

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 January 2024

Present: Councillor F Ezeifedi (Vice Chair in the Chair)
Councillors F Ezeifedi, S Ahmed, M Devonish, P Hill, A Khan,
P Kloss, L Nembhard MBE and T Osborn

Also present: Councillor Ian Stotesbury (Minute numbers 67 to 71.)

Officers: Director of Partnerships
Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy
Senior Democratic Services Officer

67 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

Apologies for absence had been received from the Chair, Councillor Grimston.

68 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

69 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023 were submitted and signed.

70 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

Councillor Khan provided an update on Finance Scrutiny Committee on 10 January noting that the agenda contained a link to the minutes and there had subsequently been a full debate at Council.

The Housing Task Group had had a productive and positive meeting with Watford Community Housing. The report contained a number of tenant-centric recommendations which focused on damp and mould and complaints processes with a view to the incoming Awaab's Law. Councillor Devonshire added that complaints had gone down over the last few years and she was pleased with the relationship with social housing providers.

71

Update on recommendations of the Sustainability Strategy Task Group

The committee received an update on the Sustainability Strategy Task Group.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport, Councillor Stotesbury, introduced the update. It had been a very positive exercise with good recommendations which were in the process of being implemented. The update was timely as there would be a series of reports on the strategy later in 2024.

Responding to a question around charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs), it was noted that a number of funding bids had been secured and applications were being prepared for the next round of levies. There was no indication that the national political situation was impacting funding that had already been announced. It was important for residents to have access to on-street charging but these were expensive capital investments.

The committee discussed enforcement of EV bays in controlled parking zones, noting that some vehicles were parked in these bays for long periods of time. Some bays were currently only advisory and the approach taken was to prioritise EV infrastructure before moving to enforcement. This would increase confidence in switching to EVs. Enforcement would be introduced in the future, subject to resident consultation through the TRO process.

RESOLVED –

that all the recommendations be signed off as complete.

72

Performance of the high street

The committee welcomed Kara Mesiano, Watford Business Improvement District (BID), and Simon Plumb, Atria Watford, who made presentations to the committee about the performance of the high street.

Kara Mesiano made a presentation which introduced the BID, impact of the changes to the levy, footfall and dwell time, vacancy rates, benchmarking, sustainability, recruitment and retention and their response to the cost-of-living crisis.

Simon Plumb, Atria Watford, then presented an update to the committee. This introduced the centre, performance, community focus, cost-of-living initiatives and challenges faced which included recruitment and crime prevention.

The presentations are appended to these minutes.

In the course of the discussion, the following points were made:

- The hospitality sector was struggling across the board but businesses were offered support including with marketing and food waste costs. The impact of the closure of Pryzm was not yet clear but the reopening of the Colosseum would provide an opportunity.
- The retail market was best-placed to ensure that the range of businesses in the town met the diversity of the community.
- The BID had no influence over lettings in the town centre but was looking to recruit a director for the BID board who represented a business that particularly served Watford's diversity. The team also spoke regularly to lettings agents and were keen to encourage a diverse offer.
- The Intu business model had been focused on national brands but the current operators were keen to talk to the community and offered free space to test the viability of new offers within the centre. There was potential for events to mark Black History Month.
- Watford Gift Cards were valid for 12 months from the date of purchase.
- The BID could not control which suppliers and types of packaging that businesses used but offered a cardboard recycling service to avoid it going to landfill.
- Watford Palace Theatre was a BID levy payer and were actively engaged with them. They were also in conversations with Atria about partnering on initiatives.
- The idea to develop a 'BID-lite' for other areas in the town centre, such as Queen's Road, was under consideration but would be complex. If the BID's area were to expand, there was a risk that the BID would not be extended for a further term due to the increase in smaller, independent businesses that would be involved in the ballot. The next ballot was not until 2026 and there were also options for businesses to join as voluntary levy payers.
- It was understood that there were copyright issues with the name 'the Harlequin' and so the centre could not currently use that name. Any renaming process was costly.
- Atria had committed to Purple Tuesday, which focused on accessibility and inclusivity of public spaces. Their approach was for continuous commitment which was likely to include a community-led disability mystery shoppers, who experienced a range of disabilities, who could provide feedback to the centre and businesses.
- Vacant units were not identified by their size. For the BID, these covered ground-level units that were vacant and not leased. In Atria, certain units were still leased, even though they were not currently operational, and were therefore not included in the figures. Vacancy rates remained below 10%.

- The reduction in the levy funding was likely to impact the provision of Christmas lights. While these would remain in some form, the costs for maintaining the tree lights were looking to be prohibitive at present. The cost of festive lights was not, however, an issue in Atria, although other shopping centres were reviewing their provision.
- It was confirmed that there were defibrillators in the Atria Centre as well as in the BID area.

The committee thanked the guests for their time and useful presentations and agreed a number of recommendations.

RESOLVED-

1. To explore the concept of a 'BID-lite' for the Queens Road area.
2. To remove any barriers to the provision of more retail which caters for Watford's diverse community.
3. To encourage councillors and community groups to engage with the BID and the Atria Centre about ideas for events and initiatives.

73 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2023-24 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the current 2023/24 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

74 **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee**

The Chair would provide any relevant updates at the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED –

the update be noted.

75 **Work Programme**

Members were invited to review Overview and Scrutiny Committee's draft work programme for 2023/24.

Officers were asked to recirculate the work programme for consideration.

RESOLVED –

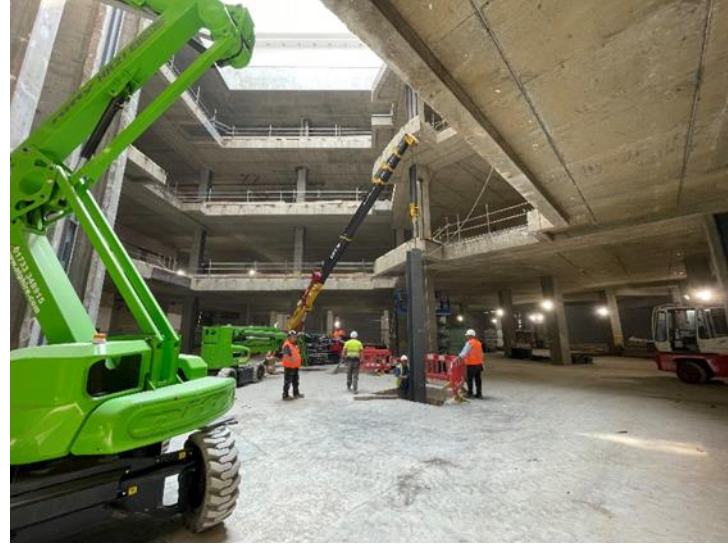
that the Chair works with officers to incorporate members' suggestions into the committee's work programme.

76 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be on Wednesday 21 February 2024.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm
and finished at 8.40 pm



Minute Item 72

Atria Watford

WBC Overview and Scrutiny

Committee Jan 24

atria Watford



1.4m square feet of retail and leisure

Top 20 of the largest shopping destinations in the UK

172 units

2770 parking spaces over 4 car parks

Annual footfall of over 16,000,000

15th best shopping destination in 2024 (Trevor Wood Associates)

Metrics

Footfall

Lettings

Vacancy rate

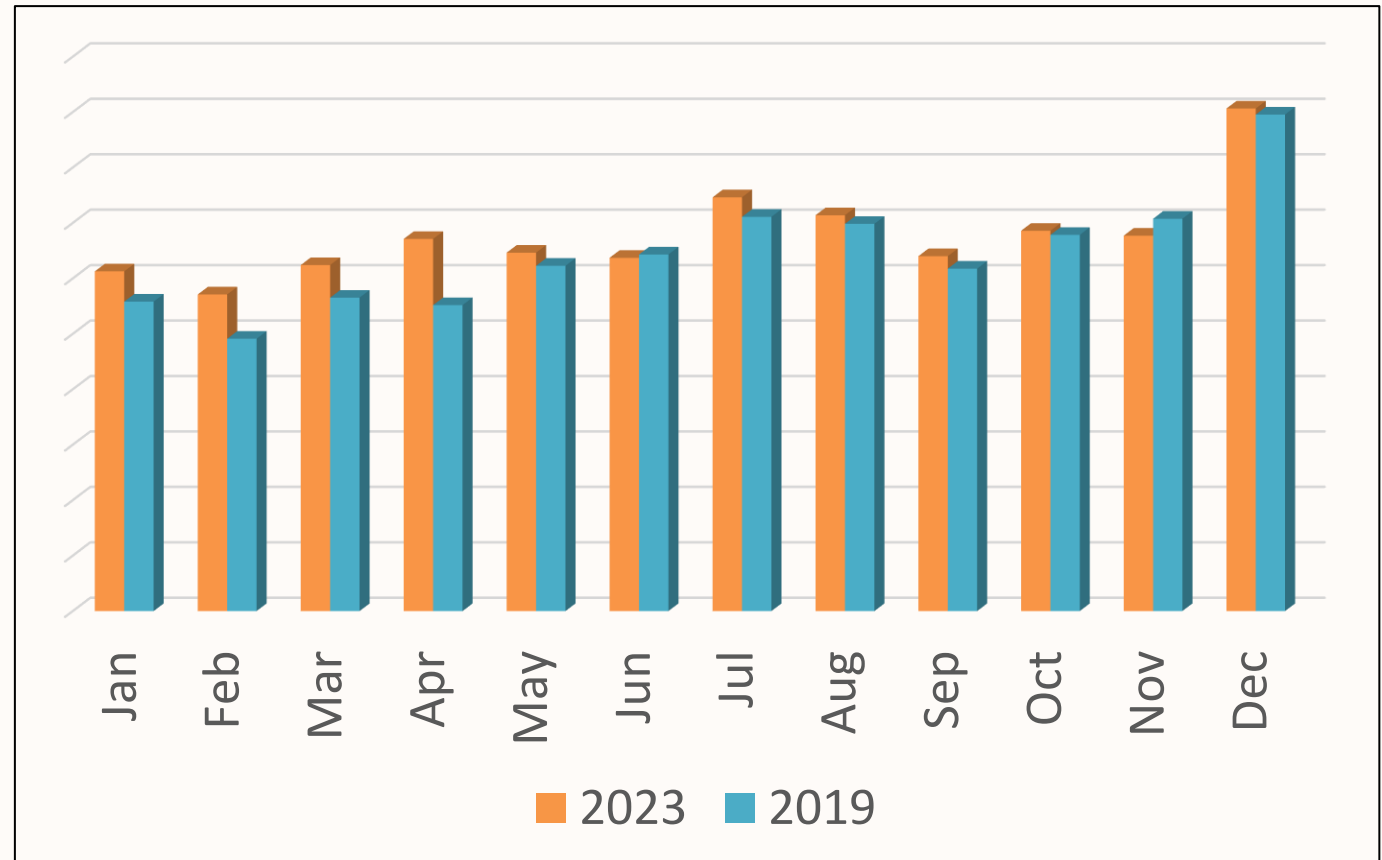
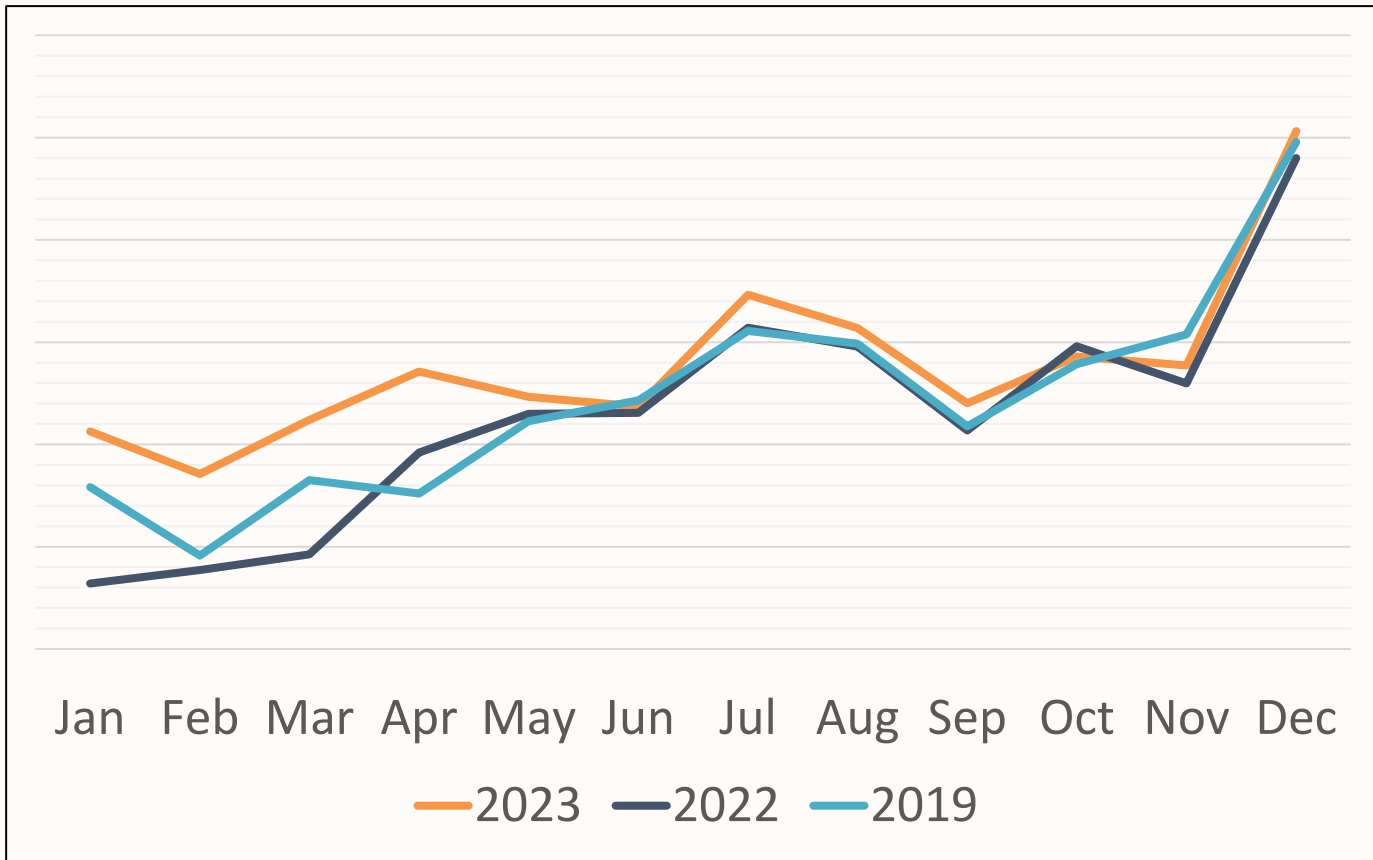
Lease renewals and upsizing

Car park usage

Dwell time

Sales data (increasingly important)

Rent and service charge collection



National and Regional data footfall 2023 Vs 2019

Trend Summary				
UNITED KINGDOM / TOTAL MALL	UNITED KINGDOM / TOTAL RETAIL	SOUTH EAST ENGLAND / TOTAL MALL	SOUTH EAST ENGLAND / TOTAL RETAIL	LONDON / TOTAL MALL
▼ -19.1%	▼ -12.0%	▼ -14.5%	▼ -12.6%	▼ -13.8%

MOSS
chaiiwala®

klass.
YI FANG®
— UNITED KINGDOM —

MELBE
HOME

H A U T E | D O L C I

Tkmaxx®

FOOTASYJUM

RITUALS...

ProCook®
BUBBLE CITEA

MARTINS
FURNITURE & FLOORING

Dunelm
Poundland®

FINECRAFT

photogenic
studio

F.HINDS
JEWELLERS SINCE 1830

suit DIRECT

Boutique
ONE

BloomsYard

Shakeaway

R
REPertoire

AMERICAN
Candy
Empire

Typo

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

The ZARA logo is displayed in a black, serif, all-caps font.

Upsizing 18,000 sq ft to 43,000



Tripling in size to 19,000 sq ft



Warren James

More than doubling in size

The MOSS logo is the word 'MOSS' in a black, bold, sans-serif font.The Poundland logo features the word 'Poundland' in a teal, sans-serif font, followed by a circular icon made of yellow dots.

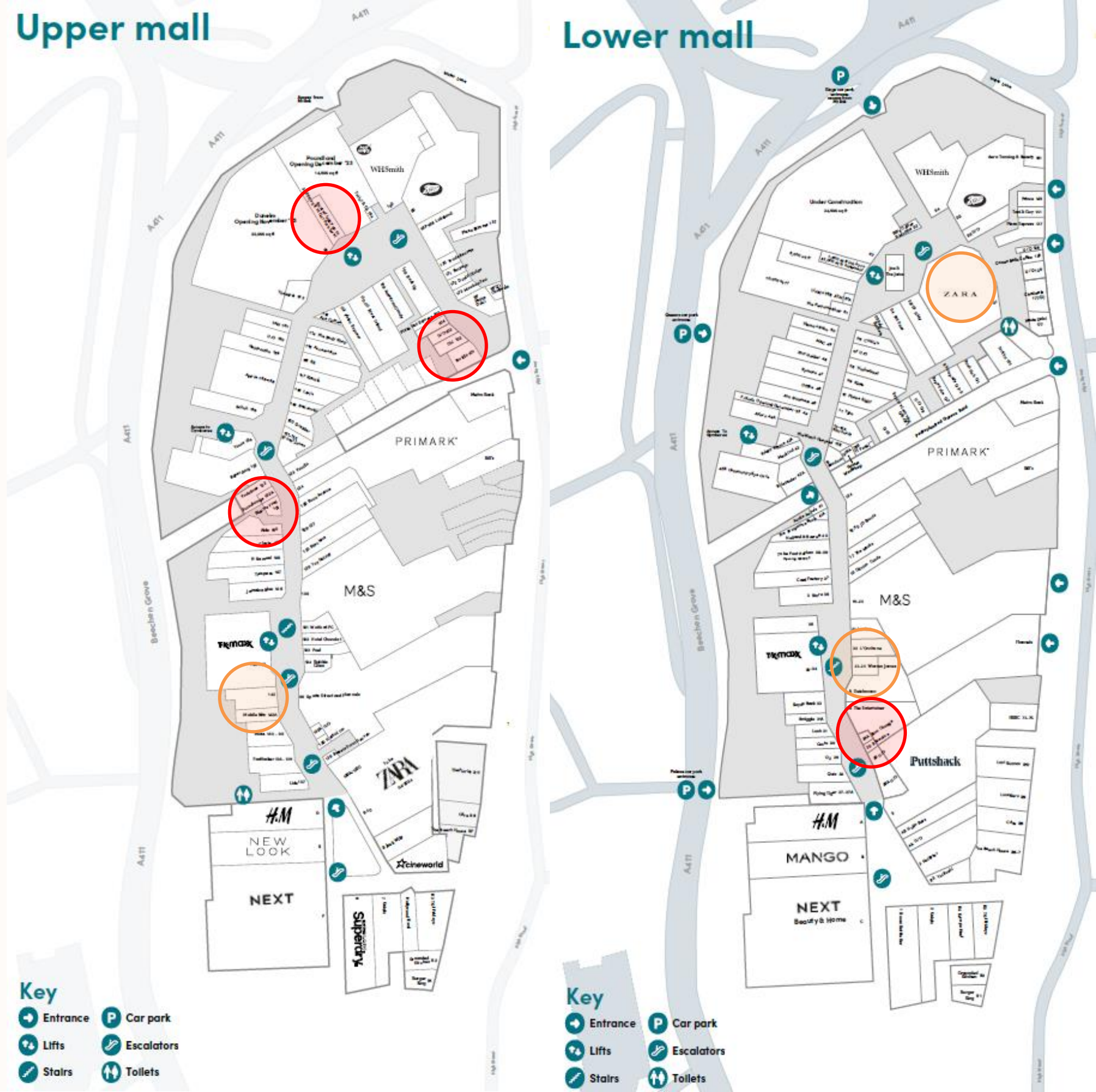
National vacancy rate (BCR) – 13.9%

Atria Watford – 4.5%*

Less than 10%

Must not be complacent

Page 13



Performance – Vacancy rate

INTU

Early shift to leisure

SGS / Global Mutual

True partnership working

Investment

Speed

Attention to detail

Transparency

Savills

Wider industry experience

Cost reduction

Greater flexibility

Focus on catchment and community





Page 16

240,000 sq ft

- Jul 20 John Lewis Closed
- Jan 21 Unit surrendered
- First unit opens Dec 23



Savills UK

Retail & Leisure property management



SHOPPING CENTRES UNDER
MANAGEMENT

174



SHOPPING CENTRES SQ FT
UNDER MANAGEMENT

48,527,819

OUR PROPERTY
MANAGEMENT
OFFICES



Over 39,000

staff throughout the Americas, the UK,
Continental Europe, Asia Pacific, Africa
and the Middle East

9000+ **400+**

staff

Service lines

600+

offices with **130+**
in the UK

70

countries

17

divisions

REVENUE BY
BUSINESS

OTHER SERVICE LINES

63%

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

37%





SAVE BIG MONEY BY JOINING THE ARRIVA TRAVEL CLUB

Great value bus travel in your leisure time and for your commute when you work within Atria Watford



arriva

HYGIENE POVERTY DONATION STATION

Support our appeal by purchasing essential hygiene products for local people in need. Donate today.



UPPER MALL NEAR APPLE

- Roof allotment
- Discounted bus travel
- Hygiene poverty appeal
- Gift swap

The Gift Swap

Sunday 28th Jan

Don't let unwanted gifts go to waste. Swap them for something you really want at The Gift Swap event.



atria Watford

Challenge	Approach
Volatile retail sector	Brilliant basics Keep costs low Partnership approach
Rising costs	Constant review Reductions where possible Make every penny count
Recruitment	Focus on conditions
Theft and ASB	Retailers need to step up
Make the successes count	Continue driving, investing (money and effort) and engaging






Thank you



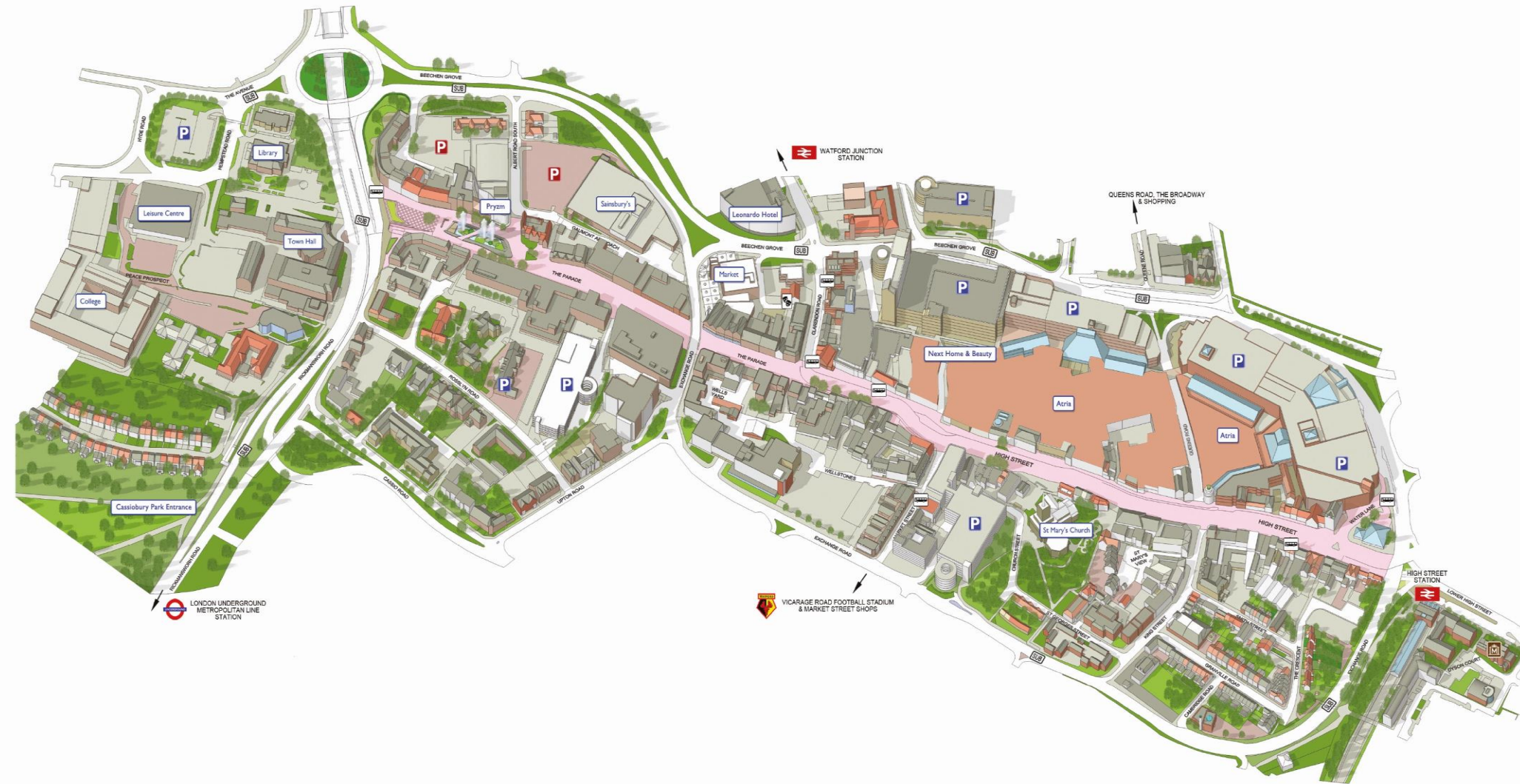
TOWN CENTRE BID

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Presentation 2023/24

- 
- **BID stands for Business Improvement District.**
 - **There are over 330 in the UK.**
 - **A BID term is 5 years.**
 - **BIDs operate in a defined BID area.**

Watford Town Centre BID

497 'hereditaments that pay a BID levy



Sector split:

Sector	No	%
Retail	158	32%
Cafes, restaurants & takeaways	89	18%
Office / professional	45	9%
Other	39	8%
Hair & Beauty	29	6%
Consumer Services	21	4%
Leisure	20	4%
Bars, clubs & pubs	19	4%
Health & Wellbeing	18	4%
Charities	16	3%
Banks	14	3%
Estate Agents	11	2%
Gambling	9	2%
Car parks	9	2%
Total	497	100

Geographical split:

Sector	No	%
Atria Shopping Mall	143	28.77%
The Parade	116	23.34%
High Street	92	18.51%
Atria Non Retail	44	8.85%
Market Street	24	4.83%
High Street (Atria)	15	3.02%
Clarendon Road	11	2.21%
Civic Quarter	10	2.01%
King Street	9	1.81%
Queens Road (Atria)	8	1.61%
Wilmington Crescent	8	1.61%
Exchange Road	7	1.41%
George Street	3	0.06%
Rickmansworth Road	4	0.01%
Rosslyn Road	1	<0.01%
Sutton Road	1	<0.01%
The Crescent	1	<0.01%
Total	497	100

Levy payers:

(Highest paying hereditaments)

Total: £109,462.50

(19% of all levy)

John Lewis Unit	King / Queens Car Park
Marks & Spencer	Next
TK Maxx	Cineworld
WH Smiths	Boots The Chemist

(Highest paying companies)

Total: £159,472.50

(28% of all levy)

Watford Centre Ltd	Marks & Spencer
Town Centre Carparks	Next
Watford Council	Primark
Sports Direct	Cineworld
WH Smiths	Boots

Independents:

Total no: 111

Total levy: £51,046.27

(9% of all levy)

Sector	No
Retail	18
Hair & Beauty	18
Restaurants	11
Office / Professional	10
Consumer services	10
Minimarket/newsagent	9
Leisure	7
Café / fast food	7
Bar / pub	6
Health / wellbeing	6
Estate agent	6
Other	1

Estimated total levy:

2023/24
£570,804.29

2024/25
£441,147.13

2025/26
£441,147.13



Reduction of £129,655

Watford Town Centre BID's Vision is for Watford town centre to be a place where everyone feels **safe**, **confident** and **comfortable**, and where businesses thrive and prosper. It will be competitive and dynamic, a place that is attractive to businesses and investors.



The slide features a teal background with four decorative geometric patterns in the corners. Each pattern is a square composed of smaller triangles in shades of blue, yellow, red, and purple, arranged in a complex, interlocking design. The top-left and bottom-left patterns are larger and more prominent, while the top-right and bottom-right patterns are smaller.

Estimated £1.5m BID investment!

How is Watford Town Centre performing?

Footfall

Month	Footfall	Change from previous month	YTD Year on Year 2022 / 2023
September 22	1,177,228	-2.36%	
October 22	1,144,187	-2.81%	
November 22	1,108,934	-3%	
December 22	1,138,737	+3%	
January 23	1,068,211	-6%	+25.4%
February 23	961,564	-10%	+20%
March 23	1,075,695	+12%	+17%
April 23	1,084,092	+1%	+13.4%
May 23	971,535	-10%	+10.7%
June 23	1,132,335	+17%	+8.7%
July 23	986,320	-2%	+6.4%
August 23	939,579	-5%	+5%
September 23	1,002,659	+7%	+3.3%
October 23	947,111	-14.2%	+1.4%
November 23	962,747	-14.3%	-0.2%

Average dwell time in 2023 was approx. 90 minutes

Vacancy rates

	National	Watford High Street
Q1 - Apr 22 - Jun 22	14.1%	7.6%
Q2 - Jul 22 - Sept 22	14.0%	5.6%
Q3 - Oct 22 - Dec 22	13.9%	5.6%
Q4 - Jan 23 - Mar 23	13.8%	7.8%
Q1 - Apr 23 - Jun 23	13.9%	7.0%
Q2 - Jul 23 - Sept 23	13.8%	6.7%
Q3 - Oct 23 - Dec 23	13.9%	7.4%

The figures are calculated using 269 ground level units within the BID area, including the atria High Street

visible units, but excluding the units inside the shopping centre.



Business Investment

2022 - 29 new businesses opened.

26 remain open in the Town Centre - 88.5%.

2023 - 19 new businesses opened.

19 remain open in the Town Centre - 100%.

How do we compare?

TownandPlace.AI

Location	Visit Frequency	Catchment Size	Est. Monthly Footfall	Est. Weekly Footfall	National Chains	Typical Retail Dwell (h:m:s)	BID
Harrow	2.41	1,025,551	665,933	150,372	90	01:30:22	Y
Hemel Hempstead	2.21	378,825	466,595	105,361	84	01:21:38	Y
Hertford	2.70	428,968	343,098	77,474	26	01:28:44	N
Reading	2.66	1,228,677	1,661,608	375,202	169	01:39:43	Y
St Albans	2.35	1,021,501	701,007	158,292	133	01:31:07	Y
Watford	2.05	1,353,870	948,598	214,200	181	01:29:31	Y

Responding to the BID levy income reduction

2023

- **Communicated the upcoming change to stakeholders**
- **2023 BID Survey - April 23**
- **Restructure of the BID team**

2024

- **2024 BID Survey - Currently live**
- **Build 2023 surplus levy income to support 2024-2026**



2023 Priorities

01 Town Centre marketing.

02 More support for businesses with ‘Going Greener’.

03 Support in the reduction of crime & increase safety.

The delivery

01 New Town Centre branding.

02 Cardboard collection service.

03 Improved Town Centre partnership approach.

Town Centre Marketing

Social media: impressions/views									
Social media account	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23
Facebook impressions	13,195	10,876	11,560	42,674	118,490	31,680	131,875	420,257	276,880
Instagram impressions	2,528	2,704	2,164	6,832	16,395	5,519	51,552	5,644	10,922
TikTok views	3,781	3,829	2,690	11,784	3,449	3,557	3,609	3,635	20,604
Twitter/X impressions	2,341	4,887	2,244	18,900	9,953	6,961	9,222	23,700	5,839
LinkedIn impressions	1,042	1,070	950	3,884	1,788	2,168	1,370	3,437	453
Total impressions	22,887	23,366	19,608	84,074	150,075	49,885	197,628	456,673	314,698
% change		2.1%	-16.1%	328.8%	78.5%	-68.4%	296.2%	131.1%	-31.1%
Social media: new followers (net)									
Social media account	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23
Facebook followers	17	9	7	40	104	21	285	380	87
Instagram followers	50	35	28	79	65	45	204	123	161
TikTok followers	3	5	4	13	11	1	19	31	150
Twitter/X followers	-13	-6	-4	-4	-9	-8	5	0	0
LinkedIn followers	12	7	8	17	5	7	8	21	10
Total new followers	69	50	43	145	176	66	521	555	408
% change		-27.5%	-14.0%	237.2%	21.3%	-62.5%	689.4%	6.53%	-26.5%
Website: unique visitors									
Website page	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23
Home page	-	-	-	-	2,385	1,689	1,850	1,227	1,346
Who we are	-	-	-	-	51	94	85	83	79
What's on	-	-	-	-	115	108	283	5,978	438
Plan your visit	-	-	-	-	94	87	53	100	145
Gift card	-	-	-	-	35	21	42	28	22
For BID Businesses	-	-	-	-	37	84	67	36	41
Contact Us	-	-	-	-	40	34	52	52	24
Total	315	439	180	271	2,531	1,999	2,200	6,800	1,211
% change		39.3%	-59.0%	50.5%	833.9%	-21.0%	10.1%	209.1%	-82.2%

Going Greener

- **Free Cardboard Collection Scheme launched in August 23 - 5 tonnes collected to date.**
- **Participation & support of the growth of the Environmental Managers Network.**
- **Continue to offer award winning sustainability events in Watford Town Centre - The Gift Swap.**
- **Encourage BID business to make green changes to their business via the Business Improvement Grant.**
- **Continue to lead by example.**



Crime & Safety

- **Increased partnership working.**
- **Financial support for community engagement media board.**
- **£15,000 CCTV contribution.**
- **Continue to participate in ASB Forum and PubWatch.**
- **Continue to deliver WBAC (Watford Business Against Crime) Scheme.**
- **Encouraged businesses to assess their property and support crime & safety initiatives via the grant.**

Watford Gift Card



2023 Total Sales: £50,890

£5,810

2020 total sales

£8,495

2021 total sales

£37,794

2022 total sales

2024-26 Vision

Our vision remains the same, as outlined in our 2021-2026 business plan

↳ Strategy

To work with key partners in the town to develop and deliver a programme of activities that support business growth and improve the Watford town centre experience for them, their staff and their customers.

BID Themes

**Theme 1 - Safeguarding the future of
Watford**

**Theme 2 - Enhancing the look and feel of
Watford**

**Theme 3 - Marketing, communication and
events**

Drive improvements that address current concerns over safety in the town centre during the day, early evening and at night.

- **Continue to run our business crime reduction partnership: ‘Watford Business Against Crime’.**
- **Review the funding of the CCTV – Regular reporting required.**
- **Explore BID Ranger options for the Town Centre to enable us to continue to support businesses with retail crime.**
- **Monitor street drinking, begging and rough sleepers.**
- **Attend ASB Forum Group, PubWatch and any additional Town Centre safety Working Groups.**
- **Continue to work closely with Herts Police – BID levy payers from 2024.**
- **Create a ‘Town Centre Safety’ video.**
- **Support ‘White Ribbon’ and work in partnership to reduce VAWG.**

Maintain initiatives that enhance the town centre experience, in a more cost effective way.

- **Review lamppost banners – Match new branding.**
- **Flower displays to be reviewed. Options include reducing the cost of the current displays or a brand-new town centre enhancement offer.**
- **Christmas lights (in place from November to January) – New 2-year contract to be agreed.**
- **LED tree lighting – Potential loss.**



Build and ethos that is welcoming and inclusive

- **Continue to support ‘Purple Tuesday’ and work with town centre businesses to ensure they’re unlocking the disability consumer spend.**
- **Review the £5,000 contribution to Shop Mobility.**
- **Work with businesses to ensure their venue is accessible.**
- **Ensure our events are inclusive.**
- **Continue to be a ‘Proud Watford’ supporter.**

To ensure levy payers have access to the information and support they need.

- **Capture town centre data & create a quarterly digital ‘Watford Town Centre Performance Report’.**
- **Drive levy payers to our website for up to date information on BID activities, training, important news.**
- **Continue to create and circulate 2 newsletters per year, reducing printing.**
- **Grow our e-database & send regular e-comms.**
- **Share relevant partner information to our levy payers.**

To maintain initiatives that lock-in local spend.

- **Grow the Watford Gift Card scheme - focus on larger corporate sales.**
- **Support the Watford Business Charter – Buy more from local suppliers.**
- **Establish better connections with wider Watford business community.**
- **Share information about networking opportunities held by partner organisations.**

To support businesses with the recruitment and retention of staff.

- **Support employment & recruitment initiatives organised by partners.**
- **Work with ED team at council on overcoming barriers to employment.**
- **Work with partners on the creation of a fortnightly jobs bulletin, listing all job vacancies in the BID area / Watford and how to apply.**
- **Continue Excellent Employee Awards & look at other ways to recognise exemplary businesses and organisations.**
- **Support the Watford Business Pledge in partnership with Watford ED team and the Chamber – Support local recruitment.**

Generate additional revenue to invest into BID initiatives and support long term growth.

- Increase WBAC membership fees.
- Voluntary levy payments.
- Explore event sponsorship / partnership.

Other options could include:

- Expansion of the BID area.
- Additional BIDs in Watford.



Deliver our strategic marketing plan

- ✓ **Explores the Watford town centre offer.**
- ✓ **Identifies our USPs and footfall drivers.**
- ✓ **Know our target audiences.**
- ✓ **Understands the best channels.**
- ✓ **Identifies the key communication messages.**
- ✓ **Outlines our marketing tactics.**

Promote the Watford Town Centre brand

- Continue campaigns to support the rebrand.
- Continue to drive traffic to our website via our socials and e-communications to levy payers.
- Ensure the new branding is visible at all events.
- Consider Town Centre branded banners on the High Street.



Town centre events

**BID
events**



**Other
events**

The Gift Swap

Breakfast with the BID

BID blood drive

Marketing & events working group

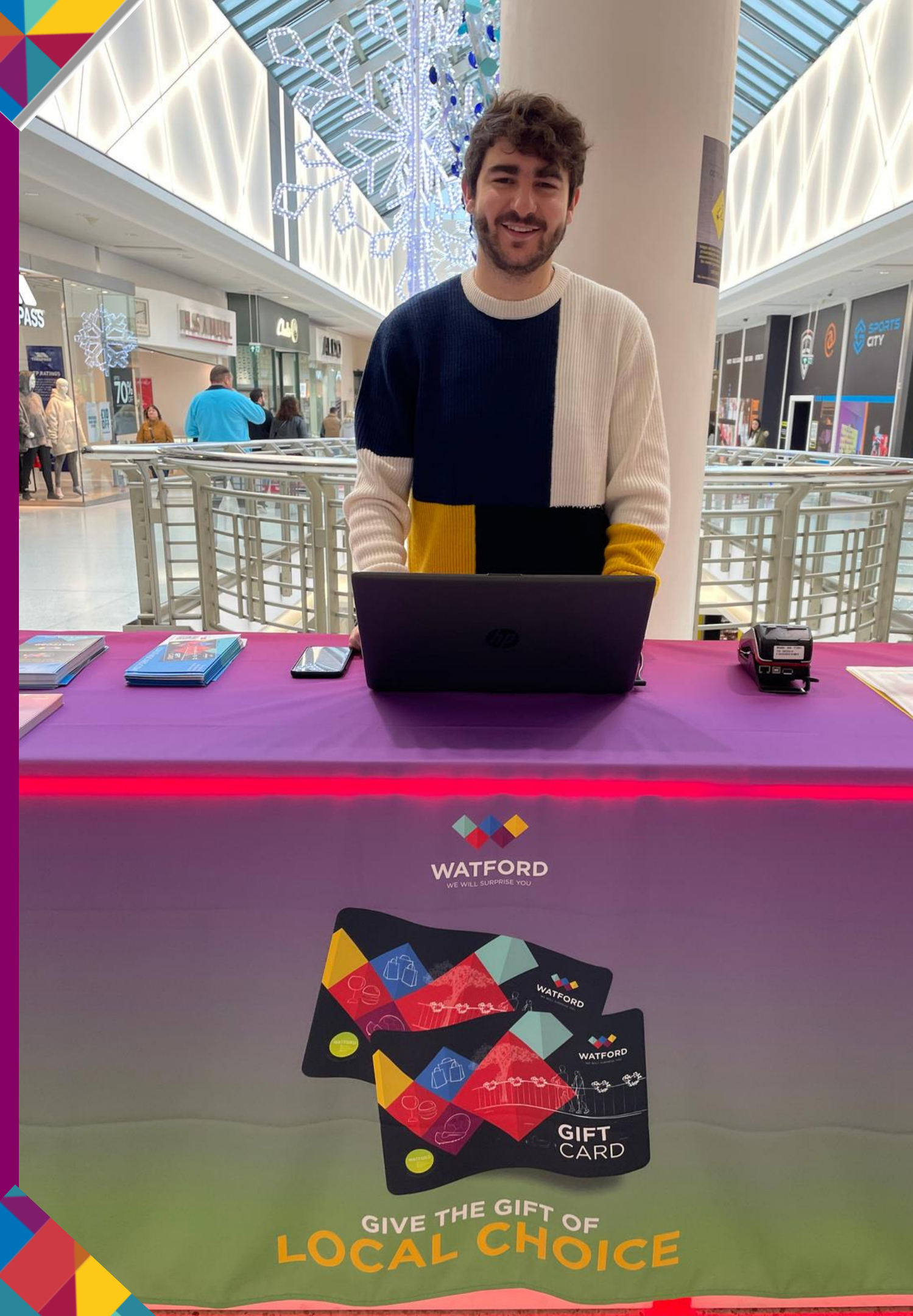
Share info

Agree comms

Promote ALL town centre events

Watford Gift Card marketing

- **Promote Watford Gift Card as the gift of choice.**
- **Publicise every new business that joins.**
- **SEO campaign to drive Xmas sales.**
- **Sales booth in the Atria throughout December weekends.**



Challenges

- ✓ **Loss of 23% BID income – Impact on delivery.**
- ✓ **Sourcing additional revenue.**
- ✓ **Securing a third term.**
- ✓ **Resource and funding to react appropriately to changes.**
- ✓ **Recruitment and retention.**
- ✓ **Retail theft / Crime & ASB.**
- ✓ **National issues within the hospitality sector.**

Response to the cost-of-living crisis

- **The BID where possible will continue to free of charge town centre events such as Winterfest and Sustainable Sunday.**
- **Promote businesses that are offering discounts and promotions to consumers.**
- **Promote all support/events from partners via the Watford Town Centre website.**
- **Support our businesses that are affected by the loss of revenue / retail theft as a result of the crisis.**



Questions?