

The York BID Feasibility Study

Introduction

York has one of the strongest economies in the north of England and has reinvented itself from a railway and confectionery manufacturing city into an international hub for science and technology as well as a national centre for financial and business services.

The city centre BID area is a major retail and tourism destination, mostly contained within the ancient city walls and including York Minster, one of Europe's finest cathedrals, world class museums and many beautiful and historic buildings, attracting more than 7m visitors a year.

However, it faces many unique challenges which is why business leaders decided to investigate the feasibility of the creation of a Business Improvement District to capitalise on its strengths and to safeguard and develop its economic prosperity.

Why does York need a BID?

York already has a great city centre, famous for its heritage, historic streets, ambience, big-name shopping brands, visitor attractions and scores of independent shops. But with the right vision and a coordinated management approach driven by city centre businesses, imagine what could be achieved. York cannot stand still.

There are now more than 200 BIDS across the UK, making a real difference to the economies of those areas. BIDS have just been approved in Leeds and Sheffield. York city centre is not immune to the challenges posed by out of town shopping centres.

A BID provides the best opportunity for continued investment in the city centre. It will help York to:

- Attract big-name brand retailers
- Attract more professional and financial employers to locate in the city centre
- Market the city to visitors and residents, increase footfall, dwell time and spend
- Improve the centre's appearance and environment
- Add to and enhance the city's festivals and events
- Work in partnership to improve safety and reduce crime
- Develop the early evening economy
- Provide business support and development
- Create a strong leadership voice to lobby on issues such as parking and transport

These are some of the issues businesses in York are telling us they want to see as priorities.

A BID can make this happen.

Background

The idea of setting up a Business Improvement District was suggested by City Team York, a public-private sector partnership, set up in the wake of the Portas report into the future of the British High Street.

City Team York has about 40 representatives from all business sectors and its main aim is to work collaboratively to improve the economic vitality of York city centre. The City Team York Executive (CTYE) began formalising plans in 2013 and early 2014. Initial feedback from City of York Council, other major stakeholders, businesses and service providers was positive.

The feasibility study has been overseen by the CTYE, whose members are:

- Adam Sinclair, MD of Mulberry Hall (Chair)
- Neil Setterfield, MD, Fenwick Department Store
- Frank Wood, partner, Braithwaites Jewellers
- Sophie Jewett, owner, York Cocoa House
- Michael Hjort, owner Walmgate Ale House, director, York Food Festival
- Sue Anderson-Brown, manager Coppergate Shopping Centre
- Charles Storr, City of York Council
- Jane, Lady Gibson, chair Visit York
- Paul Stansfield, property expert
- Steve Brown, MD, make it York

Following the positive feedback, CTYE chairman Adam Sinclair, wrote to 779 city centre businesses informing them of the plans and including a survey. 95 people (12.2%) responded to the survey and those responses, along with personal feedback to CTYE members helped shape the next stage of the consultation process. A story about the plans was also featured on page 1 of the city's daily newspaper, The York Press and on its website.

More than 30 City Team York members, representing a cross section of York city centre businesses voted unanimously to press ahead with plans to set up a BID at a special meeting hosted by HSBC on October 31, 2014.

Following that meeting the CTYE and the city council worked closely together on establishing arrangements, checking the business rates database and drawing up a proposed boundary.

Initial support from businesses across the city has been overwhelmingly positive.

The BID Area

The proposed BID area is largely within the natural boundary of the inner ring road, but includes businesses facing the inner ring road. To view the map, go to www.theyorkbid.com

How much could a York BID generate?

We consulted on a 1% levy based on rateable value, with a minimum threshold of £7,500. This would apply to 1,322 hereditaments, or 1090 separate businesses. This would generate in excess of £870,000 a year. The money would be spent according to the wishes of local businesses (through the auspices of BID champions and the BID Board once established).

Areas of Focus – Initial consultation suggested four areas of Focus as follows:

1 Appearance and environment

We want to promote York city centre as a great place to live, work and visit. This could include providing an enhanced street cleaning and litter collection service; improving public spaces, flower displays, seating and other street furniture; employing uniformed city ambassadors and improving access points to the city centre and signage to create a great first impression.

2 Events and Festivals

York has an enviable reputation for the number and breadth of its events and festivals but this could be enhanced and extended by working with partners to create a year-round programme. This could include a spectacular Christmas/Winter lights display, fashion and restaurant weeks, and making more use of public spaces, and tapping into the potential of the city's historic buildings, revamped theatre and art gallery and world class museums. There could also be a focus on developing the early evening economy with later opening hours for shops and cafes, street entertainment, public art displays and other open air events.

3 Safe and secure

The BID would look to work with partners to minimise crime and create a truly family friendly environment during the day and at night. Crime reduction initiatives could include: closer working relationship with the York Business Against Crime Scheme, support partners in tackling problem areas such as anti-social behaviour and drunkenness, improved lighting and secure bike storage.

4 Business Support and Development

The BID company would focus on the investment needs of the city centre, working with partners to coordinate one voice for all sectors to lobby the council and other public sector organisations to ensure the centre gets a fair deal and maximises its funding opportunities. It would seek to address concerns over parking and transport and to reduce overheads through procured services for utilities, insurance, waste collection and recycling.

We are now seeking further views on the areas of focus via our consultation document which has been sent to all 1,090 businesses.

Conclusion

There is considerable momentum in support of a BID across the full range of sectors included in the feasibility consultation. The largest sector contributors in terms of levy payment would be Retail, Professional and financial services companies, hotels and the public sector, including education and culture, all of whom have expressed their overwhelming support in favour of BID.

City of York Council would be the largest levy payer and it has agreed to be the accountable body for the ballot and levy collection.

To capitalise on the level of support and momentum, a ballot date of November 2 would be desirable. The council has already indicated that this is possible but this will require a concentrated focus, requiring a good deal of collaboration between the council and private sector as the date of the ballot must be included in the 84-day notice of intention to create a Business Improvement District issued to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

If the ballot is successful in November 2014, the new BID company would formally commence in April 2016 with levy collection invoices issued in March 2016 for payment in April.

The Board is recommended to endorse the contents of this report and recommend to City of York Council that a delivery process for establishing a BID for York city centre is set up with immediate effect with a ballot date of November 2 as the desired outcome.