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Sam  
Eastwood

This last year has been incredibly difficult for all of us with COVID-19 affecting our personal lives and businesses. I've personally experienced the devastating impact the pandemic has had on businesses and the town centre but have also been immensely proud and heartened by the resilience, flexibility and partnership working shown by local businesses, Kingston First and stakeholders in response to COVID-19.

On behalf of the Board I would like to thank members and partners for all your support and hard work to help businesses and Kingston town centre during these challenging times. As we enter the recovery phase, Kingston First will continue to support and listen to you.

There are many exciting projects and initiatives underway or in the pipeline that will help drive recovery in the town centre, build confidence for the future and improve the town centre experience. I'm confident Kingston will bounce back from the pandemic and become a stronger, vibrant and diverse town centre because of the determination and passion within our local community.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to make this happen and secure a successful town centre for the future.

Chairman **Kingston First**



2020/21 has been a challenging year for all of us. Like many businesses we have had to adapt during this time, adjusting and finding our way to ensure we continue to engage with and support you.

I would like to say thanks to the Kingston First team for extraordinary work, creativity, and dedication during the past year to support the town and members.

Over the past year, we have supported members by co-ordinating two town centre re-openings; providing guidance, information and assets to help businesses open again safely and lobbied for much needed financial support.

We have delivered marketing and social campaigns to drive footfall to the town and invested in public realm projects to create a welcoming experience and encourage well-being.

We have carried out extensive research with our member community to better understand your needs and concerns and to make sure our work supports local businesses and organisations.

With this insight our focus over the next 12 months will be improving the town centre experience by investing in projects that support economic recovery and encourage local residents and visitors to spend time in the town centre.

We will be refreshing our consumer brand, In Kingston to help reinforce Kingston's community spirit and to drive footfall to the town, and will deliver an integrated campaign for Christmas which is a vital time for so many of you.

We will be launching a new training series free of charge for our members to help build skills and resilience. We will continue to work in partnership with you to strengthen the town centre's offer and experience, positioning Kingston as a vibrant and diverse destination.



Chief Executive **Kingston First**



**Kirsten  
Henly**



# Who are Kingston First?

Kingston First is a business improvement district (BID) which operates within Kingston town centre. Set up in accordance with the Local Government Act 2003, it is a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee and principally funded by a levy. This levy is used to provide additional projects and services to those provided by Kingston Council and other public agencies.

## Who are Kingston First?

The company is governed by a voluntary board of directors who represent a cross-section of the town's business community. They are responsible for overseeing the delivery of the agreed business plan. A dedicated team is delegated responsibility for its delivery and the management of the company.

Kingston First was the first BID set up in the country and following a successful renewal ballot in June 2019, the company started its fourth five-year term on 1 January 2020.

To view the Renewal Proposal and details about our projects and services in more detail, please visit our website.

Our work focuses on the following areas:

- Attractive Streets and Spaces
- Marketing the Town
- Supporting and Informing
- Influencing and Representing



# Responding to COVID-19

We co-ordinated several town wide re-openings after restrictions were lifted. This included providing guidance on how to operate safely and working closely with the Council, Police, industry experts and our MP, and we ensured members had the most up to date information in a timely way.

Responding to COVID-19

We created in-store and social media assets to support members re-opening safely and delivered these to hundreds of businesses. We canvassed member views and listened to feedback which led us to locally sourcing PPE equipment such as face shields and hand sanitisers which we provided to members.

To ensure the town centre was a pleasant and welcoming experience for returning staff and customers, we dressed the town with colourful bunting along with hanging baskets.

**We carried out 37 days of deep cleaning, including removing graffiti and full cleaning of pavements within the town.**





We have lobbied for much-needed financial support during COVID-19 to help our independent businesses and successfully helped to secure additional and local discretionary grants for sectors particularly affected.

# £15k

increase secured from the initial £10k (total 25k) to Kingston First members in leisure and hospitality with a £51K+ rateable value.

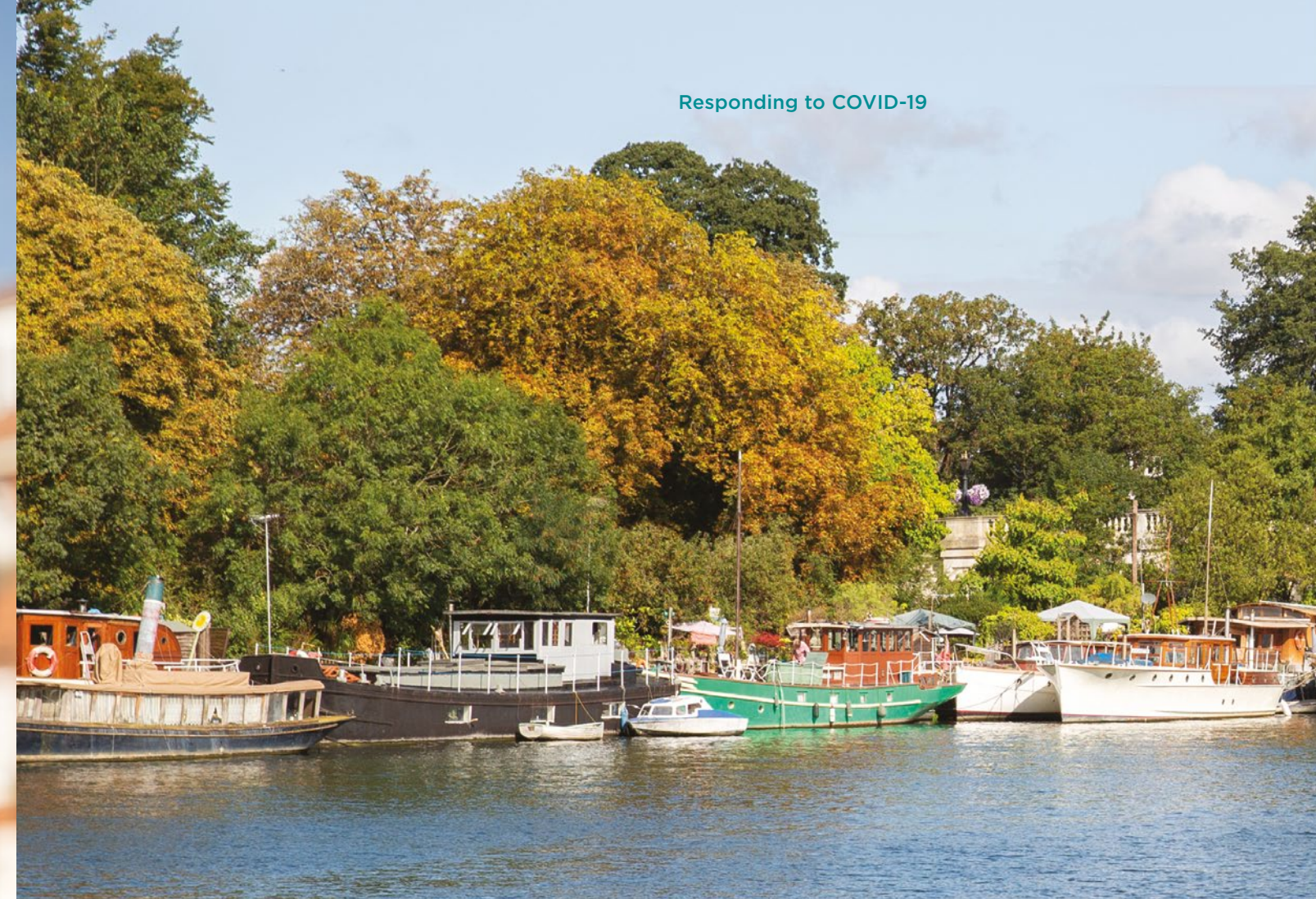
We secured additional funding from the government which we are investing back into the town centre experience, including better public spaces to encourage well-being and revitalising our vacant units.

We represented members on traffic issues in the town centre, particularly as the town re-opened, and gained support from Kingston Council on bringing forward the Christmas roadworks moratorium.

We've been part of a national campaign 'Bounce Back Better' to lobby the government for support and funding around business rates and reductions in VAT and NI contributions.







We delivered webinars and training online on subjects such as 'recovery in the hospitality sector' to 'social media skills'.

We provided key policy updates and information within 24hrs of government announcements during the first lockdown and continue to provide fortnightly updates through our member newsletter with 97% of members rating our newsletter as very or quite useful.

## Benefiting over 150 members



# Benefits to members

## Attractive Streets and Spaces

We installed 122 seasonal hanging baskets and sustainable planting. We replanted and continue to maintain flower beds with a mixture of pollinator friendly evergreen and perennial plants.

## Free recycling and discounted trade waste

One of our most popular services, the free recycling service operated through First Mile continues to be valuable for many of our members.

# 200

businesses taking advantage of the scheme.





Training and webinars

We adapted our training programme to provide webinars and training online, covering topics to help our businesses through the challenges of the year, including improving their social media presence and marketing, access to funding, improving mental health, and support with re-opening.

We hosted webinars with the local MP Ed Davey, Leader of the Council Caroline Kerr and Kate Nicholls, CEO of UK Hospitality.

Raising Kingston's profile and supporting local businesses

We delivered marketing campaigns to drive footfall and spend in our town centre. We launched the 'We are Kingston' campaign, which many businesses were involved in, to help bring back that sense of community spirit to Kingston and to encourage people to shop local, spend time in Kingston and re-discover what the town has to offer.

Our recent consumer research showed that 56% of consumers said the campaign made them feel positive about what was on offer in the town centre.

We delivered a campaign for Christmas, adapted due to restrictions, to promote offers from local businesses, which garnered awareness of over 70% from those who responded to our consumer research.

We continued with campaigns for the series of Thumbs Up It's Thursday events which over 60% of those raising a family in our consumer research said had encouraged them to visit the town centre, and delivered our first well-being campaign which was hugely successful and popular with the local community.

Benefits to members



Most recently we've delivered 'Colour Your Senses', a vibrant campaign encouraging locals and visitors to rediscover what's on offer in Kingston, with over 50% awareness amongst those that responded to our consumer research.

Our social campaign alone reached over 96,000 people, generating 14,500 engagements with the posts.

Our consumer newsletter highlighting events in Kingston, raising the profile of our members and advertising their offers, continues to be very popular with 75% of consumers in our research rating it good or very good.



In collaboration with Kingston School of Art we worked with students to install vibrant and colourful artwork in the town centre's vacant retail units. The artwork, in high profile locations, aims to bring enjoyment to Kingston's local residents, businesses and visitors and showcase our talented local student community.

We were featured on BBC London, alongside businesses, highlighting the COVID-19 secure measures businesses and the town have taken to encourage a safe experience for people visiting and shopping in the town centre.

We secured PR coverage in the Surrey Comet, Time and Leisure, Radio Jackie and SW Londoner helping to raise the profile of Kingston town centre.

We have promoted our KIK app, which is very popular with businesses, with nearly 100% awareness, over 100 offers advertised, 5000 users and nearly 300 redemptions per month.



## Representing members

As well as lobbying for much needed financial support to support local businesses during the pandemic we secured funding from the government via the High Streets grant to invest and improve the town centre experience.

We represented members on traffic issues in the town centre, particularly as the town re-opened, and gained support from Kingston Council on bringing forward the Christmas roadworks moratorium.

We supported the national campaign 'Bounce Back Better' which called for specific support for the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors including an extension of the business rates holiday, extending the VAT reduction scheme and furlough scheme to support employers in 2021.



## Town centre insight

Understanding the performance of the town centre, and the make up of its visitors is important to tailor your offering. We set up weekly footfall reports during the pandemic which we continue to send, along with a monthly roundup of footfall, vacancies and other data - benchmarked against London and the UK - so you know how Kingston compares to its competitors.

We will continue to develop our insight offering to ensure you receive useful data about the town centre to improve your business.

## Investment in the public realm and town centre experience

In partnership with Kingston Council we have been leading on a public realm initiative to create inclusive 'Happy Spaces' within the town centre for local residents, visitors and business community to unwind, enjoy and connect with nature.

Kingston based landscape architects Davies White Ltd and The Edible Bus Stop design studio were appointed to lead on the engagement and design to transform Eagle Brewery Wharf, on Kingston's riverside, and Memorial Gardens, in the centre of the town, into green spaces that improve the pedestrian flow around the town, encourage wellbeing, social and cultural activities, and acknowledge their historical significance.

## Listening to you and your customers

We have continued to listen and respond to concerns and issues that you have raised; from proposed road closures, street cleaning to improving the town centre experience and lobbying for funding.

We carried out extensive research with our member community giving you the opportunity to share your feedback, which is key to ensuring we are giving you the best service possible, and to enable us to share your feedback with the Council and other partners.

We have carried out extensive engagement online and in-person with businesses, residents and local community groups to hear what people think of the spaces, and now have design ideas and principles that we can take forward to make this project a reality.







Bringing arts and culture to the town centre is a key priority for us and local businesses. Over the last nine months we have been leading on a project to deliver a Kingston Sculpture Trail in partnership with the Council, Kingston University and Canbury Community Trust.

Seven sculptures have been installed in the town centre in August 2021 for three months. Residents and visitors will be asked to vote for their favourite sculpture, with the winning artwork becoming a permanent feature in the town centre after the trail ends.

#### Benefits to members

In 2020 we invested in a new Christmas light scheme across the town centre bringing two light installations to the town for locals and visitors to enjoy, with two thirds of respondents in our consumer survey saying it made them feel positive about what was on offer in Kingston, and 61% saying it encouraged them to visit Kingston.

Local businesses have highlighted to us the importance of creating a vibrant and welcoming town centre. One of the ways we are addressing this is through our 'Social Spaces' project in partnership with the Council.

Following engagement with businesses, residents and access groups we have delivered temporary planters and seating to Thames Street, Fife Road and the Station Plaza in August 2021.





# Financial statement

## Income

Levy	
£804,369	Notes 1
Additional public and private sector contributions	
£189,094	Notes 2
Markets income	
£243,235	Notes 3
Total Income	
£1,236,698	

## Expenditure

Attractive streets and spaces	
£247,141	
Marketing the town	
£180,222	
Supporting and informing	
£126,129	
Influencing and representing	
£88,279	
Overheads	
£158,956	Notes 4
Markets costs	
£177,745	Notes 5
Contingency	
£35,000	Notes 6
Total Expenditure	
£1,013,472	

## Financial statement

Net surplus/(deficit) for the year 2020-21 (after tax)	
£223,226	Notes 7
Net surplus brought forward from 2019-20	
£361,501	
Net surplus carried forward into 2021-22	
£584,727	Notes 8

## Notes

- The financial statement covers the period of 12 months from April 2020 to March 2021 inclusive. Full audited accounts will be available at the Company's Annual Meeting to be held in October and on the Kingston First website.
1. Levy collection rate of 94%, including a 5% Central Government Covid Resilience Grant.
  2. Includes grants, sponsorships, project contributions and bank interest received.
  3. Income related to the running of the Ancient Market Place, Monday Market and commercial spaces in the town centre.
  4. Overheads at 13% of total income include non-project staffing, office accomodation, IT, levy collection charges, legal and accountancy costs associated with the running of the company.
  5. Costs of running and servicing the Ancient Market Place, Monday Market and commercial spaces in the town centre.
  6. Operating contingency at 3% of total income.
  7. Net Surplus was higher than planned due to Expenditure during the period being reduced to priority items and Lockdown responses, as a result of the disruption and uncertainty caused by COVID-19.
  8. Surplus is carried forward for the projects and services detailed in the business plan. Kingston First's voluntary board of directors represent sectors from across the town's business community. They are responsible for the financial oversight of the company and oversee the delivery of the business plan. You can find out details about the board and the Kingston First team on our website.



# The year ahead

## Consumer research

We've been carrying out extensive research with consumers, locals and non-visitors to Kingston to better understand their motivations for coming to the town centre and understand what they would like more of. We look forward to sharing the insights with you in Autumn 2021.







## Christmas 2021

We are in the middle of planning an exciting and varied offer for Kingston this Christmas to help drive footfall and spend in the town centre.

## New year, new consumer brand for Kingston

We are currently embarking on a project to refresh our consumer brand 'In Kingston'. Over the last few months we have been researching competitors and analysing our recent member research which highlighted a lack of awareness of the 'In Kingston' brand and a need for consumer marketing to drive footfall and support the town's economic recovery.

With this insight, we want to create a consumer brand that positions Kingston as a vibrant destination bringing it to life and giving it a personality that represents its unique offer and experiences. We will be launching the new consumer brand in early 2022.





## Vacant units

We've been working on a project to transform the vacant units in Kingston town centre to support economic growth, encourage innovation and diversity and create a vibrant place to live, work and play.

We've been reaching out to landlords, agents and the local community to explore new opportunities through the use of vacant units, creating a buzz and vibrancy in our town centre, and look forward to sharing our progress over the next few months.

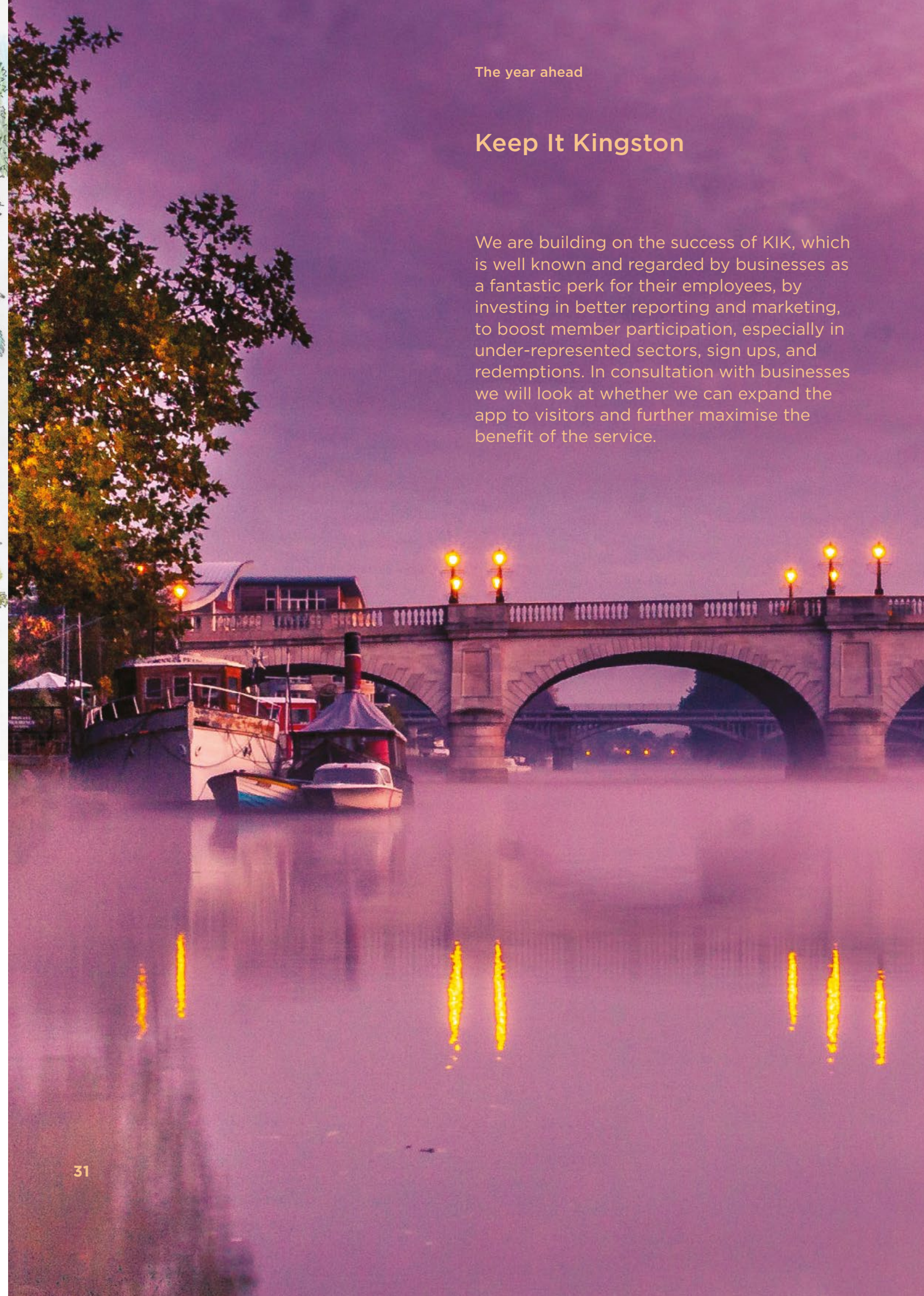
## Happy Spaces

The 'Happy Spaces' project represents an exciting change in the town centre, and builds upon our vision for reimagining the town centre's streets and spaces which has been developed by Kingston First in partnership with Kingston Council and Kingston University.

The project will transform Eagle Brewery Wharf on Kingston's riverside and Memorial Gardens in the centre of the town. After extensive engagement with local businesses, residents and community groups we are hoping to start work to transform these spaces in 2022.

## Keep It Kingston

We are building on the success of KIK, which is well known and regarded by businesses as a fantastic perk for their employees, by investing in better reporting and marketing, to boost member participation, especially in under-represented sectors, sign ups, and redemptions. In consultation with businesses we will look at whether we can expand the app to visitors and further maximise the benefit of the service.







## New training programme

A new training programme will be launched in Autumn 2021 to support members and help their employees enhance their knowledge base and build on essential skills.

There will be something for everyone, across all sectors, touching on three key themes which have been identified through our research with members; Sales and Marketing; Health and Safety; and The Sustainability Agenda.

Within Sales and Marketing we will continue the popular series of courses on digital/social media, plus add new courses on customer service and sales skills.

On the theme of Health and Safety we will run courses on first aid at work, mental health first aid, riverside safety and counter terrorism.

And on Sustainability we will run a course on Diversity and Inclusion, and look into courses on making workplaces more eco-friendly.



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