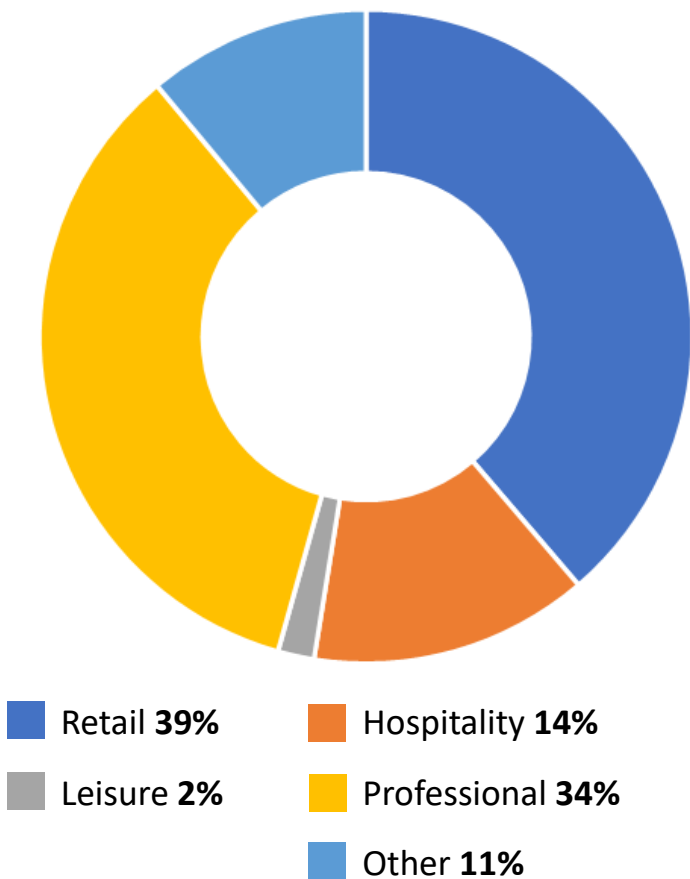


# THE BID AREA

The Hitchin BID boundary has been carefully considered to accommodate businesses that will get the most out of the projects and initiatives we deliver. We have included a number of new businesses in the area for the 3rd term as well as reduced rate zone. The red area will be on a 2.2% levy rate and the blue area on 1.5% levy rate.

Arcade	Churchyard	The Lairage
Arcade Walk	Churchyard Walk	Tilehouse Street
Bancroft	Hermitage Road	Portmill Lane
Bedford Road (part)	High Street	West Alley
Brand Street	Ickleford Road (part)	Queen Street
Bridge Street	Market Place	Whinbush Road (part)
Bucklersbury	Old Park Road (part)	Fishponds Rd (part)
Churchgate	Park Street (part)	Walsworth Rd (part)
Paynes Park	Sun Street	Grammar Sch. Walk

## HITCHIN BID BUSINESSES BY SECTOR





# THE BID LEVY

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- The levy rate to be paid by each property or hereditament will be 2.2% or 1.5% depending on the location (please see page 28 & 29 for details). The levy will be based on its rateable value (as per the 2023 Rating List) and reviewed every 3 years as per Government process.
- Under the Local Government Act 2003 and the Business Improvement District Regulations (England) 2004, the levy is mandatory by law for the full period of the term (not exceeding 5 years and will be charged annually in advance for each chargeable period from April to March (starting on 1st April 2024).
- The BID levy will apply to all eligible hereditaments located within the defined BID area.
- Liability for the full year's levy falls upon the Non-Domestic Ratepayer for the property on the date of billing (typically the first week of April). If the property is empty on the date of billing, then liability shall fall upon the property owner.
- Residents and businesses outside the BID or not eligible to pay the levy can apply to become voluntary members. This decision will be at the company's discretion.
- Business can set up a standing order to pay the levy over a 12 month period.
- No refunds will be made, either fully or in part, in respect of levy amounts paid should there be a change in Non-Domestic Ratepayer during the financial year. Neither the BID Company nor the Council will enter into negotiations between outgoing and incoming levy payers, and all said negotiations to recoup part-year payments must be resolved independently by the individual or company concerned.
- Hitchin BID reserves the right to raise or lower the levy by the rate of inflation at the discretion of the Company Directors.
- Please note: no exemption or discounts will be issued to listed buildings and those who pay discounted business rates are also not entitled to a levy discount as well.



Hitchin**BID**

# THE BID FINANCES

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
<b>Income (£)</b>						
BID Levy	280,000	290,000	295,000	305,000	310,000	1,480,000
Sales & sponsorship	20,000	22,000	24,000	26,000	28,000	120,000
<b>Total income</b>	<b>300,000</b>	<b>312,000</b>	<b>319,000</b>	<b>331,000</b>	<b>338,000</b>	<b>1,600,000</b>
<b>Expenditure (£)</b>						
Promoted	35,000	36,500	38,000	40,000	43,000	192,500
Vibrant	98,000	100,000	100,000	105,000	118,000	521,000
Save & Support	18,000	20,000	22,000	23,000	26,000	109,000
Clean & Safe	70,000	72,000	75,000	78,000	80,000	375,000
<b>Total activity costs</b>	<b>221,000</b>	<b>228,500</b>	<b>235,000</b>	<b>246,000</b>	<b>267,000</b>	<b>1,197,500</b>
BID team	45,000	45,000	46,500	47,000	48,000	231,500
Premises/admin	24,700	26,200	26,700	27,700	28,700	134,000
<b>Total overhead cost</b>	<b>69,700</b>	<b>71,200</b>	<b>73,200</b>	<b>74,700</b>	<b>76,700</b>	<b>365,500</b>
Contingency	5,000	6,000	7,000	9,000	10,000	37,000
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>295,700</b>	<b>305,700</b>	<b>315,200</b>	<b>329,700</b>	<b>353,700</b>	<b>1,600,000</b>

- All figures are calculated based on historic and likely future trends. Programme costs may change over the term subject to Director approval.
- Levy income figures are estimated based on National Non- Domestic Rates listings as of April 2023. The figures are based on a 97% BID levy collection rate.
- As well as revenue generated from the levy, the BID will seek to secure additional funding from sponsorship, voluntary contributions and other sources.
- North Herts District Council will be responsible for collecting the levy, after which all collected funds will be transferred to the BID.
- Some projects detailed are inclusive of staff overheads.



# GOVERNANCE

Businesses have been at the heart of developing this BID renewal at all stages of the process.

This began when businesses in Hitchin were asked for their views in 2023, via a survey which was available as an online form or through a face to face business visit. The survey was structured to seek the views of businesses as to which improvements projects they considered would boost their performance and to confirm their support for the renewal of the Business Improvement District.

A strong and representative sample of 187 responses (representing a response rate of 30% based on the total number of businesses) was received and provided strong support (93% in favour) of the BIDs renewal. The Directors met on a regular basis to oversee both the production of the business plan and also to ensure the proposals have been drawn up in close consultation with as many Hitchin businesses and organisations as possible.

## THE DIRECTORS



**Mark Shields**  
Life Practice UK



**Andrew Pearce**  
Bradshaw Johnson



**Mark Shadbolt**  
Chiltern Developments



**Cllr Keith Hoskins**  
NHC Representative



**Charlotte McCrossin**  
Gatwards Jewellers



**Michael Norgan**  
Osinskys

### BUSINESS REPRESENTATION

The Directors are responsible for the high level financial and strategic direction of Hitchin BID. Sub-groups are formed to deliver specific projects such as tourism, branding and street days as necessary. The renewal process has seen over 300 businesses consulted with and all businesses have had the opportunity to feed into the new 5-year business plan. Business representation is of the utmost importance when delivering Hitchin BID projects and initiatives.





Hitchin's businesses are majority independently-owned small businesses. The last three years have nearly crushed them through Covid, Brexit, and price increases. The BID has been instrumental in bringing excellent communication and reassurance in times of difficulty. They make the town sing with extra activities, events, and measures to help promote and drive business to the town. They do an invaluable job.



**Michelle Smith**  
Pilates Pod



I support the BID because they bring so much to the town with all their events throughout the year, making Hitchin a vibrant town that people want to live in and visit. Without all their hard work Hitchin town centre would not be the same.



**Michael Norgan**  
Osinsky's





I support the BID because of all the good they do for the town. You just have to look at some of the towns around here that don't have a BID to see how they're doing less well. So that's why I will continue to support the BID.



**Felix Camfield-Walker**  
Farley's Hair Salon



I support the BID because of the invaluable support they provide to the businesses in Hitchin. We really appreciate the work of the rangers who are always on hand to help with any security issues and help to keep our streets clean and safe. The Christmas lights and floral displays as well as all the events that go on in the square help to make Hitchin a vibrant, attractive town that helps boost footfall.



**Charlotte McCrossin**  
Gatward's Of Hitchin

# DETAILED INFORMATION

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**Additional income** – this proposal commits to seek a substantial amount of extra income in addition to the BID levy over the life of the BID from other sources.

**Aims and objectives** – this plan explains how the BID would deliver improved trading for Hitchin.

**Ballot** – the timescale for the entire ballot process is clearly defined and both the BID and the Council will quickly and clearly communicate the ballot result.

**BID boundary** – the proposed BID area has been drawn to represent universal business interests and is formed around the natural town centre limits.

**Budget** – a detailed budget has been produced, which includes all income and expenditure, as well as the provision of a prudent contingency fund.

**Caps** – no levy caps are proposed to the BID levy payable.

**Communications** – a number of detailed communications with potential BID members have been carried out and are highlighted within this proposal.

**Company** – it is proposed that the Hitchin BID would operate on a non-profit basis as a Company Limited by Guarantee.

**Database** – the voter database has been refined to include the correct voter contact details, including those that are Head Office voting addresses, where appropriate.

**Empty properties** – the liability for the BID levy on any eligible vacant premises will revert to the Landlord.

**Exemptions** – There are no exemptions for businesses in the BID area.

**Governance** – the structure and operation of the BID Company has been designed so as to follow the highest possible standards of representation, governance and transparency.

**Hitchin Information** - Hitchin BID will make every reasonable effort continue to subsidise this facility. The BID company reserves the right to relocate offices and close this facility if it is no longer viable.

**Inflation** – the proposed BID levy will be subject to annual increases by the rate of inflation at the discretion of the Directors.

**Levy** – the proposed levy has been selected as the minimum possible to deliver the required improvements and is considered to represent excellent value for money to levy payers.

**Levy collection costs** – the Council have kindly agreed to collect the levy free of charge.

**Mid-term review** – the Hitchin BID would undertake to commission and publish an independent review during the third year of the proposed five-year term.

**Monitoring** – the BID will employ regular and robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms, which will include an annual survey of a representative sample of levy payers, an Annual General Meeting and an Annual Report.

**Notices** – all notices, including those issued to the Secretary of State, the Local Authority and all proposed levy payers have been issued in line with the prescribed regulations from all applicable Legislation.

**Operating costs** – the proposed budget includes a detailed breakdown of all anticipated BID operating costs, as far as can be determined at this time.

**Premises** – all relevant and eligible public and private sector premises within the BID area have been included in our database and this will be maintained to ensure accuracy during the lifetime of the BID.

**Proposals** – this document summarises the proposition to deliver additional services in Hitchin.

**Research and Consultation** – the BID development process has been carried out in a very open, inclusive and transparent manner and a number of consultative techniques have been employed over a twelve-month period.

**Revaluation** - the prevailing Rateable Value list, as updated on the 1st January each year of the BID term, will be used for the calculation of the annual BID levy for the duration of this proposal.

**Services** – the proposed BID projects have been generated through local research, are able to be measured and have been fully costed.

**Term** – the duration of the proposed BID, to include start and end dates, has been included in this document.

**Transparency** – every effort will be made to ensure the transparency of the operation of the BID, including the production and distribution of detailed progress, monitoring and financial reports.

**Variation** – there is no intention to significantly vary the projects within this plan and consequently we do not expect to seek a Variation Ballot for any reason, although, this could possibly occur during the term of the BID if it becomes necessary due to required material changes to the plan following the midterm review.

**Voting** - the ballot timetable is outlined on page 26.





## Contact

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Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID)  
Hitchin Information  
1A Churchyard  
Hitchin  
SG5 1HR

**Email** [tom.hardy@hitchinherts.com](mailto:tom.hardy@hitchinherts.com)

**Phone** 01462 453335

**Website** [visithitchin.com](http://visithitchin.com)

**Social Media** @VisitHitchin

Letchworth Garden City  
Business Improvement District (BID)  
Proposal and Business Plan  
2024 – 2029

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# **Letchworth Business Improvement District (BID) Proposal and Business Plan 2024 – 2029**

## **1. Foreword**

### **Message from the Manager of the Letchworth BID**

For the last ten years Letchworth Garden City town centre has enjoyed the benefits of a Business Improvement District. This has resulted in an additional £2 million being spent to improve the business opportunities in our town.

It has been a challenging past few years, particularly with the COVID pandemic, but the BID team has risen to the challenge with some outstanding examples of how they have supported the business community in Letchworth. The current team is no different, demonstrating a real passion to support each and every business in the BID area.

The BID is justifiably proud of the range and variety of events and campaigns, the Christmas Lights, the beautiful planters, marketing, and training opportunities provided to businesses. However, it has been much more than that.

The BID is proving to be a real force for good in the town, reaching out and supporting hard to reach businesses, helping to drive initiatives such as enhanced town centre signage and sustainability projects, developing the new town centre website and being a voice for the businesses through improved communication links.

As we come to the end of the current cycle it is time for the businesses to decide whether to vote for the BID. They will decide whether to retain the services and support of the BID team or rely on other organisations and businesses to provide the wide range of events and initiatives described above.

In short, if the businesses vote 'No', by majority, all those opportunities, events, services and support will stop on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. At that point there will be no collective voice and budget to deliver any priorities identified by businesses. In short, businesses will be left to face the challenges and uncertainties of the future alone.

This business plan aims to prove that the BID is worth investing in. It demonstrates that, by working together, with investment from all the businesses and organisations in the BID and the positive community spirit that Letchworth has in bounds, real difference can be made to the town centre.

We already have a town centre to be proud of, complemented by the open spaces and community organisations within walking distance. By voting to keep the BID the businesses will be making a very positive statement that we can always do better and help make a town centre that everyone is proud to visit, live and work in.

Richard Harbon  
Letchworth BID Manager

## Current BID Board Members

The BID Company, the Letchworth Garden City Business Improvement District Limited, is the body which has proposed the BID for the purposes of the BID Statutory Provisions and is responsible for the implementation of the BID plan. The membership of the board of the company is open to all businesses in the BID area.

The current members of the BID Board are:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Business Name</b>
Maureen Davison (Chair)	Just For Me
Harry Williams (Director)	Vutie Beets
Punit Shah (Director)	Cooks Boutique
Nigel Walters	Morrisons
Cllr Daniel Allen	North Hertfordshire Council
Graham Fisher	LGC Heritage Foundation (CEO)
Jack Philbin	Garden Square Shopping Centre
Aminta Gagnon	We Do Yoga
Savannah Joyce	Arena Tavern
Julia Bothick	Joules
Richard Harbon	Love Letchworth BID
Suzy Holding	Best Before Cafe
Ali Ribchester	Tutti Frutti

## 2. What is a Business Improvement District.

A Business Improvement District (BID) is a precisely defined geographical area within which the businesses have voted to invest collectively in local improvements to enhance their trading environment.

BIDs were enabled by parliament through the Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004. Since their inception over 350 BIDs have been approved by business communities in England and Wales and have been proven to be a powerful tool to enhance the trading environment of town centres.

The lifetime of a BID is prescribed by regulations and is set at no more than 5 years. At the end of the BID period businesses within the BID area are offered the opportunity to vote whether they want the BID to remain.

The purpose of the BID is to provide new or extended works and services or environmental enhancements within the BID area, funded via a BID levy charge. All services/improvements will be additional to those already provided by North Herts Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

### The Vote

To succeed the ballot must pass two tests.

- A majority vote of those who vote.

- The aggregate rateable value of those who vote ‘Yes’ must be greater than those who vote ‘No’.

The persons entitled to vote, and are liable for the BID levy, are the ratepayers of non-domestic premises in the BID, which meet the levy criteria.

The Ballot Holder for the BID vote is North Herts Council’s CEO Anthony Roche. Details of voting procedures and how you can confirm persons entitled to vote can be found by contacting North Herts Council’s Electoral Services on 01462 474305 or by email [elections@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:elections@north-herts.gov.uk).

### **Alteration of Arrangements**

The BID, its boundaries, business plan and the levy percentage cannot be altered without an alteration ballot. The BID Board can adjust projects and spending as they feel appropriate, provided the basic tenets and budgets are not compromised.

There are no plans to make any alterations to the current BID area or levy percentage.

### **The Levy**

A levy of 2% of rateable value is proposed for all businesses irrespective of their rateable value and which fall within the levy criteria laid down in Section 10.

The levy arrangement will generate around £1million of ring-fenced funding over the 5 years life of the BID and will also help lever in additional income. This money will be used to fund projects identified in the business plan. See Section 9 for more detail.

### **Duration of the BID arrangements.**

Subject to the successful ballot in December 2023 the arrangements for the Letchworth BID and associated business plan will operate for 5 years from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. This can be extended in 2029, subject to a renewal ballot.

### **Ballot Timescales**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
Notification to the Secretary of State and Billing Authority of the intention to hold a ballot to renew the BID.	3 <sup>rd</sup> July 2023
North Herts Council Meeting to discuss BID Business Plan.	19 <sup>th</sup> September 2023
Notification of the ballot letter to be sent out.	24 <sup>th</sup> October 2023
Despatch of ballot papers.	7 <sup>th</sup> November 2023
Latest date to appoint Proxy.	27 <sup>th</sup> November 2023
Close of ballot.	7 <sup>th</sup> December 2023
Result of ballot declared.	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2023



### **3. Letchworth BID – the last 5 years.**

Ten years ago, the Letchworth Business Improvement District was established by businesses in the town to address the increasing challenges faced by many small towns and high streets across the country. Five years ago, the BID was re-elected with support from over 85% of those who voted.

Many of the challenges reported in the prospectus of 5 years ago remain today. There is still a threat of recession, competition from the internet and neighbouring towns and many businesses still feel isolated. The challenges that COVID presented to the business opportunities have only added to this uncertainty.

In response the Letchworth BID has risen to the challenge providing a wide range of events, campaigns and opportunities to individual businesses and the wider town to maximise their opportunities to succeed.

The current team has at its heart the mantra that it will listen and respond to the needs and ideas and businesses in the BID and to invest their money in projects and initiatives that they have identified as priorities.

Below are just some of the initiatives undertaken during the last term of 5 years. Without the BID and businesses working together and providing the funding, none of these activities would have been possible.

- An annual respected programme of events generating increased footfall and repeat visits. For example, The Coronation, Christmas Lights, Food and Drink.
- An imaginative range of campaigns to provide continued interest in local shops. For example, Halloween, Easter Trail and FiverFest.
- Generation of commercial revenue from events enabling continued investment and sponsorship.
- Introduction of the new Love Letchworth branding, bringing a clearer, more professional narrative for the town centre.
- Provision of a wide range of free training opportunities for businesses empowering them to better help themselves.
- Provision of the Christmas Lights and associated Christmas events.
- Wide ranging support to businesses during COVID through communication, PPE support, sign posting to grants and business opportunities and restarting events.
- Development of a new town centre website to further advertise businesses, events, and opportunities.
- Promotion and sharing of best practice through networking events.
- Promotion of businesses and organisations to a wider audience by recruiting a dedicated marketing manager and maximising every publicity opportunity.
- Responsible for the beautiful planters in the town centre which have significantly enhanced the street scene.

In addition, the BID team has demonstrated how important working together at a strategic level is by playing a major role in:

- The Town Centre Recovery Group.
- The Letchworth Sustainability Travel Group.
- The rebranding of Letchworth Garden City project.

The BID team has learnt several lessons along the way:

- The BID represents each and every business in the BID area. Connecting with and listening to these businesses is paramount in making sure the BID does the right thing for the town.
- Events can bring increased footfall to the town, but this does not mean increased trading for all the shops. Frequency and type of event must be balanced.
- Working together is the only way that we will ever be successful in facing current and future challenges. Whether that's businesses, individuals, organisations, and agencies.

Finally, the current BID team has also demonstrated the importance of being an Ambassador for the town centre and all the businesses therein. This has been, primarily, in its involvement in the ongoing fraud investigation and by putting in place processes and practices to make sure the issues faced by the previous BID team can never happen again.

#### **4. Partnership Working.**

Letchworth Garden City has a unique heritage, as the first garden city, upon which it can develop and grow. It is a town full of opportunities, which is within easy reach of large audiences and business markets and has unique features to North Herts such as a railway station actually in the town centre.

In order to take advantage of the great opportunities that exist, it is essential that the BID works with the full range of partners to raise the town's profile, improve the appeal to visitors and make it a great location for people to live, visit and work and for businesses to expand and invest.

There are already strong links with North Herts Council with an agreed protocol, 'BID Operating Agreement with North Hertfordshire District Council'. This document needs a review but most of the agreements and policies within are as relevant today as they were when it was agreed.

The BID works closely with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation in a range of initiatives. The Heritage Foundation is a unique and very positive asset for the town that has the experience and influence to continue to make a significant difference in the town centre.

Letchworth is also lucky to have a whole range of very proactive independent businesses who are already making a significant difference to Letchworth. For example, the Wynd.

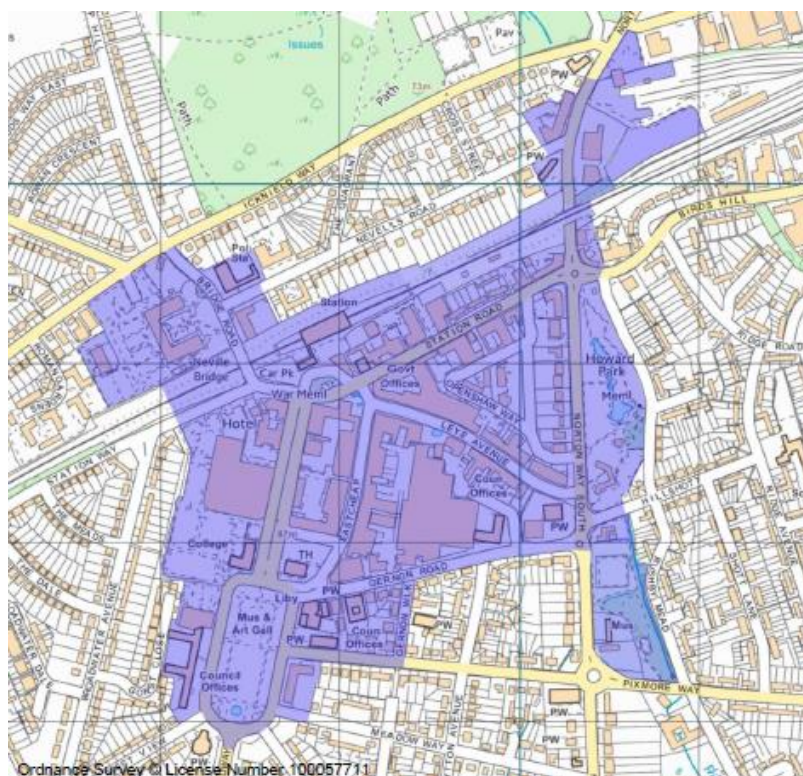
In addition, Letchworth has a range of other partners that can help to make a huge difference to the town centre. For example, the Festival Committee. They are already bringing vibrancy and helping to improve the trading environment.

Finally, Letchworth has a very can-do wide range of communities who care passionately about the environment that they live in. Many are already involved in volunteering for organisations such as the Heritage Foundation. Handled correctly there is clearly scope for them to get involved in developing our town centre.

Though the role of the BID is not to assume the responsibilities of many of those referred to above, it does have a major role in bringing all these partners together and influencing them to carry out their responsibilities in the town centre. It is essential, in this challenging trading environment that we maximise all the opportunities for partnership working.

## 5. The Proposed BID Area.

The highlighted area represents the full extent of the proposed BID Area for 2024 – 2029.



Letchworth BID Area

A full list of the streets within the BID area is shown below. The BID covers all non-domestic rated properties within this area. This includes all banks, building societies, car parks, council facilities, restaurants, clubs and pubs, estate agents, leisure operators, charities, recruitment agencies, retail and health and beauty outlets, office based businesses and organisations, and transport and transport agents and all other non-domestic hereditaments are included within the BID area.

The BID area includes any smaller business areas located off these roads or streets that are located within the boundary of the BID area and any other road or street, even if they are not listed, as below, and will include any new road or street which is developed or created during the life of the BID, which is within the BID area.



The roads and streets within the BID area include:

- Arena Parade.
- Bridge Road.
- Broadway (Station Place to West View/South View).
- Central Approach.
- Commerce Way.
- Eastcheap.
- Gernon Rd.
- Gernon Walk (West side only).
- Howard Park Corner.
- Leys Avenue.
- Norton Way North (From Station Rd to Icknield Way).
- Norton Way South (From Station Rd to Pixmore Way).
- Openshaw Way.
- Rowland Way.
- Station Forecourt.
- Station Place.
- Station Rd.
- The Arcade.
- The Wynd.

## **6. The research and consultation process.**

Over the last 12 months extensive research and consultation has taken place across a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that this business plan truly reflects the views and priorities of the businesses in the BID area as well as the perceptions of those who visit, work, and reside in the area.

The research carried out includes:

- All the businesses in the BID area received a BID survey seeking their opinions on a variety of issues.
- Over 90% of the businesses in the BID have received at least one personal visit from a member of the BID team to discuss the BID.
- Over 50% of businesses returned a completed survey.
- All businesses in the BID area who operated in the night-time economy were also encouraged to complete a specific survey based on the NTE.
- In 2022 'People and Places' conducted a thorough survey of businesses, visitors, and residents of the town centre as part of the Town Centre Recovery Strategy.
- The BID has managed a series of breakfast and evening events inviting all businesses in the BID area to share their views on priorities and budget setting.
- There has been regular contact with all the businesses in the BID area via social media and email, including seeking views on and the activities organised by the BID.

- The BID Manager has made personal visits to over 90% of the businesses in the BID, held drop in events at the hard-to-reach locations and offered drop-in clinics and 121 meetings.
- The BID has regular communication with businesses and organisations via the BID newsletter.
- The BID organises regular press releases in the local paper promoting events, campaigns, and the BID.

The results of all this research and consultation have been analysed and used to develop the objectives for this business plan. If you require more information on the data collected, please contact the BID team.

## 7. Vision and Objectives.

Following consultation and research with the businesses in the BID area and a wide range of customers, the following priorities and objectives have been proposed for the next five years. They will commence on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

### The Vision

Through this business led programme of investment the vision is for Letchworth Garden City town centre to be:

- A 21<sup>st</sup> century Garden City which is connected and engaged with its business community, residents, and visitors.
- A vibrant 'Go To' place with a sense of common purpose which is attractive and appealing for everyone who lives, works, visits, and does business in Letchworth Garden City.
- A place which is lively, has strong sense of identity and awareness and is recognised locally, nationally, and internationally.

### Objectives

#### 1. TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH IS LIVELY AND WELL PROMOTED

Letchworth BID will work to create a town centre which is lively and has a strong sense of identity that is attractive to customers and by doing so increases the business opportunities.

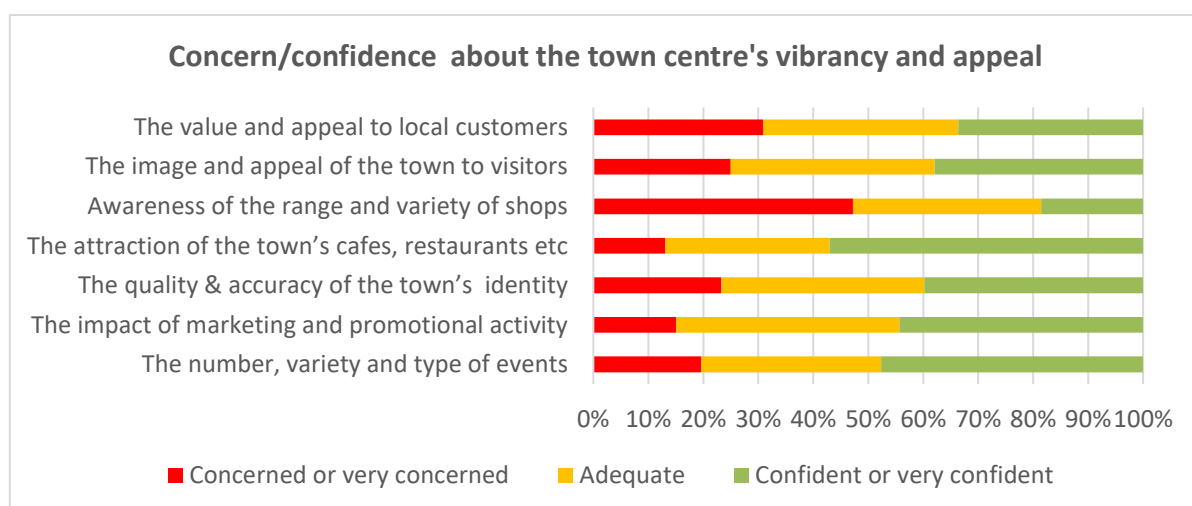
**Budget** – An initial budget of £101,500 in year 1 increasing to £134,441 in year 5.

#### *People & Places Consultation*

We know from recent research that the top priorities for businesses are the promotion of the town through events, better marketing, and digital promotion of its positive aspects. We want to continue to put on a series of high-quality events and maximise the marketing opportunities to make the town centre an attractive place for people to visit and do business.

- When users were asked if they would recommend a visit to Letchworth town centre, more than two-thirds (68%) of users said yes.
- Customers gave a high priority to the use of social media for insights about businesses, products, and places to eat (59%), followed by direct updates from favoured businesses (53%).
- Customers were slightly positive about the existing online identity of the town centre (37%) and gave high importance to the regular use of social media to promote their business and engage with customers (72%), followed by web site creation and management (67%).
- Future priorities included improving the digital promotion of the town alongside traditional methods. Customers stated that an effective broadband connection (73%) and good digital phone network coverage (68%) were important to their future performance.

### Letchworth BID Business Survey

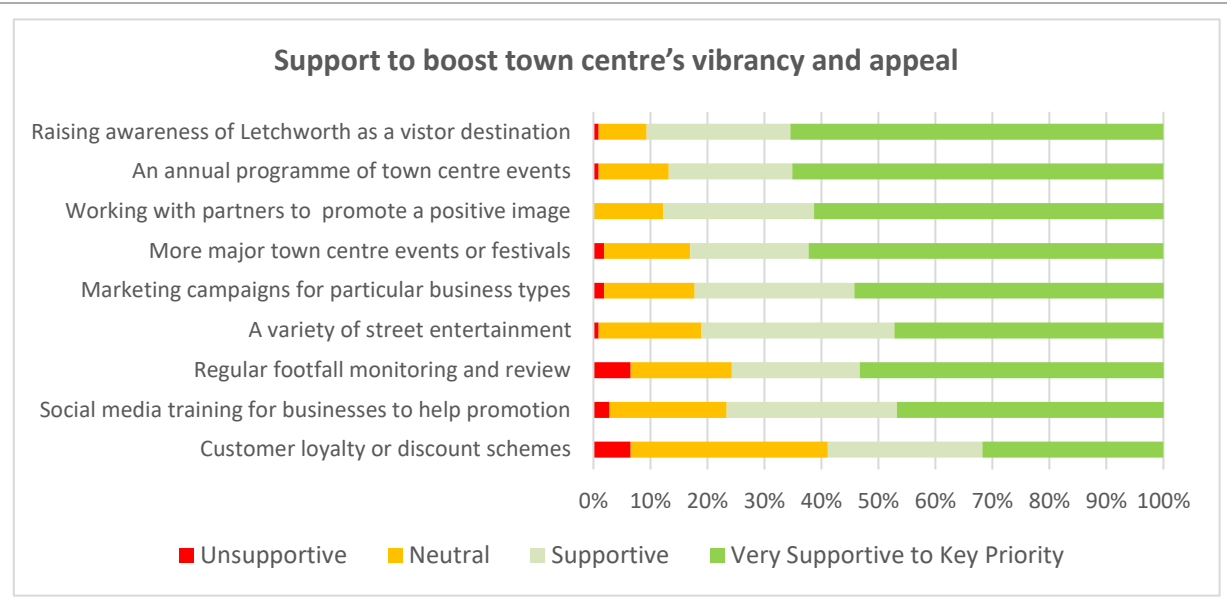


When we surveyed businesses this summer, they expressed their confidence about the range and variety of events in the town centre. They were confident or very confident about the impact that effective marketing and promotion could have on the town centre business (84%) and the attraction of the town centres cafes and restaurants (87%).

Businesses expressed their greatest concern to us about range and variety of shops, with nearly half (47%) concerned or very concerned. Over 30% of the businesses also expressed their concern about the value and appeal of Letchworth to local customers. Businesses also had a very mixed response to the quality and accuracy of the town centre identity.

Businesses said working together was crucial in developing and promoting a positive brand and image for Letchworth (88%).





In our summer survey of future priorities for the work of the BID, businesses supported an annual calendar of events and campaigns to increase the vibrancy and footfall in the town centre (69%). This included over 82% of respondents supporting or setting as a priority more town centre events and festivals.

Businesses also highlighted the need to focus on marketing for events, particular campaigns and businesses with over 80% being supportive or setting as a priority. In addition businesses were very supportive of a variety of street entertainment (72%).

- Proposed Activities**
- From our understanding of customers’ perceptions about the quality and number of events and the need to promote and market the positive aspects of the town centre, and listening this summer to businesses’ priorities for improving the identity and awareness of the town centre to do business, Letchworth BID propose to undertake the following activities.
- Delivery**
- a. Organise and provide support to an annual calendar of high quality events, campaigns and street entertainment.
  - b. Lead on the introduction of shop local promotional opportunities and loyalty schemes.
  - c. Maximise marketing and promotional opportunities of the town centre and the events therein through the wide range of media outlets.

### **Influence**

- a. Contributing to future planning strategy to help shape the future of the town centre through groups such as the Town Centre Recovery Group.
- b. Working closely with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and Garden Square to have a partnership approach to publicity and marketing of the town centre.
- c. Play a central role in the development of the wider Letchworth Garden City branding.
- d. Work with a range of partners to develop the business opportunities of the night time economy in the town centre.

### **Measuring and monitoring results**

We are keen to understand and show the impact of the BID's activities in creating a town centre environment which is lively and well promoted. That is why Letchworth BID will be working with its partners to measure, monitor and share how creating a town centre which is lively and has a strong sense of identity, that is attractive to customers, will increase the business opportunities.

In simple terms we will be tracking the contribution of high quality events and campaigns and greater focus on marketing and promoting the positive aspects of the town centre will increase the number of happy faces in our town centre! We will do this by measuring and monitoring:

- The introduction of and management of an annual calendar of events and campaigns and the feedback and footfall data from these events.
- Feedback from Tracking changes in footfall and foot-flow across the town centre.
- Website analytics.
- Data obtained from other sources such as car parks, loyalty schemes.
- Regular surveys.

## **2. TO PROVIDE A WELCOMING, ATTRACTIVE AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENT**

Love Letchworth BID will work to ensure that the town centre continues to provide a welcoming, attractive, and easily accessible environment that draws customers into and around the town centre so that they can make full use of its businesses.

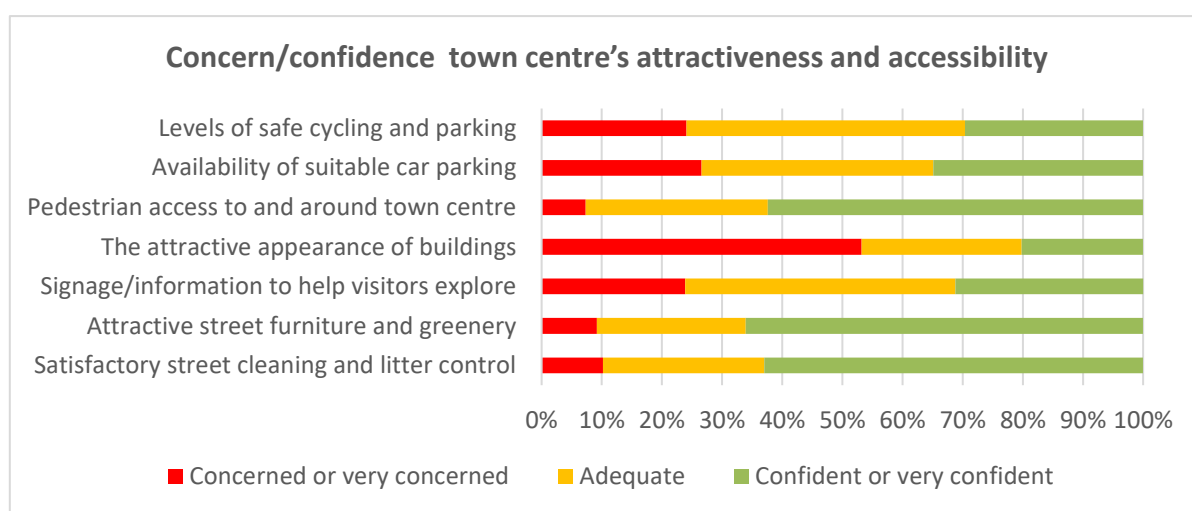
***Budget*** – An initial budget of £40,600 in year 1 increasing to £54,344 in year 5.

### ***People & Places Consultation***

We know from recent research that customers and businesses already greatly value Letchworth's town centre environment and accessibility as a key strength. We want to help meet customers' aspirations for it to become even more attractive to spend time in and move around.

- Customers were very positive about pedestrian access (84%), convenience (83%), cleanliness (75%), public spaces (74%), outdoor seating for hospitality (70%), physical appearance (66%) and the built heritage (64%) of the town centre.
- From the responses to the survey, businesses were positive about the town's public spaces (78%), pedestrian access (76%), cleanliness (74%), outdoor seating for hospitality (65%), safety (61%) and physical appearance (50%).
- The broad theme of appearance and accessibility received a significant number of comments from customers as future priorities, with appearance, greenspace, public outdoor seating, and requests to retain outdoor seating for hospitality prominent with these.

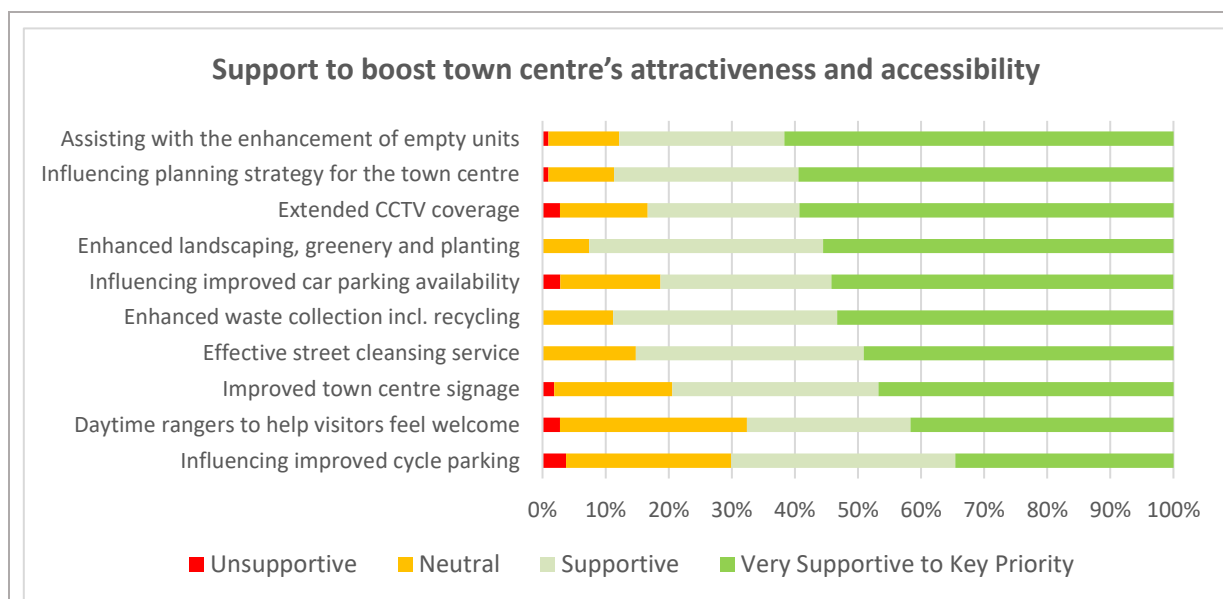
### Letchworth BID Business Survey



When we surveyed businesses this summer, they expressed their confidence about how the town centre environment continues to be looked after. They were confident or very confident about the attractiveness of street furniture and greenery (66%), street cleaning and litter control (63%) and standards of pedestrian access to and around town centre (62%).

Businesses expressed their greatest concern to us about maintaining the attractive appearance of the town centre's buildings, including empty shops, with over half (53%), being either concerned or very concerned about this. Businesses also expressed a mix of concern and confidence about aspects of the journey to and around town, including the availability of parking; levels of safe cycling; and signage and information that can help visitors explore the centre.





In our summer survey of future priorities for our work, businesses backed maintaining a strong focus on the town centre's attractiveness and accessibility with support received for all suggested measures from over 70% of respondents.

In particular, over half of businesses were very supportive or gave a high priority to enhancing empty business units; influencing the town centre planning strategy; extended CCTV coverage; enhanced landscaping, greenery and planting; influencing improved car parking availability and enhanced waste collection including recycling.

### Proposed Activities

From our understanding of customers' perceptions about the quality of the town centre environment, and listening this summer to businesses' priorities for maintaining and enhancing its impact, Love Letchworth BID propose to undertake the following activities.

#### Delivery

- Take a leading role in looking after and enhancing landscaping, greenery and planting across the town centre.
- Maintaining and extending the operation of CCTV cameras across the town centre to help address anti-social behaviour and crime.
- Coordinating an enhanced business waste collection service including recycling.

#### Influence

- Enhancing the appearance of town centre buildings, including empty business units by working closely with landlords and other partners.
- Contributing to future planning strategy to help shape the long-term appearance and role of the town centre.
- Working closely with the Council and other car park operators to review and improve parking performance and perceptions for different types of users.
- Helping to shape how people are able to travel actively to and around the town centre, including through improved cycling facilities and better orientation for pedestrians.

### Measuring and monitoring results

We are keen to understand and show the impact of the BID's activities on providing a welcoming, attractive and easily accessible environment for customers and businesses. That is why Love Letchworth BID will be working with its partners to measure, monitor and share how an enhanced environment is successful in attracting customers into and around the town centre so that they can make full use its businesses.

In simple terms we will be tracking the contribution of a high quality environemt to increasing the number of happy faces in the our town centre! We will do this by measuring and monitoring:

- Improved perceptions of the attractiveness and accessibility of the town centre measured through surveys of visitors and businesses.
- Tracking changes in footfall and foot-flow across the town centre

### 3. TO REPRESENT THE COLLECTIVE VOICE OF BUSINESSES IN THE TOWN CENTRE

Letchworth BID will represent the collective voice of businesses in the town centre to ensure that it continues to develop into a great place to do business and meets the needs of those who visit, live, work, or do business in Letchworth.

**Budget** – An initial budget of £47,773 in year 1 increasing to £60,816 in year 5.

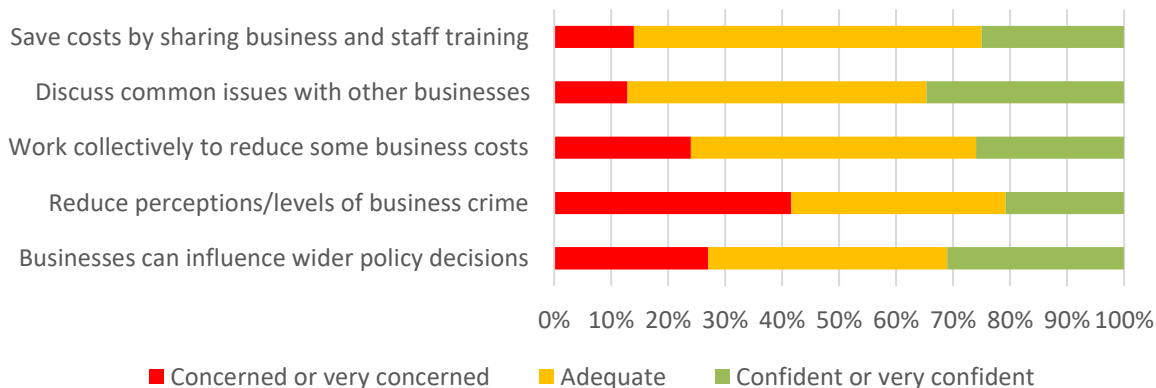
#### People & Places Consultation

We know from recent research that it will remain a priority for the BID to engage with, understand and address businesses' needs as well as working with them as key assets in promoting a refreshed identity and brand for the Garden City.

- *Customers were very positive about Letchworth's cafes and restaurants (80%), health services (67%), grocery retail (66%), customer service (61%), independent shops (51%), banks (50%) and the night-time economy (39%).*
- *When businesses were asked about their perceptions of the Letchworth's trading environment, they were most positive about the town's cafes & restaurants (77%), the benefits of outdoor seating for hospitality (65%) and potential for local customers (48%).*
- *Future priorities highlighted by businesses and customers included the promotion of the town through events (24%), the need to manage aspects of the town centre business mix (19%), parking management and promoting other means of travel (18%). A moderately prominent future priority for customers included extending pedestrianisation for the town centre.*

## Letchworth BID Business Survey

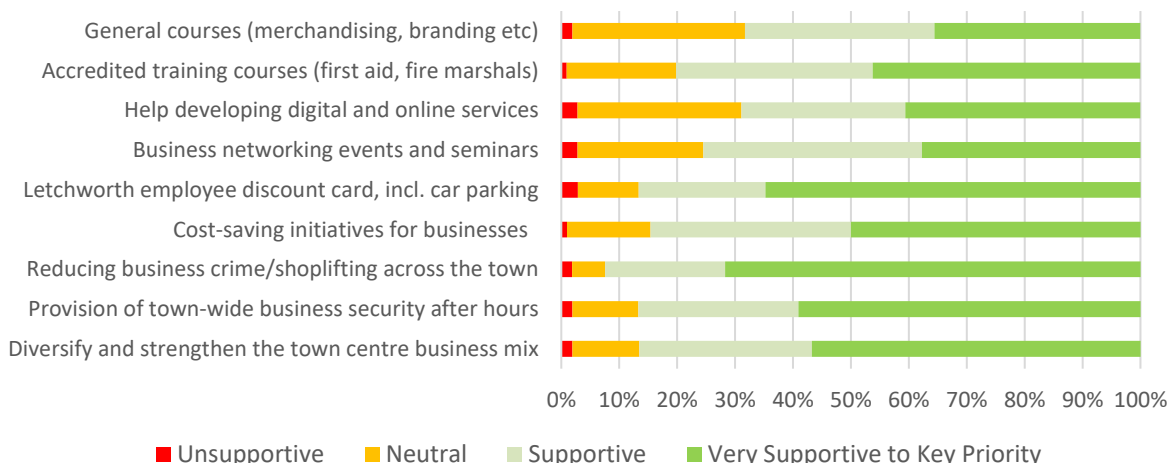
### Concern/confidence about town centre businesses working together



When we surveyed businesses this summer, they expressed their confidence about the ability to save time and costs through shared business and accredited staff training (74%). They were also confident or very confident about the opportunities in relation to cost saving initiatives such as recycling (50%). Other opportunities were highlighted by businesses. These included support to businesses through staff discount schemes, including car parking (64%).

Businesses expressed their greatest concern to us about opportunities to save time and costs through shared business and staff training (74%), the perception of town centre and business crime (72%), and the businesses able to positively influence wider policy decisions (64%). There was also concern from businesses about the diversity and strength of the town centre business mix (55%).

### Support to help town centre businesses working together



In our summer survey of future priorities for our work, businesses supported initiatives in relation to providing assistance to reduce business crime (71%) and the need for businesses



to have a greater say in positively influencing wider policy decisions in the town centre (64%).

Businesses also highlighted the need to explore wider opportunities in providing support to businesses in relation to cost saving, accredited staff training, networking opportunities and working collectively.

### **Proposed Activities**

From our understanding of customers' perceptions about how well the BID represents the collective voice of the businesses in the town centre, and listening to businesses' priorities, Letchworth BID propose to undertake the following activities.

#### **Delivery**

- Provide support to businesses through a range of initiatives including accredited training, the collection of cardboard and admin support (posters, banners etc).
- Take a leading role in the communication to and between businesses through a range of opportunities including the website, social media, networking events and newsletters.
- Be the voice of businesses in the wider town centre meetings such as the Town Centre Recovery Group and Sustainable Travel Group.
- Take a leading role in exploring opportunities for businesses to reduce overheads by working and seeking services collectively.

#### **Influence**

- Working closely with the Police and a range of other partners, including Garden Square to develop a partnership approach to preventing crime and the fear of crime in the town centre.
- Encourage and support businesses to improve their business offer with resources and guidance. For example, business led events.

### **Measuring and monitoring results**

We are keen to understand and show the impact of the BID's activities on creating a town centre environment where businesses work closer together. That is why Letchworth BID will be working with its partners to measure, monitor and share how creating a town centre environment where businesses do work collectively to improve their own opportunities to increase trading.

In simple terms we will be tracking the contribution of improved joined up communication between businesses and the provision of a range of initiatives to reduce overheads, crime levels and working collectively to improve the trading environment. We will do this by measuring and monitoring:

- Regular contact with and surveys of businesses.
- Feedback from Tracking changes in footfall and foot-flow across the town centre.
- Website analytics.
- Crime and ASB data from the Police.
- Data obtained from other sources such as car parks, loyalty schemes.

## **8. Organisation, Resources and Finances.**

The preparation of the business plan has been managed by the BID Manager and the BID Board, which is made up of a cross section of businesses and organisations from across the BID, together with a representative from North Herts Council and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

Letchworth Garden City BID Ltd is a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee. It is legally and operationally responsible to the businesses in the BID area for all the BID activities and acts on their behalf.

The Board is responsible for the governance and the management structure of the BID company. All businesses within the BID are encouraged to be actively involved in the BID and associated working groups to represent the levy payers.

The main role of the Board is to represent and safeguard the interests of BID levy payers by ensuring that the business operates in line with the BID business plan, is professional and offers consistent value for money in line with its targets.

All roles on the Board are voluntary and are undertaken with a commitment to represent the interests of all businesses in the BID area.

Partnership working is seen as essential to build the business community in the area and ensure that skills, experience and resources available for delivery of the BID business plan are enhanced and deliver best value.

The Letchworth BIDs financial accounts and governance arrangements will be independently scrutinised annually, and the effectiveness of the measures undertaken will be gauged by key performance indicators, including footfall, surveys, analytics and retail data as identified in this plan.

There will be an annual report providing details of activities and performance of the BID against the business plan objectives.

There will be an Annual General Meeting at which all BID members will be invited to attend and vote and at which the Board, activities of the BID and the accounts will be reviewed.

## **9. Letchworth Budget and Finances.**

The BID Manager and Board have put together a very positive and proactive budget plan for the next five years based on the extensively researched objectives. In doing so their focus has been on the following main aims:

1. Proactively using the money provided by the businesses, supporters, and sponsors to maximise business opportunities in the BID area.
2. To develop opportunities with the wider business community in Letchworth Garden City to raise funds to further increase the benefits to businesses.
3. Reduce overheads whenever and wherever possible.

In doing so the BID Manager and Board have had an eye on the past but with a clear vision to the future to put in transparent and robust processes to ensure that BID finances are managed with due diligence.

The below table shows the proposed 5-year budget plan. There is a much more detailed plan available upon request.

<b>Letchworth Bid 5-year Budget:</b>			<b>2024-2029</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Income</b>									
Bid Levy Revenue				204000	214200	244910	254706	264894	1182710
Heritage Foundation				30000	30600	31212	31836	32473	156121
Sponsorship and Sales				36900	37638	38390.76	39158.58	39941.75	192029.09
Other Funding source				17000	17340	17687	18041	18402	88470
<b>Total Income</b>				<b>287900</b>	<b>299778</b>	<b>332199.76</b>	<b>343741.58</b>	<b>355710.75</b>	<b>1619330.09</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>									
Objective 1 Lively and Promoted				101500	107600	120692.31	139896.84	134441.91	604131.06
Objective 2 Welcoming,attractive and accessible.				40600	42437	51028.76	26722.95	54344.87	215133.58
Objective 3 Businesses working together				47773	49753.46	58491.6	73094.99	60816.6	289929.65
Central Management Costs . Administration,Office.				90027	91827.54	93664.09	95537.34	97448.12	468504.09
Levy Collection Costs	Additional costs								0
Contingency				8000	8160	8323	8489.46	8659.25	41631.71
<b>Total Expenditure</b>				<b>287900</b>	<b>299778</b>	<b>332199.76</b>	<b>343741.58</b>	<b>355710.75</b>	<b>1619330.09</b>
Accrual for Renewal									
			Year 2 and 3 a 5% was added for Inflation going down to 4% for year 4 & 5.						

#### Notes:

1. The BID levy revenue includes a 2% per annum increase due to inflation.
2. We are grateful to Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation for their ongoing support of £30k per annum.
3. We are committed to obtaining further funding through sponsorship and sales, for example income generated at our events.
4. Other funding sources including voluntary contributions and donations and grants will be exploited.
5. The budget set for the objectives includes part or whole of some of the staff wages.
6. Central management costs include part or whole of some of the wages and the office costs.

#### The indicative costs to businesses based on a 2% levy are as follows:

Rateable Value	Annual @ 2%	Weekly cost	Daily cost
£2,000	£40	£0.77	£0.11
£6,000	£120	£2.31	£0.33
£12,000	£240	£4.62	£0.66
£25,000	£500	£9.62	£1.37
£75,000	£1,500	£28.85	£4.11
£150,000	£3,000	£57.69	£8.22
£350,000	£7,000	£134.62	£19.18



### **Cost of the BID Proposals and re-ballot**

The costs incurred in undertaking the research and developing the BID business case and proposal have been met by the Letchworth BID. However, the majority of the work has been conducted by the BID team. This has led to savings of nearly £15k.

The costs associated with the ballot are being met by North Herts Council, for which we give our sincere thanks.

### **Sources of Additional Funding**

The BID is committed to seeking additional funding from a variety of sources to increase the benefits that can be delivered to the businesses. These will include:

1. Grants, where the criteria match the aims of the business plan.
2. Voluntary contributions and donations from businesses and organisations outside the BID area.
3. Sponsorship opportunities at events or for services and projects undertaken by the BID. For example, planters.

The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation has proven its commitment to supporting the BID and creating a strong collective voice representing business interest in the town. To this end the LGCHF has pledged to support the BID with an additional £30,000 per annum over and above any levy payments it will pay from its property liability.

The BID is grateful for this contribution and recognises that it will be essential to demonstrate that all income from all sources is spent effectively and there are measures in place to demonstrate the benefits derived from meeting the objectives set.

### **Governance and management of the BID budget.**

The BID Board has the responsibility to oversee the management of the BID budget. To that end they have delegated responsibility of the day-to-day management of the budget to the BID Manager, overseen by a BID Director. There are a set of clear rules to be used for each financial transaction. These include:

1. 3 sets of quotes for every purchase.
2. Purchase order allocated to each purchase.
3. The BID Manager will review each purchase and then reviewed by the BID Director.
4. Clear budget sheets for every event/campaign.

The budget is a standing item at the Board meetings.

### **10. BID Levy Criteria for Letchworth BID.**

Each BID has the responsibility to establish its own BID levy rules. These rules have been set with reference to the following relevant legislation – Part 4 of the Local Government Act 2003 and the Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004.

The main rules are as follows:

- The BID levy will be charged on all hereditaments listed in the local Non-Domestic Rating List located within the BID area, irrespective as to how a business has voted in the BID ballot. North Herts Council collect the levy. The Letchworth BID will invoice North Herts Council for the levy collected.
- The BID has a lifetime of a maximum of 5 years, whereupon a formal ballot will take place to decide its future.
- All businesses within the BID area will be entitled to vote for the BID proposal in a 28-day postal ballot which will commence on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and close at 5pm on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023. The result will be announced on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023.
- If successful at the ballot, the BID will continue to operate and will commence a new 5-year term on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.
- The levy amounts for rate payers of business premises will be applied as follows:
  1. The BID levy will be 2% of the 2023 rateable value shown on the Local Authority's NNDR billing system for each defined business within the BID area.
  2. The levy will be due from businesses or individuals who are liable to pay the business rates, including those who have liability for unoccupied properties or anyone who occupies a non-domestic property but receives or claims business rate relief other than those who are exempt.
- The liable person is the ratepayer liable for occupied or unoccupied premises. North Herts Council will be responsible for the imposition, administration, collection, recovery, and application of the BID levy. The Council will also be responsible for any enforcement action that may be appropriate in case of non-payment of the levy.
- There may be an annual inflationary increase in all levy charges for the duration of the BID, not including the first year of the BID cycle.
- The BID financial year will start on 1<sup>st</sup> April. The BID charge is a daily charge based on rateable value and is to be paid in full in advance due on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Businesses that cease to have liability for business rates during the year will be entitled to a refund for the remainder of the year provided they apply to North Herts Council in writing.

## **11. Risk Analysis.**

### **The responsibilities of the BID Company.**

The Letchworth Garden City BID Company has a mandate from all the businesses in the BID area to deliver the BID Business Plan. This is a significant responsibility which has an influence over the trading environment and commercial prosperity of Letchworth Garden City, the businesses in the town and the livelihoods of the staff who rely on the businesses for a living. Having a vibrant enjoyable town centre also has a direct impact on the desirability of Letchworth Garden City as a place to live, visit and work.

It is important, therefore, to articulate some of the external and internal issues that have a direct bearing on the ability of the BID to trade successfully, as well as highlight the consequences of not voting in favour of renewing the BID and associated business plan.

## **BIDs in other places**

There are over 300 BIDs across the country proving their commercial value and improving the trading environments. Many are in their third term with an increasing share of the votes because of the return on investment.

Most of the towns in Hertfordshire and neighbouring counties now have BIDs and are showing their worth by improving the vibrancy and trading environment. Though not necessarily competitors due to the unique aspect of Letchworth they are a draw for customers across our area. By not retaining the BID in Letchworth we are risking diminishing the attractiveness of the town for these customers in this very competitive market.

## **The Importance of Voting ‘Yes’**

Over the last 10 years the Letchworth BID has proven to be very successful in delivering on a number of projects and initiatives to support the business opportunities in Letchworth town centre. All of these are over and above what services our key partners in North Herts Council and the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation provide.

If the businesses in the BID want to retain all the benefits and opportunities described in section 3 and the collective voice of business that the BID brings then they will need to have a majority vote of ‘Yes’, by number and rateable value.

If the businesses vote ‘No’, by majority, all those opportunities, events, services and support will stop on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. At that point there will be no collective voice and budget to deliver any priorities identified by businesses. In short, businesses will be left to face the challenges and uncertainties of the future alone.

## **Collaborating with key partners**

The BID cannot deliver on all the priorities of the town centre alone. To maximise the opportunities in the BID area and deliver value for money the BID has to work with individuals, businesses, property owners, organisations, the Heritage Foundation and statutory agencies.

Working more efficiently and effectively and with the wide range of partners must be a priority in this business plan for the next 5 years if we are to deliver on the objectives in this prospectus. However, the over-riding principle of the BID should remain. That is, the services and benefits provided by the BID are over and above those provided by the other agencies.

## **Financial Management**

The BID is a unique mechanism which combines solid business support with a compulsory scheme which creates benefit for all on an equitable basis. It also guarantees constant cashflow to deliver the projects and priorities identified by the businesses. It provides a platform for the BID company to control costs, plan over the longer term and rise to the challenges and expectations of its businesses.

Following the financial irregularities of the previous BID, there are now robust processes in place to ensure that each and every financial transaction made is scrutinised and accounted for. The BID will also continue to produce an annual budget sheet, monthly management



accounts and financial forecasts for the information of the Board. Independently scrutinised accounts will be produced each year, made available to all contributors and the local authority and filed at Companies House in the normal way.

In addition, the BID team is continually seeking opportunities to reduce overheads. For example, office services such broadband, event management including the Christmas lights and rents such as the barn.

There are, also, no plans to rely upon bank or other support other than the levy and so there is no risk of financial in security.

The BID is VAT registered to ensure that the tax can be reclaimed on expenditure, and this is robustly followed up. It also benefits from mutual trading status meaning it is exempt from Corporation Tax liability.

Finally, one of the aims of the next term is to explore opportunities in the charitable sector. As the BID is a limited company, it cannot become a charity but there are other opportunities the BID will explore.

## **12. Final thoughts.**

It is a privilege to be the BID Manager of our wonderful town centre, working in partnership with businesses, organisations, and the community to help make it a vibrant and attractive place to do business.

The BID provides us with an opportunity to forge even stronger links between these partners to deliver on projects to support the hard-working businesses in the BID.

The trading environment of towns and cities in the UK is changing rapidly. The BID is key to ensuring that Letchworth Garden City does not get left behind but takes advantage of its unique position and great sense of community.

This plan gives a clear direction for the next 5 years with the sole aim of helping make Letchworth an outstanding place to do business now and in the future. I urge you to get involved and work in partnership for the future of the town. By voting 'Yes' in the forthcoming ballot you will send out a clear message about helping to make Letchworth town centre fit for the years ahead.

Richard Harbon  
Letchworth BID Manager

### **Acknowledgments**

The Letchworth BID would like to thank the following for their assistance in preparing this business plan:

North Herts Council  
Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation  
Chris Wade – People & Places

### **Further information**

For more information about the BID or to discuss any aspect of this business plan please contact Richard Harbon, BID Manager on [richard@loveleitchworth.com](mailto:richard@loveleitchworth.com) or 01462 486999

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WORKING WITH  
YOU FOR A BETTER  
ROYSTON



Royston First  
Business Improvement District

# Business Plan

2024 - 2029



# What is a BID?

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## Royston First Business Improvement District

**A Business Improvement District (BID) is a formal arrangement between businesses and other organisations in a designated area that come together to fund, manage and ultimately enhance the local trading environment for all businesses and other organisations within that area.**

The business plan outlines our ambitions for Royston over the next five years and will be voted on by businesses and other organisations within the area and are in addition to the services already provided by the council.

All businesses and other organisations with a ratable value of £7,000 or more will be entitled to vote.

## Additional Income

**Although the vast majority of the BID income originates from levy payments from members, the organisation will continue to work hard to generate additional funds from other sources, including voluntary membership and sponsorship income.**

Additional income allows the BID to deliver over and above the projects outlined in the business plan and add extra value for businesses and other organisations that can provide more return at no extra cost to them.

### Voluntary Contributions

The BID, in its fourth term, will continue to encourage businesses and other organisations to become a BID member and take advantage of the membership benefits that are available. The minimum cost is £100 per annum, but the ratable value will be taken into consideration in arriving at an annual fee for each voluntary member.

### BID Membership

Any mandatory BID levy payee or equivalent financial contributor can become a member of Royston First BID. This enables them to take part in the decision-making process as well as stand for and vote during Board of Director Elections.



# Introduction

from the Chairman

**David Smyth**  
Chairman of Royston First BID



As I reflect on the last five years of our third term, I feel immensely proud of what the BID has achieved and how we have continued to work with businesses and other organisations and local stakeholders to ensure Royston remains a vibrant environment for all to enjoy.

Like all towns and cities across the UK, Royston has experienced unparalleled challenges with the impact of the pandemic, the growth of online shopping, and now the cost-of-living crisis.

Covid-19 exemplified the value the BID offers in responding quickly to dramatic changes in our trading landscape. Our readiness to provide support during times of economic uncertainty hopefully gives you confidence.

The BID levy fund has allowed tangible support for a vast array of projects, and recently, we took the steps to employ a new BID Manager, Paul Brown, to engage with businesses and other organisations and our partners to ensure Royston continues to thrive.

As we look forward, there are many planned exciting projects to come. We have consulted with Royston First BID members, and developed a robust proposal and business plan for the next five years, ensuring that business owners' priorities and key challenges are addressed, and needs are met.

Throughout this document, we have identified several projects and initiatives that will remain in our next five-year term, as well as introducing new areas of support for businesses and other organisations.

It is important to be clear: **only a 'YES' vote by 30 November 2023 will ensure that we can continue projects and further improve Royston** through a vote to deliver a fourth five-year term. Without the BID, all the services provided will cease to exist.

I hope you will give the proposal your full support in November and allow Royston First BID to commit to another five years working with you for a better Royston.

# Why Vote 'Yes'

Since starting as the new BID Manager, I have been really struck by the positive mindset of businesses and other organisations throughout the town. Royston has so much potential, and this new Business Plan is both bold and ambitious and exactly what the town needs to thrive over the next five years.



**Paul Brown**  
BID Manager | Royston First BID

Royston First goes out of their way to support the town centre and as an independent shop, this is vital. The town trails, Christmas lights, and other events all help to showcase Royston as the amazing town it is.



**Laura Whitford**  
Manager | No. 3



As a small local business that has recently moved from an 'at home business' to a shop, we have really appreciated the support of Royston First.



As we are not located on the high street, we have felt the benefit of being involved in the Town Trails to encourage families to find our shop. We also thought Independents Week was a fantastic initiative to help residents find out more about businesses and other organisations that are run by local people.

Thank you so much to Royston First for the warm welcome, we look forward to working with you more in the future!



**Kelly Da Silva Fernandes**  
Owner | Kelly's Kitchen



# Investment in Five Key Areas

A renewal of Royston First BID for a further five years will mean:

300 + businesses and other organisations will be supported and serviced by the BID

Over £1 million of investment for Royston

The continuation of existing popular projects, events, and promotions, and the introduction of new initiatives, as appropriate, to improve trading for our members.

What will we do in the fourth term of the BID, in addition to our current projects?

## Town Investment

- Smart Radios - to help businesses secure workspaces
- New Industrial Estate Signage - to help deliveries
- Youth Employment Initiative to tackle anti-social behaviour and support youths

## Events

- Royston First BID Business Awards

## Welcome & Security

- ShopSafe App - to protect employees and customers
- Summer Decorations - to help make our town more vibrant

## Business Support

- Fire Extinguisher and First Aid Training - to protect businesses and their employees
- Quarterly Networking Events - to increase networking opportunities

## Marketing

- Digital Signage - to provide free advertising space



# Welcome and Security

What we will continue to provide...

It is important that the town presents an attractive and positive first impression.

Royston First BID will continue to support several projects designed to achieve this, namely:



Free After 3pm Parking and Parking Scratch Cards



Hanging Baskets



Enhanced Christmas Lights



Christmas Lights Switch On




Deep Street Cleaning and Pigeon Proofing




Police Partnership


What will be new...



Summer Decorations



Digital Signage



Shop Safe App



Smart Radios



An example of how The Umbrella Trail could look in our High Street.



# Our Events

## Royston First BID Events

### What we've achieved...

Royston First BID has delivered a number of first-class events and trails this term. Highlights include The Coronation of His Majesty The King, Independents Week, and Christmas Lights Switch On, along with the regular children's town trails. We will continue to work hard to ensure that events are both relevant and value-adding for our members.

### What will be new...

We will be introducing The Royston First BID Business Awards to celebrate the achievements of businesses and other organisations in the town.

### Some of the events we've delivered:



#### Coronation Celebration Day

To celebrate the Coronation of His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen Consort, Royston First BID held a celebratory day in Priory Memorial Gardens in May 2023.



#### Christmas Window Decorations

Each year, we commission an artist to decorate shopfront windows with colourful Christmassy designs to help make our town more vibrant.



#### Independents Week

We celebrated Royston's growing independent business community with our week-long campaign to highlight our town's premises-based independent businesses and other organisations.



#### Christmas Lights Switch On

For two years, we have organised the town's Christmas Lights Switch On event, and it's growing year after year!



#### Creative Royston Arts Festival

We are proud to support partner events, such as the annual Royston Arts Festival.



#### Children's Town Trails

Each quarter, we organise the popular themed children's trails in the town centre. A great opportunity to encourage the community to shop local while they are participating.



#### Royston Museum Events

We are proud to sponsor and work with Royston Museum so they can organise wonderful events for our town.



#### Royston Kite Festival

We sponsor the Royston Kite Festival, so that the Rotary Club's flagship event of the year can help to bring in thousands of visitors to the town.



# Marketing and Promotion

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What we will continue to provide...

Royston First BID will continue to showcase businesses and other organisations through both traditional and digital advertising.

This includes promotion through:



Royston Business Directory



Email Marketing



Royston Town and Royston First websites



1,300 Likes  
1,500 Followers



434 Followers

## Social Media

- Subsidised advertising in **The Listing Magazine** and **Royston Crow**.
- **Royston Information Centre**, with booklet resources such as the Town Trail, Clubs and Societies, the Accommodation Guide, and the Town Maps.
- **Large poster sites** in the town.
- **Facebook and WhatsApp** groups.

## What will be new...

Advertising opportunities through new digital signage.



# Business Support

What we will continue to provide...

Royston First BID will continue to act as a facilitator between our members and key stakeholders including the Town, District, and County Councils, along with the British BIDs network.

## What will be new...

- First Aid and Fire Extinguisher Training
- Quarterly Networking Events





# Town Investment

## Town Centre

### Digital Signage

Royston First BID will invest in relevant and enhanced signage to help visitors better navigate their way around the town, aimed at making the visitor experience more aesthetically pleasing.

In our fourth term, we are introducing new digital signage in the town, giving free marketing space to ALL businesses and improve visitor navigation

To introduce new digital signage in the town, giving all members access to free advertising to promote their goods and services.



Proposed new digital signage

## Industrial Estate

While developing a successful Royston town centre is crucial to our local business economy, there are more relevant projects that are also beneficial to businesses on the industrial estate.

These are:

- Free After Three Parking
- Parking scratch cards for employees and customers
- Quarterly networking events
- Fire extinguisher and first aid training courses
- New signage in the form of lamppost banners to improve deliveries
- Police liaison on town matters
- Youth Employment initiative
- Job Vacancies website page
- Smart Radios to secure business premises





# The BID Area

2024 - 2029

The map shows the new Royston First BID area that will contribute and benefit from the projects laid out in this business plan.

- BID Boundary

General Building

School

Sport & Leisure

Market Place

Industrial Estate

Cemetery

Railway Station

Bus Station

Car Park

Toilets

Place of Interest

Underpass
- North Arrow

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## BID Area Map

Businesses and other organisations located on the streets (part and whole) shown and listed are included in the BID. If you are unsure as to whether you are included and therefore will pay the BID levy, please contact a member of the BID Team.

The streets included are:

- Angel Pavement

• Baldock Road (North side)

• Baldock Street

• Barnack Grove

• Beverley Close

• Braeburn Walk

• Briary Lane

• Cedar Crescent

• Chilcourt

• Church Lane

• Copperfields

• Coronation Avenue

• Days Close

• Downlands

• Durham Way

• Evans Close

• Farrier Court

• Fish Hill

• George Lane

• Grantham Close

• Green Drift

• Greenfield

• Heath Avenue

• Heathfield

• High Street

• Jarman Way

• Jepps Lane

• John Street

• Kiln House Yard

• King Walk

• Kneesworth Street

• London Road (part)

• Lower King Street
- Mackerel Hall

• Mallard Road

• Market Hill

• Melbourn Street

• Middle Drift

• Minster Road

• Newark Close

• North Close

• Old North Road

• Orchard Road

• Ostler Court

• Palace Gardens

• Phillips Avenue

• Pightle Close

• Pippin Grove

• Princes Mews

• Priory Lane

• Rock Road

• South Close

• Stamford Court

• St Mary's Park

• Stuart Drive

• Sun Hill

• Tannery Close

• Tannery Drift

• The Green

• Upper King Street

• Weston Avenue

• Willowside Way

• York Way

• All roads associated with the Royston Gateway
- District can change between now and up to 42 days before ballot papers are sent out.

# Budget Forecast

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Income from Levy	£229,000	£229,000	£229,000	£229,000	£229,000	£1,145,000
Additional Income	£5,000	£6,000	£7,000	£8,000	£9,000	£35,000
	£234,000	£235,000	£236,000	£237,000	£238,000	£1,180,000

## Expenditure Project and Services

Welcome and Security	£80,000	£80,000	£80,000	£80,000	£80,000	£400,000
Marketing and Promotion	£20,000	£22,250	£23,500	£24,000	£25,000	£114,750
Business Support	£13,000	£13,000	£13,000	£13,000	£13,000	£65,000
Own Investment	£25,000	£19,900	£16,300	£13,450	£9,600	£84,250
Contingency	£40,000	£40,000	£40,000	£40,000	£40,000	£200,000
Contingency	£20,000	£20,000	£20,000	£20,000	£20,000	£100,000

## Overheads

Staff and Training	£20,100	£22,100	£23,600	£25,100	£27,100	£118,000
Office and IT	£5,000	£6,000	£7,000	£8,000	£9,000	£35,000
Insurance	£2,500	£2,750	£3,000	£3,250	£3,500	£15,000
Professional fees	£5,000	£5,500	£6,000	£6,500	£7,000	£30,000
Contingency	£3,400	£3,500	£3,600	£3,700	£3,800	£18,000
	£234,000	£235,000	£236,000	£237,000	£238,000	£1,180,000

Surplus / Deficit	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
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The majority of BID levy income will seek to maintain management and overhead beneath the industry benchmark of 20% and aim to leverage voluntary income to enable 100% of BID member contributions to be allocated to work programmes which directly benefit business and the local area in general.

# Management and Governance

Royston First BID is a private, not for profit company and since its inception in 2009, has been governed by a board of unpaid and voluntary directors, together with other key stakeholders.

The majority of the board and Chair will come from private-sector organisations to ensure the BID retains its strong business focus. The company will continue to be Limited by Guarantee, thus limiting the liability of Directors and businesses and other organisations.

The Board of Directors will be fully accountable to BID levy payers and would consist entirely of representatives from BID levy paying organisations who are senior figures within their parent organisations. The board will meet at least four times per year and receive both management and financial reports at each meeting. They will communicate regularly with levy-payers on key issues, particularly reporting progress against this Business Plan.

All BID levy payers will be entitled to attend BID board meetings by arrangement to raise any matter and can be nominated to fill vacant positions on the board. Royston First BID will follow the BID industry best practice in the following respects:

- Being subject to independent, accredited and external scrutiny to the production and submission of an annual report, annual accounts and submission of statutory financial and tax returns.
- Produce regular updates to BID levy payers
- Hold an Annual General Meeting

## Proposed board composition

There are 10 directors as follows:

- 2 x Independent Town Centre
- 1 x National Town Centre
- 2 x Industrial Estate
- 1 x Professional Services
- 1 x Council
- 1 x Food, Drink, and Public Houses
- 1 x Community
- 1 x Entertainment, Leisure, and Accommodation





# BID Levy

The cost of the levy for each business is a percentage of its Rateable Value and so is based on the size and location of the business premises'. Businesses and other organisations are encouraged to consider the levy as an investment of a relatively small sum which, when pooled, will provide over a £1 million investment to be spent entirely on Royston over the next five years.

## What will you pay?

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The percentage of RV will be set at 1.75% for those with an RV of 15k or more\*. For businesses and organisations with an RV between £7,000 and £14,999 they will pay £100 per annum. This means that the BID would only cost businesses and other organisations a minimal amount per year. For example:

Business Size	Rateable Value	Levy
Micro	£7,000 - £14,999	£100
Small	£17,500	£306.25
Medium	£40,000	£700
Large	£100,000	£1,750

Contributions from a single hereditament with an RV of £1M+ will be capped at £17,500.  
To calculate your proposed annual levy, simply multiply your Rateable Value by 0.0175.  
If you are unsure about your Rateable Value, please contact the Valuation Office on **03000 501 501** or visit [www.gov.uk/find-business-rates](http://www.gov.uk/find-business-rates).

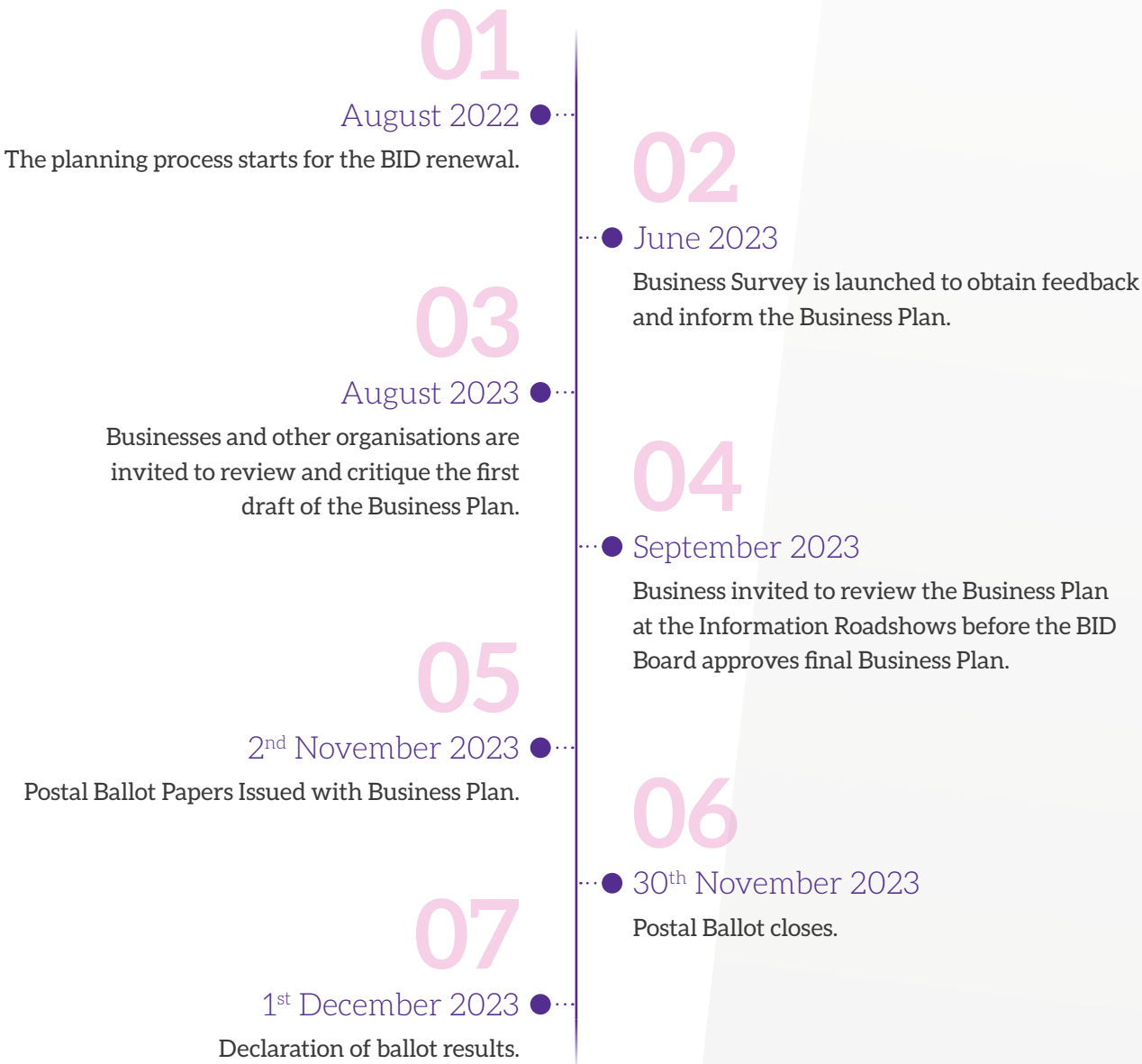
# Timetable

## Over a year in the making

Planning for the BID's renewal began in August 2022, and in June 2023, the Business Survey was launched to capture feedback from businesses and other organisations.

This information is being used to inform the first draft Business Plan.

## The process is as follows:





# BID Ballot

## Key Facts

- All eligible businesses and other organisations can vote.
- The ballot will be conducted through an independent, confidential postal vote by Civica Election Services on behalf of North Herts Council, which is the responsible body as determined by the BID legislation.
- Each eligible business ratepayer will have one vote in respect of each hereditament within the BID area, provided they are listed on the National Non-Domestic Rates list for the defined area, as provided by North Herts Council.
- A proxy vote is available, and details will be sent out by Civica Election Services.
- Ballot papers will be posted no later than 2nd November 2023 and are to be returned no later than 5pm on 30th November 2023.
- For the BID to continue, two conditions **MUST** be met:
  - More than 50% of businesses and other organisations that vote must vote in favour of the BID.
  - Of the businesses and other organisations that vote, the 'yes' votes must represent more than 50% of the total rateable values of all votes cast.
- The results of the ballot will be declared on 1st December 2023.

Under the legislation, if the BID is approved, all the businesses and other organisations regardless of how or if they voted will be legally obliged to pay the levy amount as outlined on page 18, per annum, for five years.

### Get in Touch

For more information, please contact us using the following details:

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# BID Rules

## for BID Renewal

### Levy Rules

The Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004 as approved by the Government, sets out the legal framework within which BIDs have to operate, including the BID rules which define the way in which the levy is charged and collected.

- The renewal BID term will be five years from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31st March 2029.
- The BID levy will be applied to all eligible business ratepayers within the defined area of Royston First BID with a rateable value of £7,000 or more.
- The BID levy rate is fixed as outlined on the BID Levy page, using the business rating list as at 1st April 2024.
- The liability for the daily BID levy will fall on the eligible ratepayer.
- The BID levy will be paid by any new ratepayer occupying any existing hereditaments within the BID area.
- New hereditaments will be charged from the point of occupation based on the rateable value at the time it enters the rating list.
- Empty properties will be liable for the BID levy with no void period, for as long as the hereditament remains on the NNDR list.
- Where the rateable value for individual hereditaments (rated properties) results in a lower BID levy, it will only come into effect from the start of the financial year in which the change is made. No refunds of the BID levy will be made for previous years.
- The BID levy will not be affected by the small business rate relief scheme, service charges paid to landlords, exemptions, relief or discounts prescribed in the Non-Domestic Rating (Collection and Enforcement) (Local Lists) Regulations 1989 made under Local Government Finance Act 1988.
- There will be no VAT charged on the BID levy.
- Refunds will be at the discretion of the BID.
- The BID would deliver services in addition to any public or private sector organisation.
- In the event of any queries regarding any BID levy, the BID Board would make the decision.
- The Rateable Value list, as of the 1st September 2023, will be used for the calculation of the annual BID levy for the duration of this proposal.
- The BID Board may exercise the ability to raise the BID levy on an annual basis for the duration of the BID, with such increases limited to the increase in the Consumer Price Index of the preceding year.
- Voluntary BID contributors would be welcomed, although will not be entitled to vote in the BID ballot. Such voluntary contributions would be paid by separate agreement with the BID Company.
- None of the costs of developing this BID proposal would be recovered from levy receipts from this business plan.

Collection and enforcement arrangements will be similar to those for collection and enforcement of non-domestic business rates with the BID Company responsible for any debt write off. Details can be found in the Operating Agreement between the BID and Council (see website).

The BID area and BID rules cannot be altered without a re-ballot of members.



# FAQs

The BID has been running for 15 years, why can't it just continue?

BIDs last for a maximum of five years and once that term is over, the BID is required to re-ballot. It reviews its projects, produces a new Business Plan stating its objectives for the next five years and this plan is then voted by BID businesses and other organisations that will be required to pay the levy. This is known as a renewal ballot.

How much will I pay?

On behalf of Royston First BID, North Herts Council will collect a levy from each BID business that will be transferred to the BID company and used to implement the projects laid out in this plan. All eligible BID businesses and other organisations will pay an annual levy as outlined on page 18, based on their rateable value.

My business isn't part of Royston First BID, can I still be a part of it?

Yes, any businesses and other organisations that are exempt from paying the BID levy can contribute voluntarily. If you join the BID in this way, you have the same rights to the governance and management of the company as any other business. To discuss voluntary membership, please contact the BID Team (see page 20).

When will the fourth mandate's projects start being delivered?

The third term of the BID is due to end on the 31st of March 2024. The fourth term will then start to be rolled out from 1st April 2024 and levy bills will be issued. If the renewal ballot is unsuccessful, all BID services will cease on 31st March 2024.

Is this just another tax and will it substitute those services that North Herts Council already provide?

A BID cannot replace or substitute local authority statutory services i.e., those covered by your business rates. These are a level of street cleansing and maintenance, highways and roads, and emergency services. Royston First BID can choose to enhance and add to these services using BID levy income. North Herts Council has provided baseline statements as part of the BID renewal for both its statutory and discretionary services.

## What a 'Yes' vote means...

Over 50% of businesses and other organisations that vote must vote in favour of Royston First BID

+

Of the businesses and other organisations that vote yes, their combined rateable value must be greater than 50% of the total rateable value of voters

=

**YES!**

## What would a 'No' vote mean?

A 'NO' vote will mean Royston will lose a great number of benefits that the BID currently brings to its members and the town.

We would lose:

- ✗ Parking Scratch Cards
- ✗ Events such as the Christmas Light Switch On
- ✗ Supporting projects such as Royston Picture Palace
- ✗ Planned projects e.g. summer decorations, Business Awards, Shop Safe App and digital signage
- ✗ Christmas-painted windows
- ✗ Historic Town Trail and Children's Trails
- ✗ BID Manager, engaging with and supporting our local businesses and other organisations
- ✗ Royston Information Centre
- ✗ Business Directory – print and online
- ✗ Town communications via social media, emails and WhatsApp

- ✗ Royston Town Website
- ✗ Free Advertising and Marketing Support for businesses and other organisations
- ✗ Hanging Baskets
- ✗ Pavement Deep Cleans

We could also lose:

- ✗ Free After 3pm Parking, subsidised by Royston First
- ✗ Christmas Lights, subsidised by Royston First





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## Contact Us

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