

## Newport Now Business Improvement District

Board Meeting 4pm, Thursday, November 23, 2023

Conference Room, Riverfront Theatre

Meeting notes for publication

### Agenda

#### **1. Welcome**

- 2. In attendance:** Zep Bellavia (Bellavia & Associates, Chair), Kevin Ward (BID Manager), Tracy Stokes (Belle Femme), Ian Lamsdale (Newport City Radio), Robin Hall (Kymin), Dan Smith (M4 Property Consultants), Nicky Vignoli (The Newporters), Alan Edwards (Vacaras), Gavin Horton (Horton's Lounge).

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

**Apologies for absence:** Richard Ellis (Ellis Lloyd Jones, treasurer), Nicola Marshall (Newport Arcade), Steve Corten (Pub Watch), Jane Mudd (Newport City Council), Catherine McNamara (Liverton Opticians), Simon Pullen (Friars Walk).

#### **3. Declarations of interest**

- DS (re agenda item 7)
- IL (re Christmas lights)

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

- Approved.

#### **5. Finance update**

- As some Board members are aware, the BID was 'debanked' by Barclays on October 9. We only became aware of the closure of our accounts a week later. Unsurprisingly, this caused us considerable difficulties – not least in paying suppliers and contractors.
- The £70k in our two accounts took more than a fortnight to be transferred into our new bank account. There has been considerable national press coverage of other non-profit organisations having the same issue with Barclays.
- Our new account is now fully operational, with ZB, RH and KW as signatories on the mandate.
- The next step is to set up a savings account so we can ringfence grant monies as before.
- KW thanked ZB, RH and RE for their help in dealing with this issue.

- Cash in bank in the BID's current account as of last night is £60,982. Invoices for Countdown to Christmas are yet to be received, but will be approximately £23k.
- This total includes £35,225 grant money for the empty shops project and £4,238 for the Night Ambassadors project.
- An update on both projects is included later in this report.
- Therefore, the 'actual' balance is £21,519. Forecast was £20,662.
- November's £20,400 levy instalment is due next week.
- Levy collection for 23/24 to date is £164k – or 94% of the total levy bill for the year, though this includes payments owing from previous years.
- Income for 23/24 to date is £169,661 and expenditure to date is £176,861. Again, bear in mind expenditure includes grant-funded projects. Taking those out, gives us an expenditure of £145,077.
- The current cashflow forecast, which now includes first half actuals, is that we will end the year with a closing bank balance of £17.2k in reserve.

## **6. Events update**

- This year's Countdown to Christmas took place last Saturday (November 18) and saw an additional 8,900 people in the city centre compared to the previous Saturday – an increase of 63%.
- We were fortunate with the weather and everything went to plan. Newport City Radio hosted the entire event for the first time and did a great job.
- The decision to ask a 'community champion' – Mike 'Puffa' Jones from FreeBikes4Kids – was extremely well received on social media.
- IL said NCR surveyed attendees. There were people from Bristol and Cardiff at the event. One social media post had 7,000 views.
- We are looking at whether we can access SPF funding for next year's event, and also how High Street can be more involved.
- Small Business Saturday takes place on Saturday, December 2. We are repeating our gift card giveaway that was successful last year.
- The new events website for Newport - <https://whatsoncityofnewport.co.uk/> - has been launched by the council. There is an easy-to-use submission button for anyone staging events in the city.
- Year to date, city centre footfall is 22% above 2019 (ie pre-Covid). Footfall for Wales year to date is 13% below 2019, and for the UK is 12% below 2019. We should be shouting about this!

- TS said businesses in the city centre were struggling for trade despite the footfall figures and wanted to see two hours' free parking for the December period mirroring the likes of Merthyr and Aberdare. TS said she had spoken to JM and emailed her.
- MT said footfall was not the issue given the figures reported by KW and questioned whether free car parking would help, and the council was committed to driving city centre events.
- ZB said free parking was a double-edged sword – successful when happening but then poor trade when it is removed. Business is affected by online and we can't change that. Important that businesses do more to use promotional tools available to them and take advantage of increased footfall.
- MT said work was already underway on building existing events such as the marathon and the food festival, and bringing in new events for 2024.
- NV said the £5 Newport Bus family ticket offer needed to be promoted more, as an incentive for people to come to the city centre without their cars, and a benefit to those without cars.
- MT said important that incentives/events etc were consistent offers rather than one-offs like free parking.
- DS said concern for retailers was the importance of Christmas as the biggest trading period of the year. Businesses via the BID or between themselves can control their own destiny via refunding car parking for X amount of spend, late night shopping events, revised opening times etc rather than relying on the council or others to do it for them. *If we want things to change, we have to change.*
- ZB said if we as a BID can be a catalyst for change then we will do so.
- General consensus that we need to be driving publicity around footfall figures in comparison to pre-Covid versus Wales and UK.

## **7. DS project update**

- Spoken to a number of retail agents in recent weeks; focus seems to be on out-of-town openings rather than traditional high streets. Neighbourhood retail centres seem to be trading well.
- Fashion retailers showing interest in Friars Walk; one national and one regional.
- Feedback from agents is that retailers are not showing interest in city centre due to anti-social behaviour/rough sleeping/delivery riders/youths on bikes. Feedback seems to be different compared to other South Wales towns/cities despite them suffering from the exactly the same problems.

- Strategy should be to target local and regional retailers rather than national.
- Talking to a couple of food outlets who are expanding in South Wales. Working with a children's play business, a sports shirts outlet, and an Afro Caribbean restaurant. Trying to get keys for Costa Coffee site on Commercial Street to show to interested parties.
- Interest in a couple of empty units in Friars Walk.
- DS believes there is some interest at the moment in the Debenhams site.
- We are going to access a software system (The Requirement List) that lists all retailers looking for space in Newport along with full database of retail acquisition managers. Minimum cost to BID of £382 a year but will save us huge amounts of time in finding and contacting agents/landlords.
- DS asked whether business rates relief announced by Chancellor would be extended to Wales. MT not sure yet.
- DS has spoken to new leaseholders of Kingsway re pop-up shops and seem keen on the idea.

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

- A reminder that the current funding for the Night Ambassadors will run out at the end of this month. In partnership with the council, we have been awarded £16,500 via the Police & Crime Commissioner to extend the service to the end of March. In partnership with the council, we are also submitting a further funding application to the PCC. If successful, this would extend the service for 12 months from next April.
- KW is meeting Safestyle next week to discuss concerns over the lack of consistent staffing of the daytime service.

#### **9. Loyal Free update**

- The app is currently promoting 163 businesses – 25 via deals and 143 via events listings and trails.
- To date, there have been 8,455 interactions with the app, 3,176 interactions with the trails, and 1,391 deal redemptions.
- Loyal Free has merged with CRM company Solomon and is rebranding as Vicinity. This does not affect our current contract or the look of the app.
- However, Vicinity is launching a new version of the app that we may wish to take advantage of. This would be branded entirely as the Newport Now app and includes a

better user experience and better data capture for businesses. KW had a demonstration of this earlier in the week & shared this with the meeting.

- Vicinity is offering to build a fully branded Newport Now app for us at no additional cost to our current contract. This is unlikely to be until mid to late 2024, but could fit in perfectly with our renewal ballot.
- Leamington Spa is the first area to launch the new 'white label' app.
- Board asked KW to progress with Vicinity.
- GH asked if gift cards and the app can be linked. KW said he did not believe so, but would check.

#### **10. Gift Card update**

- Gift card sales for the calendar year to date are £1,095 (48 cards) – an increase of £100 (6 cards) since the end of September. Please note November figures are not yet available.

#### **11. Savings Advisory Service**

- The service will next be in Newport in January (date TBC).
- During their October visit, they had appointments with AG Meek and Newport Grill, and also did some cold-calling in Commercial Street, Skinner Street, High Street and Cambrian Road.
- In total, the project has now identified £102,600 in savings for levy payers since it was relaunched in late 2021, with £57,600 savings realised by businesses.

#### **12. Purple Flag**

- The application for the renewal of Purple Flag status for the night time economy has been delayed until the new year. With 95% of the work for the application already completed by KW, we are confident the status will be awarded again.

#### **13. BID Foundation accreditation**

- As members of the trade body the BID Foundation, we have been encouraged to apply for full accreditation by the end of February.
- We already meet 9 of the 11 required standards and KW is doing the necessary work to ensure we achieve the remaining two.
- Accreditation will provide us with a kite mark, and be helpful for the renewal campaign next year; particularly when dealing with national head offices.

#### **14. AOB**

- ZB/KW met with MT and new city centre manager Roger Jeavons on October 11. MT provided an update to the meeting on work RJ had been doing, and said the plan was for

him to have an office in Market Arcade. KW said he had passed on two issues from city centre businesses that needed council input to RJ and he had responded promptly.

- Our renewal ballot will be taking place this time next year. Mirroring the process we followed in 2019, it is planned to invite agencies/consultants to tender for the renewal campaign in March, with presentations to the Board and a decision made in April. The campaign will run from May until the end of November, with the ballot taking place during November. This will be a standing item on the agenda from January onwards.
- USW's Global MBA students were briefed today regarding our Levy Payers' Database project. There are 12 students helping to deliver the project. The aim is to have a complete email database for levy payers by the end of this financial year. This will be particularly useful ahead of our renewal ballot.
- Tramshed Tech has opened its Innovation Station at the former Information Station in the former railway building on Queensway. There is an open invitation for Board members to have tour of the building.
- Our Letters to Santa post box will be placed in Newport Arcade throughout December. One letter will be chosen to receive a £50 gift card.
- NV said Art on the Hill was this weekend, starting tomorrow.
- MT said business grants scheme had launched for start-up businesses and businesses that are looking to grow.
- ZB said Alacrity on the riverfront was looking to rent out some car parking spaces to businesses.
- ZB said USW was keen to get MBA students involved with local businesses to help them with projects/issues etc.

**15. Date of next Board meeting**

16. Thursday, January 18, 2024, at 4pm at the Riverfront Theatre.