

## **Newport Now Business Improvement District**

**Board Meeting 4pm, July 17, 2025**

**Conference Room, Riverfront Theatre**

### **Agenda**

**1. Welcome**

- 2. In attendance:** Zep Bellavia (Bellavia & Associates, Chair), Kevin Ward (BID Manager), Robin Hall (Kymin), Dan Smith (M4 Property Consultants, via video link), Nicky Vignoli (The Newporters), Councillor James Clarke (Newport City Council), Nikki Marshall (Newport Arcade), Mike Colcombe (Secrets of Cymru), Emily Grimes (Friars Walk), Tracy Stokes (Belle Femme), Rachel Phillips (RJ Phillips Interiors).

**Also in attendance:** Matt Tribbeck (Newport City Council).

**Apologies for absence:** Ceri Trela (Mercure Newport), Cath Macnamara (Liverton Opticians), Richard Ellis (Ellis Lloyd Jones, treasurer), Ian Lamsdale (Newport City Radio), Gavin Horton (Horton's Lounge).

**3. Declarations of interests for Register of Interests**

- None in relation to this agenda.

**4. Approval of minutes of last meeting**

- Approved.

**5. Centre for Cities report discussion**

- KW presented a summary of last week's Centre for Cities report for general Board discussion.
- While the report showed Newport city centre had the highest number of vacant commercial properties (19%) of the 63 towns and cities studied in the report, this was an improvement on the 33% vacancy rate in 2021.
- MT and JC confirmed the City Council had provided actual vacancy rate figures to Centre for Cities ahead of the report; one of only two local authorities to do so (Leicester being the other). The remaining 61 places either provided estimated figures or none at all. For 26 of the places, no information was provided and Centre for Cities researchers used other data to estimate vacancy rates.

- MT said the biggest challenge in the city centre remained the diverse ownership of commercial properties. In response to a question from NM, he said there were around 100 different owners of empty properties in the city centre.
- DS highlighted the number of shops per 1,000 people recorded in the report, with Newport's figure being particularly high. This again confirmed the BID's long-held view that there is an over-supply of retail space in the city centre.
- JC said the way forward with long-term empty properties was for the council to buy them, demolish them and redevelop areas. The proposals for the southern end of Commercial Street in the recently-published Placemaking Plan was an example of this policy. However, he acknowledged this would not be popular with everyone and could lead to further negativity in the interim and a use would need to be found for buildings in between purchase and demolition.
- The general view was that the Centre for Cities report was not necessarily a scientific study given the different levels of information provided by local authorities, that it was not a UK-wide picture – just a snapshot of 63 of the 1,000-plus towns and cities in the country – and that some of the media and social media coverage of the report had been wide of the mark.
- However, it was acknowledged that we do not want to be bottom of the list in four years' time and that 81% occupancy was a platform to build upon.
- ZB said it was important that businesses continued to be positive while not ignoring problems as constant negativity can be damaging, particularly for independent businesses.
- KW said he had been invited to write a column for Business News Wales responding to the Centre for Cities report and this was likely to be published in the week beginning July 21.

## **6. Route Media advertising proposal**

- KW has had a series of meetings over a number of months with Route Media, who provide video screen advertising solutions for town and city centres across Wales.
- They currently operate screens in Friars Walk and at the bus and railway stations.
- KW gave a presentation detailing the offer from Route Media and its proposal to the BID.
- Their proposal is to offer the BID a monthly advertising deal for city centre screens. Content can be changed as often as we like.

- EG said the screens in Friars Walk were high quality and seemed to attract an audience. They are monitored and if they go down the response from Route Media is very good.
- KW said his view was we could offer advertising slots on the screens free of charge to Levy payers. They would, however, need to provide completed artwork. We have enough 'give' in the budget to trial for 3 months, preferably October-December.
- The Board agreed unanimously for KW to agree a three-month deal with Route Media.

## **7. Finance update**

- Cash in bank in the BID's current account as of last night is £8,671 with all payments up to date.
- We have paid 50% of the Urban Beach construction costs from our funds while we await payment of the SPF grant. We expect to receive this by the end of the month.
- We have also paid for the Night Ambassadors for May and June without receipt of the relevant grant money. This will arrive tomorrow.
- With the return of the Urban Beach payment, we will end the month with a surplus of £25,042. Forecast was a deficit of £412.
- Levy collection to date is £145,400 or 69% of the total levy bill for the year. Court summons have been issued by the council to non-payers.
- Total income for 25/26 as of today is £144,198 and expenditure is £135,527.

## **8. External funding update**

- A reminder that we have again applied successfully this year for grants from the Home Office (via the Police & Crime Commissioner), and the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (via NCC).
- The full Home Office grant for the Night Ambassadors scheme has yet to be announced, but it will not be any less than the £36,000 received last year. For the time being, we have been asked to continue to invoice at the current monthly rate of £3,300.
- SPF funding via NCC amounting to £167,852 has now been allocated to BID projects for this financial year. All the BID's applications for funding were successful.
- JC told the Board that this year's SPF was massively over-subscribed and several applicants have been disappointed as a result.
- Urban Beach and the new Summer projects are in the next agenda item.
- Countdown to Christmas will be finalised at a meeting next week. It is almost certain we will not be replacing fireworks with drones for logistical and financial reasons. The date is confirmed as Saturday, November 15.

- The Christmas markets will be in JFS from November 22 to December 23. Up to 14 cabins open 7 days a week. We have contracted Mall Solutions to deliver this project.

## **9. Events/footfall update**

- MT said the 14 new AI footfall cameras were now installed and operational at sites across the city centre. These would provide a richer and more granular level of data than the previous laser counter on Llanarth Street, and as a result it may be difficult to compare to previous years. MT will update again at the next Board meeting.
- Forthcoming events:
- Big Splash Festival this weekend. We are again sponsoring the Newport Now Zone (renamed the Newport Now Creative Quarter this year).
- Urban Beach, August 1-31. The beach is booked and will be constructed on the night of July 31. Newport Live staff have been contracted as last year to act as Beach Buddies during opening hours. Safestyle has been contracted to provide dedicated security through the night to supplement Friars Walk security. The first hour of each day will be a 'quiet hour' to ensure the event is as inclusive as possible.
- Four new projects have been agreed with funding from SPF since the last Board meeting.
- Pop-up Picnic Park, July 25-September 10. Under the Steel Wave on the riverfront.
- Giant Chair Trail, July 31-September 10. Running from the pop-up park to Friars Walk.
- Monster Trail, August 11- September 10. Aimed at children. Utilising the BID app. Kids collect monsters from 8 venues in the city centre and then get a free monster story book from the library.
- Information Towers, July 31-September 10. Eight promotional towers advertising forthcoming events in the city centre.
- Live Aid tribute, Rodney Parade, August 30.
- Pride in the Port, September 6.

## **10. Ambassadors (Day and Night) update**

- KW continues to talk to partners about how we find a longer-term funding solution for the Night Ambassadors service rather than the current 12-month cycle. NCC officers are supportive of this approach.
- One of our regular Street Ambassadors, Mo, was threatened with a bladed implement while on duty on May 15. We and Safestyle have and continue to provide him with support. We continue to press the police for action on this incident. The Board expressed concern at the apparent lack of action from the police on the matter.

### **11. City centre app update**

- The Newport Now app is currently promoting 169 businesses – 37 via deals and the remainder via events listings and trails.
- To date, there have been 13,775 (now 13,844) interactions with the app (up 11% in last six months), 4,036 (now 4,074) interactions with the trails, and 3,142 deal redemptions. The app has 1,337 (now 1,352) registered users in the Newport area (up 30% year on year).
- This weekend's Big Splash Festival features as a trail on the app.
- We are looking at how we can link the NCC what's on website with the events section of the app to increase content and avoid duplication of effort.
- NV pointed out there were a couple of businesses listed on the app that are no longer in operation. KW to action their removal from the app.

### **12. Gift Card update**

- After a delay caused by due diligence taking longer than expected, the digital gift card will be launched on July 21 with a PR and social media campaign.
- The digital version of the card is contactless and sits in the Googlepay or Applepay wallets on smart phones. It has been fully tested prior to launch.
- Cards worth a total of £2,840 (226 cards) have been sold to date in 2025. This time last year we had sold £585 (18 cards) worth of cards.
- In 2025 to date, £2,468 worth of cards (111 cards) have been spent in the city centre at Boots, Primark, M&S, Prezzo, Bubble Trouble, The Entertainer, Waterstones, Le Pub, Assets Jewellery, New Look, RJ Phillips Interiors, Wagamama, Gallery 57, Diverse Vinyl, the Carpenters, Vision Plus and Skechers.

### **13. Savings Advisory Service update**

- Total savings identified by Place Support Partnership for BID levy payers is £121,784 to date; with realised savings of £73,329k.
- PSP are in Newport again on August 6 and we will promote as usual via social media, email and website.

### **14. AOB**

- RP referred to the TRAIL recycled art project she had seen while on holiday in Teignmouth, and the way in which it involved the whole local community. KW and JC to look at the project and see if it could be adapted for Newport. This led to a discussion regarding the potential re-introduction of hanging baskets in the city centre.

- TS told the Board of the support she had been giving to a military veteran who had been rough sleeping in the city centre. The gentleman in question has been now been sober for six weeks, and been provided with housing for him and his pet dog. TS is now having a meeting with JC and Helen Roper from the Royal Foundation's Homewards Project (which has Newport as one of its 6 UK programme areas) to see if there were other ways in which businesses can support those who find themselves homeless.
- EG said the summer installation in Usk Plaza has a beach theme to tie in with the Urban Beach in John Frost Square. She also said the new Television and Movie Store had opened in the Friars Walk mall and was doing well.
- MT said the ground work for the new leisure centre was nearing completion and would soon start coming out of the ground, making it more visible as a construction. It is scheduled to open in the autumn of 2026.

**15. Date of next Board meeting, and remaining meetings this year**

- Thursday, September 11.
- Thursday, November 20 (open meeting for levy payers).