

Barrow BID AGM 2020

Manager's Report

Introduction

As we approached the end of our 3rd year on 31st August 2019, I was optimistic that Barrow town centre had turned a corner and we were seeing signs of a revival. The perception of the town had increased and businesses and the general public were buoyed by the success of large scale town centre events including the Super Soapbox and the Festival of Transport.

Barrow BID continued the feel good factor at the start of our 4th year with the delivery of our weekend long comedy fest which had laughs aplenty in venues across the town centre.

The festive period was a personal highlight as we purchased 3km of brand new cross-street lighting, new lights for Dalton Road trees and installed 2D shapes and speakers in the Forum Ginnel. Our aim was to create a festive atmosphere to welcome visitors to Barrow town centre and we backed up the new lighting with a range of schemes, events and activities, including: A town centre Santa Dash, Christmas Carol competition, Visit from Santa, live musicians and our first Shop Barrow Day which included all day free parking in the town centre.

In January the ITV Tonight programme aired and showcased some of the the issues that Barrow town centre and local businesses face. The programme provided us with an opportunity to lobby the Government for additional funding and a reduction in non-domestic rates. We have since represented businesses on the Town Deal board and have helped provisionally secure £25m for Barrow via the Government's Town Deal fund.

In February we travelled to Edinburgh for the British High Street Awards where Barrow had been shortlisted for the Rising Star award based on our work during 2019. Unfortunately we weren't to win the award, but we took some great ideas from the winning towns.

MARCH 2020 was the month when the world as we know it changed. The COVID pandemic had become the main topic everywhere and the UK went into its first National lockdown. COVID has impacted massively on town centre businesses with several high street chains entering administration and being lost forever from the UKs high street. Independent shops, hairdressers, market traders and the hospitality sector have been hit particularly hard and have been forced to close their doors.

Barrow BID has continued to work to support and promote town centre businesses and have delivered the following COVID schemes:

- Provision of information on COVID grants
- Supply of barriers and H&S support to businesses
- Supply of floor stickers and posters
- Promotion of businesses remaining open or providing local delivery services

COVID has impacted the decline of high street shopping and it is going to more important than ever that we have a Business Improvement District to safeguard businesses, fight for change and deliver initiatives which will revitalise and regenerate the town centre.

The summer of 2020 was very different to our planned year, with most of our events and initiatives postponed or cancelled all together.

With overseas travel badly affected we continued to promote Barrow as a visitor destination via an online marketing campaign and we hope this groundwork will enable Barrow to become a staycation destination.

We have also been working on a Train Station Gateway Scheme which will see new sign-posts installed to direct visitors to the town centre and places of interest. This scheme should have been completed in 2020, but has been delayed due to the COVID pandemic.

Our Business Premises Grant scheme has continued throughout the pandemic and some businesses have taken the opportunity to improve their premises whilst unable to trade. We supported 16 businesses with a grant in our 4th year.

Dino Day took place in August 2020 when the COVID virus R rate had dropped below 1 and it looked like we were able to get back to some kind of normality. The event was severely reduced in size and had strict health and safety rules in place to keep volunteers, staff and the general public safe. It was really nice to see smiles on children's faces after a tough summer and we launched our very first town trail.

What are Barrow BID's plans for the future?

Barrow BID remain determined to create a town centre fit for future generations. We understand that businesses are going to need our support following the COVID pandemic and we plan to put schemes in place that will safeguard local businesses and help them to adapt and grow.

The town centre has many issues and we are working with partners to identify them and implement schemes and initiatives to tackle them. Anti-Social Behaviour, vandalism and begging on the streets are a focus.

We also want to return to pre-COVID times and put on quality events, activities and initiatives which will help to increase footfall and improve the perception of the town centre.

We remain passionate that Barrow can have a town centre that is safe, welcoming and accessible to all and we will be the voice of businesses as we work with private sector partners, organisations and the local authority to deliver on our aims and objectives.

How can you help?

Barrow BID goes to ballot on 24th June this year, so if you believe that we can make a better Barrow town centre, vote YES for Barrow BID.