

Watford Town Centre Business Improvement District Business (BID) Plan **2016 - 2021**

Chairman's introduction

I am delighted to introduce Watford's Business Improvement District (BID) Business Proposal. This signals a wonderful opportunity for Businesses within the Town Centre to be more accountable for and have greater influence over what happens to promote and develop Watford's Town Centre. By working in Partnership with our local authority, we can ensure we provide Services, Marketing and Events that add real value to our current and prospective customers.

I am extremely proud to Chair the BID and I urge you to vote "Yes" for the BID, so that together, we can make our aspirations an absolute reality.

Jonathan Field
Managing Director, John Lewis, Watford
Chair, Watford Town Centre Partnership

Executive Summary

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3. What is a BID and how does it work

A BID is a business led initiative supported by government legislation which gives local businesses the power to raise and spend funds locally with the aim of improving their own business environment. It is an investment scheme where local businesses agree how their money should be invested to benefit themselves, their employees, customers and clients.

There are already over 200 BIDs successfully operating across the country in places such as Nottingham, Swansea, Reading, Bedford, Southend on Sea, Ipswich, Rugby and Norwich. Locally, in Hertfordshire businesses in Hitchin recently voted for a renewal of their BID, while Letchworth is in its first term.

BIDs succeed because they are focused, cost efficient and entrepreneurial. They do not replace local authority and police services, but provide additional, supplementary resources.

BIDS are established by a ballot amongst participating businesses and have a maximum term of five years. For the BID to go ahead, two conditions must be met:

- Over 50% of businesses that vote must vote in favour
- Those voting 'yes' must represent more than 50% of the total rateable value of all votes cast

If both these conditions are fulfilled, payment of the levy of 1.25% (based on the rateable value) becomes mandatory for ALL eligible businesses, regardless of how they voted.

If the ballot is successful the Watford town centre the BID will commence operation on 1 April 2016 and will run for 5 years until 31 March 2021. It will generate over £3million of additional investment over the 5 years.

After 5 years businesses will have an opportunity to review, and decide if the Watford town centre BID will continue for a second term.

The ballot for the Watford Town Centre BID will take place in October 2015 you will need to ensure your vote is cast before 5pm on 29 October 2015.

It is important that you take the time to consider the Business Plan for Watford town centre and decide how you will vote in the ballot.

Remember, a 'YES' votes gives you the chance to make a real difference to the future of Watford town – your voice, your choice, your future – make your vote count.

4. Building on our success and achievements (put in some highlight facts and figures – population etc)

Watford is without doubt a great place to live, work and visit.

Generally over the years town centres have lost their position in the market, particularly with the advent of out of town shopping centres and business parks and, more lately, on-line retailing. Watford, however, has come through a recession in far better shape than many other towns across the country and, as Hertfordshire's premier town centre, it should be well placed to face the future with some degree of confidence.

There a number of exciting major developments about to start in and around the town such as Charter Place (the expansion of the intu centre and 9 screen IMAX cinema - £100m), Croxley rail link (improving rail links into and around the town - £280m), and the Health Campus (housing and commercial development - £300m). These combined with the investment that has already been made in the town over the past couple of years at the top of the town and with the relocation of the market, it is clear to see that Watford is a town where people and businesses are investing again.

However, a number of challenges lie ahead for Watford, the most immediate being to ensure that it is seen to be and is promoted as being 'open for business' during the redevelopment of Charter Place which will impact on the whole town . We know this is an exciting time for the town but we need to ensure the message gets out to the wider community.

Watford town centre also needs to be aware of what is happening around it and be ready to meet challenges as they arise. Increased competition from areas such as Brent Cross which is scheduled for significant investment and development will change it from a shopping centre to a town centre, plus changes in the way consumers shop and the increase of on line shopping are just a few examples of the challenges that lie ahead.

As a collective voice, Watford businesses can continue to invest in the town centre, and influence the way it looks and feels, Watford has ambitious plans for the future. Over the past year the Town Centre Partnership conducted extensive consultation with local businesses and the results identified a real desire for improvement that exceeds current funding availability. An example of this is planning improvements to Lower High Street.

In an effort to meet the aspirations of businesses in the town the Town Centre Partnership is proposing a BID is created. A vote in favour of the BID will unlock over £3 million of additional investment for the town centre. This investment will enable Watford town centre to build on it's achievements and deliver what you, the local

businesses have recommended, as well as sustaining the future growth and development of Watford town centre.

If you have some doubts about how a BID works and what it can achieve for a town just take look at what other towns and cities have achieved across the country. All of England's cities have a BID and many of the major towns have BIDs in place because businesses in these areas recognise the importance of enabling investment to help build business growth, supporting enterprise and innovation and ability to be able to proactively influence the agendas that are important to them.

This Business Plan reflects what you, Watford's local business community, told us was important, but this can only be delivered if we achieve a 'YES' vote.

Quote box

Your vision Your Future

Close consultation and engagement with businesses has been a key part of the Town Centre Partnership's (TCP) work over the last year. The TCP wants to create a BID for Watford town centre which realises business aspirations, invests in the future while retaining the essence of Watford as the heart of its local community. The TCP wants the town centre to be well positioned so it can continue to take advantage of the exciting new developments proposed for Watford, and to lead the way for further improvements in the town centre.

Since it was established in 2013 the TCP has worked hard to ensure the views of the businesses and its stakeholders have been considered.

In the past year the TCP has held two all business engagement events to establish what is important to businesses in town both now and going forward, what are the barriers to growth and what activities could be undertaken to create a thriving business environment. The first event in November, was repeated in three different locations at various times of the day. This was followed through with an on-line survey and visits by the Board members to businesses.

November Roadshow Summary	
Confirmed attendance	95
Declined	8
Unknown	10
Actual	49 (excluding Board Members)

As a result of this, the five objectives previously identified were reduced to three:

- Enhancing the look and feel of the town
- Promotion, marketing and events
- Working together to secure the future of the town

In March 2015 an evening event was held in the town to provide further information about the BID and presentations about the benefits of BIDs. Businesses in the BID area were visited by Board Members. A further on-line survey was conducted to

capture the views of those unable to attend and information packs about the BID were distributed.

March Consultation Event Summary	
Confirmed attendance	86
Declined	9
Actual	24 (excluding Board Members)
Surveys completed	43

In May we held our final event. Following on from the feedback and comments received by businesses we need to find out of the three themed areas which was the most important for business in the town. We gave all businesses in the proposed BID area £300 to spend across the three themes. The results of this money drop have helped us weight each of the priorities. 63 businesses took part in the money drop.

In addition to these events, surveys, 121 meetings, and visits by Board members:

- We have attended the towns' Pub Watch meeting
- the Chair of the Partnership hosted a lunchtime meeting with some of the managers of the largest businesses in the town centre
- discussions have taken place with the head offices of national businesses
- we have kept businesses informed about developments in the town centre via the Town Centre newsletter; Watford For You; Facebook and twitter

Working together in close partnership with the Council and the other stakeholders in the town centre has enabled the TCP to gain a valuable insight into the town, its dynamics and how the different relationships within the town centre work. This knowledge and understanding will also enable the TCP Board to help develop the steering group moving forward.

All this has helped shaped the Watford town centre Business Plan.

1. Enhancing the look and feel of the town

When people visit a town, when businesses look to relocate or do business in an area, or when students are looking at where they want to study an important factor is how a town looks and feels. The overall perception, ambience, appearance and on-going investment in a town can be a key deciding factor.

The BID will support activities which enhance the physical appearance of the town and create a sense of well-being in the town and help improve overall perceptions of the town.

Pie charts possibly – what did you tell us insert % via pie charts of activities

Improving access routes into and around the town

- We will improve access routes from car parks and other points of arrival across the town.
- We will work with the Council and the car park operators to help improve the customer experience of car and coach parking.
- We will support the development of shop mobility and other schemes that broaden and enhance Watford town centre's appeal to visitors

Creating and sense of place

- We will look at how we present the town through the use of a variety of visual improvements such as floral displays, brightly coloured banners, street furniture and street art and sculpture.
- We will identify where and when an additional deep clean of the town is required and support the work currently being carried out by Veolia

Supporting the early evening & night time economy

- We will work with businesses and other organisations to maintain and enhance the town's Purple Flag Award, CCTV and other initiatives
- We will support the development of Pubwatch, Best Bar None and other customer service initiatives that help promote excellence in Watford
- We will enter into a partnership agreement with Hertfordshire Police to part fund a Police Support Officer to support Watford's growth

Supporting a thriving business community

- We will work with agents to promote the town as a place to do business and we will work with agents, the Council and other stakeholders to help minimise the impact of vacant units in the town centre

2. Promotion, marketing & events

Improving and challenging perceptions of Watford is an important part of our proposals. We will run high visibility marketing and promotional campaigns and events to raise the profile of the town locally, regionally and nationally. We will look at how we can encourage and increase footfall to the town centre and how we can support existing activities and events.

We also recognise that we need to work with businesses and stakeholders, to listen and understand what is happening in the town and the broader communities. Communication is an important part of this particularly when building and developing partnerships and our work will reflect this.

Enhancing and improving the way we market and promote Watford town centre

- We will look at how we improve the brand and brand awareness of Watford For You and how we use this to a greater extent to support and drive footfall into the town, and support business development
- We will increase the level of marketing and communication activities undertaken across all mediums to promote Watford town centre
- We will use technology creatively and explore new ways of enhancing the visitor experience and the way people access information about the town, services and businesses

Ensuring we put out a positive message that 'Watford is Open for Business' during the Charter Place re-development

- We will work with key stakeholders including intu, the developers, the Council and Herts County Council to ensure a positive and clear message is communicated locally and regionally that we are open and ready for businesses throughout the redevelopment.
- We will listen to businesses and act as a point of contact between stakeholders and customers via Watford For You

Supporting existing events and developing new events in the town centre

- We will work together with partners to support existing Big Events through additional marketing activity
- We will deliver new events and promotions such as restaurant week, fashion week and live music in the summer
- We will support and enhance town centre wide Christmas activities and events which help promote the town, its offer and the Watford Christmas experience

Staying in touch with our businesses & partners

- We will provide regular newsletters, email bulletins and information sessions to keep levy payers informed on what is happening in the BID area
- We will host meetings, social exchanges and networking events to ensure we stay in touch and provide businesses and partners with the opportunity to meet each other.
- We work together on certain marketing and promotional activities where we can mutually add value

3. Working together to secure the future of the town

Towns and cities across the country have faced significant challenges over recent years, this will continue as consumer trends and patterns change and we see development of our neighbouring centres. In addition to understanding what is going on around us, the town collectively needs to work together to ensure businesses are well represented and their current and emerging needs are understood and so that solutions can be tailored.

We aim to explore creative and imaginative solutions using technology and skills to help drive Watford town's position as a premier league town centre.

We also recognise that Watford is both a social and economic centre that needs to thrive and support its local people and communities. We want to support Watford's spirit of civic pride and enterprise and support social and economic growth in the area while acknowledging the area's relationship with its surrounding commercial and residential areas.

Continuing to ensure the town is well presented and planned for the future

- We will undertake a master planning exercise for the lower end of the High Street with businesses and stakeholders. Thereby ensuring that when funds become available to undertake the improvements needed the town will be well placed to capitalise on any opportunities presented

Ensuring Watford has a skilled work force which meets the requirements of local businesses

- We will work with businesses and agencies to identify skills gaps and see how they can be addressed in a proactive way and where needed will facilitate the development of 'Watford' specific training courses

Ensuring our businesses thrive and prosper and encourage business enterprise and development

- We will act as the voice of the businesses and represent town centre business interests across a range of issues and with a range of stakeholders
- With partners we will develop activities which support new business start-ups, enterprise community and social enterprise and business growth

- We will identify an appropriate building which can be used as a multi-purpose business and information hub where customers can access town centre information
- We will work with partners to develop and use a range of technology across the town

Getting the best value for our businesses

- We will look to find and implement cost saving initiatives (such as recycling and energy purchase) which have succeeded in other BID areas and which are appropriate for Watford, thereby taking advantage of economies of scale. We would look at schemes where businesses may be able to offset some of the levy costs paid to the BID.

Ensuring the town centre continues to be the social and economic heart of Watford

- We will develop social and economic benefits for residents and users of the town centre and ensure the town retains its links with its broader communities.
- We will ensure the town centre is socially inclusive and a hub for its local residents, workers and communities.

Staying ahead of the game

- We will monitor what is happening regionally and nationally in town centres and work with partners to adapt to consumer trends and changes

So what will the BID do in its 1st year

We have said we will do quite a lot within the life time of the 5 year BID but here are the headline things we will deliver in the first year:

How will I know the BID is working effectively?

Once created, the BID will continue to listen to your opinions and ensure it is performing against this Business Plan to ensure your interests and those of Watford remain at the heart of its work.

We will:

- Conduct an annual business survey
- Hold an Annual Business Meeting where we will provide results and listen to feedback from you
- Work with independent agencies on visitor surveys
- Independently review how we are performing mid way through the BID

To make sure the management of the BID meets levy payers expectations we will apply for accreditation from the national organisation British BIDs certifying high quality management and successful delivery of the BID.

BID rules

In developing the rules that will apply to the BID consideration has been given to 'The Industry Criteria and Guidance Notes for BIDs (2012) published by British BIDs on behalf of the Retail Consortium.

The Ballot

1. Watford Borough Council will send those responsible for properties or hereditaments to be subject to the BID ballot a ballot paper ahead of start of ballot on 2 October 2015
2. Prior to this date, the Watford Town Centre Partnership will have completed a canvas process to identify a voter list which will be used for the purposes of the ballot.
3. Each property or hereditament subject to the BID will be entitled to one vote in respect of the BID proposal in a 28 day postal ballot which will commence on 2 October 2015, and close at 5pm on 29 October 2015. Ballot papers received after 5pm on 29 October 2015 will not be counted.
4. In order for the proposal to be successful at ballot the result will need to meet, as a minimum, two independent criteria which are:
 - Of those ballots returned by the close, those voting in favour of the proposal must exceed those voting against it
 - Of those ballot papers returned by the close, the total rateable value of those properties or hereditaments which vote in favour, must exceed the total of those voting against.
5. The result of the ballot will be announced as soon as practically possible after the close of the ballot.
6. If successful at ballot, the BID will commence delivery of services in April 2016 and will continue for a period of 5 years to 2021

Finances

1. It has been assumed that 95% of the billed levy will be collected each year, and this collection rate has been applied throughout the term.
2. The budgeted income from levy collection in the first year is **£543,959 against 533** hereditaments.
3. The average budgeted annual levy available to be spent by the BID for the term is £552,376
4. A contingency provision on expenditure provides for an anticipated surplus of £151,182 by the end of the term which equates to 5% of expenditure.
5. Income in addition to the levy will be generated to assist with the BID achieving its objectives. A confirmed total payment of £353,872 is to be made in annual instalments from Intu Properties plc over the 5 year term. The BID will seek to source income and funding from other areas and will develop scheme to develop schemes to encompass businesses who wish to be involved with its work but are not subject to a levy.
6. Total additional income, including in-kind contribution has not been included at this point as the TCP has received no confirmation of any other additional income.
7. Operating costs of the BID are estimated as 17% of total income or expenditure.

The Levy

1. The levy rate to be paid by each property or hereditament is to be calculated as 1.25% of its rateable value as at the 'chargeable day' (notionally 31 March each year), with the exception of retailers in the intu centre who pay an annual service charge. These properties or hereditaments will pay a levy rate of 1% of its rateable value.
2. Only properties or hereditaments with a rateable of £10,000 or more will be liable for payment of the levy. There are no other exemptions or discounts.
3. The number of properties or hereditaments liable for the levy is estimated at 533
4. The levy rate will be increased by the fixed rate of inflation of 2% per annum. For example if your levy rate payable is £200 in year 2 you will pay £ 204 with a 2% inflation rate applied and £205 in year 3.
5. The levy will be charged in full for each chargeable period to be April to March each year, first payable in April 2016, and then annually each April. No refunds will be available on the levy charged.
6. The owners of untenanted properties or hereditaments will be liable for payment of the levy.
7. The rating revaluation proposed for 2017 will be ignored for the purposes of calculating the levy. Instead the rateable value from that time will be defined as the rateable value assigned to a hereditament immediately prior to the formal adoption and implementation of revised 2017 rateable values.
8. The exception to this will be any change to use or a physical change to a property or hereditament including inter alia: construction; merger; subdivision; extension or refurbishment.
9. If, during the term, the rateable value assigned to a property or hereditament falls below £10,000 for whatever reason (either through physical change, change of use, or revaluation the property or hereditament will be exempt from the levy from the next chargeable period.
10. If, during the term, a property or hereditament with a rateable value which had previously been below the £10,000 threshold is assigned a new rateable value which is below £10,000, the property or hereditament will not be liable for the levy unless the increase results from a change of use or physical change, as previously described.

Watford Borough Council will be responsible for the collection of the levy , no charge is being made for this service.

Governance

1. A new not-for-profit Company will be formed to manage the BID. Initially, the Board of the Town Centre Partnership (TCP) will operate as the initial BID Board.
2. Within one year from commencement of trading the TCP will establish a procedure for electing a formal Board which shall be made up of

representatives of all levy paying businesses, who will be elected annually. A suitable rotation policy will be developed. Additional members may be co-opted, as required. Nominated representatives from the Council and the Police will not be subject to the annual election process.

3. Each year the Board will elect a Chair, who shall be a business representative.
4. A company secretary will be appointed to ensure compliance with company law.
5. The Board will also operate in line with the Nolan Principles of governance.
6. Subject to consultation with the businesses, the Board shall have the ability to vary service delivery and expenditure allocation according to changing demands of the levy payers or when substantial changes to economic circumstances impact on the BID area. However, any change to the BID boundary or to the levy rate would require an alteration ballot.
7. An Operating Agreement, which includes the Council's baseline service commitments, has been agreed with Watford Borough Council. A copy will be found at www.watfordbid.co.uk
8. Notice of the intention to hold a ballot was given to the Secretary of State on 2 June 2015. Notice of Ballot will be sent to participating businesses by Watford Borough Council within the required statutory period.

The 5 steps to help Watford town centre unlock its potential

STEP 1: Ballot papers will arrive at all the businesses within the BID area asking them to vote

STEP 2: Voting 'YES' will establish a BID in Watford for the next five years and secure up to £3.4m of investment

STEP 3: Ballot papers must be returned no later than 5pm on 29 October 2015

STEP 4: If a majority of those who vote are in favour, the new services will be guaranteed

STEP 5: Business can get involved in an even more exciting future for the town centre – five years of new investment, new ideas and new customers