



Annual Report
2021-2022

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**Sam
Eastwood**

Introductions

In 2021-22, many town centre businesses and organisations were still grappling with the uncertainty of COVID-19, from spikes in infection rates to new variants including Omicron over Christmas, one of the town centre's busiest periods. Yet again local businesses and organisations rose to the challenges the pandemic presented, demonstrating resilience, determination and partnership working.

On behalf of the Board I would like to thank members and partners for their support and hard work over the last year to ensure a safe and welcoming experience in the town centre.

Kingston First continues to have ambitious plans to make Kingston a vibrant town, where everyone has an amazing experience, while also continuing to support members.

This year, we have recruited new Board members to reflect the make-up of town centre businesses and organisations and to bring specialist skills to support key projects Kingston First will be leading on over the next few years. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you and building on the successes of this year.

Sam Eastwood,
Chairman **Kingston First**

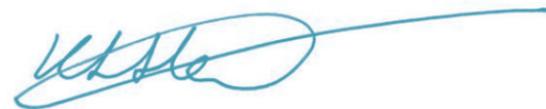
Despite another challenging year for businesses and organisations, I am incredibly proud of what the Kingston First team have delivered and achieved over the last 12 months and would like to thank you all for your support, feedback and engagement on the numerous projects and initiatives we have led on.

This year we refreshed the organisation's vision, mission and values to better reflect the type of organisation we are and the way we want to work with members, partners and stakeholders to deliver our priorities. We now have some solid foundations to create a company culture where people want to work and where staff can thrive.

We have delivered a fantastic Christmas offer and marketing campaign which led to strong footfall and spend and positive feedback from visitors and members, despite the challenges of COVID-19. I'm also really proud of the new consumer brand and website the team have created and launched - a new shop window for Kingston upon Thames which will support members, drive footfall and position Kingston as a vibrant and diverse destination.

The Kingston First team and Kingston Council have continued to work in close partnership delivering temporary planters and seating which we hope to make permanent this year. We have supported businesses and organisations with a successful training programme and hosted our first in-person networking event with future events, workshops and training planned throughout this year.

We are all looking forward to building on this year's achievements, continuing to support you and work in partnership to strengthen the town centre offer and experience.



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, we are 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.

The company is governed by a voluntary board of directors who represent a cross-sector 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.

In 2021 Kingston First refreshed its mission, vision and values to better reflect our role and our company culture.

Our VISION

Kingston will be a vibrant town where everyone has an amazing experience.

Our MISSION

By leading, supporting and working with our members, partners and community, we will create a town where our members can thrive and where people want to be.

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 & Spaces
- Marketing the Town
- Supporting & Informing
- Influencing & Representing



Attractive streets & spaces

Investment in public realm and town centre experience - delivering Project Social Spaces

Following engagement with businesses, residents and access groups and in partnership with Kingston Council, we have delivered temporary planters and seating to Thames Street, Lower Fife Road and outside Kingston Station and are hoping to make these permanent this year.



“It makes the town centre greener and more appealing, and gives visitors plenty of dwell spaces to enjoy”
Kingston First Member

Hanging baskets and sustainable planting

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



TONI & GUY™



Deep cleaning programme

We have undertaken two deep cleans of the town centre to supplement the routine cleaning carried out by Kingston Council as part of our commitment to providing an attractive and welcoming experience.

Free recycling and trade waste

We continued to provide our popular free recycling service, operated through First Mile. Over 170 businesses took advantage of the scheme saving local businesses and organisations a total of £160,000 throughout the year.

£160k

Saving local businesses and organisations through free recycling scheme

Marketing the town

We delivered a successful Christmas experience in the town centre with a diverse offer and bold marketing campaign to encourage people into the town. Footfall and spend in December were stronger in Kingston than London and the UK with footfall in Kingston up by 3% compared to 2019 while London and the UK experienced declines of up to 30% for the same period.

“I think Kingston at Christmas outdid themselves this year. I visited regularly over December and it just had such a festive feel to it. The food was great, the music was great and the stallholders were friendly and welcoming. I can’t wait for this year’s Kingston at Christmas!”
Kingston Visitor



9 out of 10 visitors surveyed were aware of the Christmas offer and almost 70% were satisfied with the offer

Thumbs Up It's Thursday and Easter campaign

We introduced a brand new Easter Trail this year which attracted over 600 families. We also saw the return of our popular Thumbs Up It's Thursday programme which ran across both Thursdays in the Easter holidays, with nearly 40 activities put on by over 20 Kingston businesses.

95%

said they would recommend our Easter activities to friends or family



80%

came into town specifically for our Easter activities

“It was such a lovely event - my son loved it, and it made me discover some places I'd never been to but will definitely visit again” Kingston mum (survey respondent)



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We have had some fantastic feedback both from those who did the trail and the businesses who took part. Plus, it created a tangible buzz in the town throughout the Easter holidays.

“Footfall for us skyrocketed higher than Mother's Day weekend. Dwell time in the store seemed to increase as well with parents happy to engage with staff and taste products from our stations” Whittard of Chelsea

17



Consumer research

We surveyed over 1000 people who live in and around the town to effectively measure the impact of our work, track consumer trends and to share these insights with local businesses and organisations. The survey found two-thirds of respondents described Kingston town centre as “enjoyable”, “lively” and “attractive” and 8 out of 10 consumers rated Kingston Town Centre highly for ‘Places to eat and drink’, and ‘Ease of getting around’. We use this insight to help enhance the town centre offer and experience.

PR and Social Media

We raised the profile of Kingston upon Thames by achieving media coverage in MyLondon, Surrey Live, Evening Standard, Visit London, Secret London and Time & Leisure, Surrey Comet, Primary Times, The Londonist and Radio Jackie.

We have achieved over 25,000 followers on our social channels with 10,000 followers on Facebook. 6,000 residents and visitors receive our newsletter which promotes and highlights what’s on offer in Kingston. Our profile and engagement on social channels helps promote Kingston as a destination and its local businesses.

New Brand and website

In March 2022 we launched a new consumer brand identity and website to help position Kingston as a vibrant and exciting town with a diverse offer and to support and promote the local business community. Since launching the new website the average length of time people are spending on the site has increased by over 1 minute and we’ve had a three-fold increase in the sign-up to our popular newsletter for residents and visitors.

“Lots of the team here have been commenting on how great it looks” Bentall Centre

“The website looks fantastic and definitely reflects the excitement and vibrance of Kingston” Kingston University student

“Just a quick note to congratulate you on the new website! I love the updated branding - you have really captured the feel and spirit of Kingston” Richmond BID

AL FRESCO DINING AND RIVERSIDE VIEWS



HIGH STREET FAVOURITES

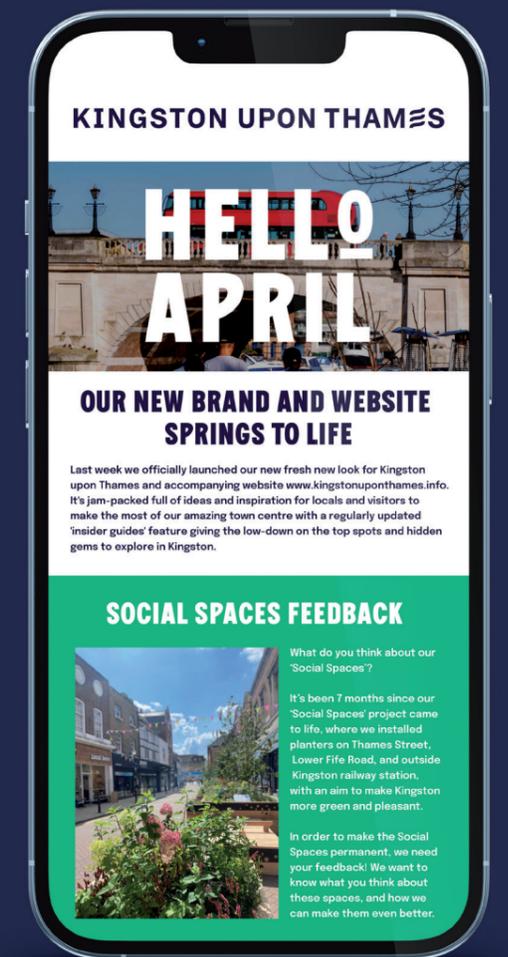
PICNIC & PLAY IN GREEN SPACE



ANCIENT MARKET PLACE



Over **50%**
of subscribers open our
consumer newsletter
(the average open rate
across all sectors for
e-newsletters is 21.5%)



Supporting & Informing

Training programme

We continued to provide our free training programme online to local businesses and organisations and offered 13 training courses covering anti-terrorism, first aid, marketing, social media and customer service. 165 employees from 97 businesses and organisations attended. 100% of attendees found the sessions we provided useful and they would also recommend attending them to a colleague. This year we are providing members with more free training and workshops in-person as part of our upskill and inspire programme.

100%
of attendees found
the sessions we
provided useful



Town centre insight reports

We shared data on the town centre with members regularly, helping them to make decisions about their businesses and attracting investors; including footfall and spend, as well as deep dives on key events such as Christmas, and have created the only database on vacancy rates on the town centre. These are valued by members with over 500 opens each month.

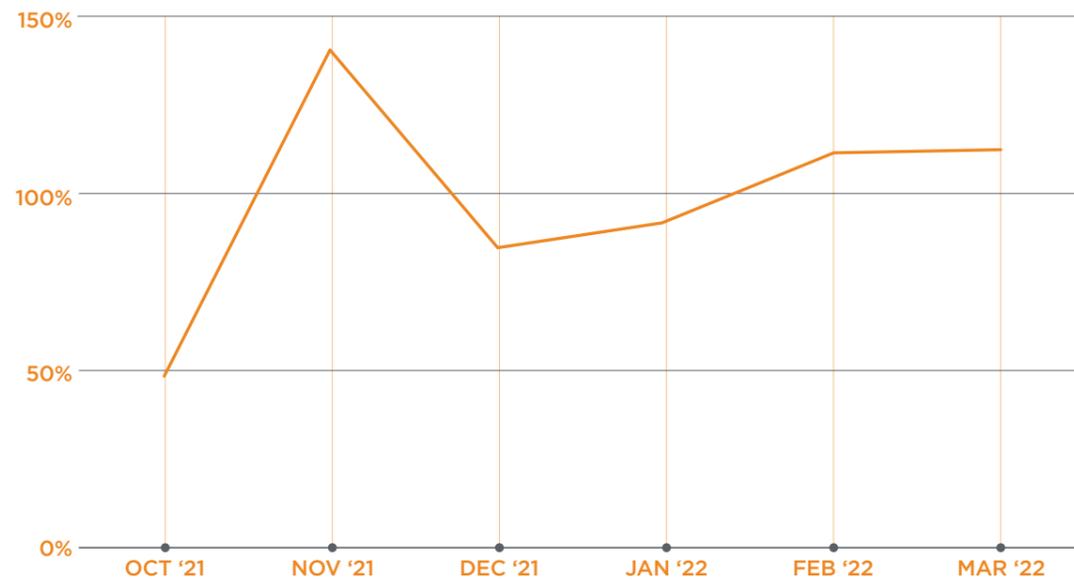
Member communications

Our bi-weekly newsletters, training emails, and communications on grants and other issues relevant to members, provide information about the town centre and services available to members, also receiving over 500 opens each month.



Kingston year on year footfall trends

The graph below shows the percentage increase in footfall compared to the same period last year. November 2021 experienced a significant uplift in footfall compared to November 2020, illustrating the impact of COVID-19 measures and restrictions on people's movements in 2020.



Keep it Kingston (KIK app)

We continued to promote our KIK app, where members can advertise their offers, and which remains a valued perk for town centre employees and encourages them to spend money in the town centre. The number of users continues to climb, with over 5000 users and hundreds of redemptions each month.

Influencing & representing



Financial assistance for UK hospitality

We joined UK Hospitality and the Mayor of London to call on the government for financial support for the hospitality industry following the restrictions and the working from home directive that were introduced over the festive period. We understood the impact this would have on our leisure and hospitality sector and lobbied for financial grants to be made available to those being hard hit.



Business rates reform

We have continued to highlight and lobby for reform of the business rates system which we believe has significant flaws and barriers to creating a diverse town centre and encouraging new business models. We will continue to lobby for much needed reform and join forces with others to help push forward this change.



Working with the Police

We have built closer relationships with the Police facilitating and encouraging partnership working between the Police and members, particularly riverside businesses to help support a safe and welcoming environment for all.

As part of our commitment to Town Centre safety, we have reinvigorated the Radio Link scheme in Kingston. This will help more businesses to connect with their fellow businesses, the Kingston CCTV control room, the Police and other stakeholders, helping to tackle crime in the town centre and make Kingston a safe destination for businesses and visitors.

Kingston ranked in the Top 5

Kingston upon Thames was ranked 4th nationally (and 2nd in Greater London) in Harper Dennis Hobbs Vitality Ranking 2022, which measures the health of 1000 retail centres, taking into account things like vacancy rates, resident's movements and suitability to local consumer demands.

Having soared up from 20th place back in 2019, this is a real positive sign for Kingston and is reflected by the number of new store openings and investment we are seeing in the town centre.



Vacant units

We started a project last year to better understand the make-up of vacant units in the town, producing unprecedented data and insights on whether units are available or part of a development or soon to be occupied. We have been building relationships with agents and landlords to encourage and facilitate the use of meanwhile use in the town centre and to use vacant units as a platform for showcasing art from our local community. We will continue to monitor vacancy rates and identify opportunities for investments to support and encourage a diverse offer in the town centre.



Kingston Sculpture Trail

Following a successful Sculpture Trail in partnership with the Council, Kingston University and Canbury Community Trust, the winner 'Party Animal' by Alex Davies MRSS has become a permanent feature in the Ancient Market Place, helping to position Kingston as a destination for arts and culture.

“The Sculpture Trail was an excellent addition to the cultural life of the town and gave Kingston the opportunity to publicise itself as an artistic London Borough.”

Lorraine Monk, KAOS artist lead & Sculpture Trail partner

Financial Statement

INCOME

Levy

£765,291 Notes 1

Additional public and private sector contributions

£319,520 Notes 2

Markets income

£319,726 Notes 3

TOTAL INCOME

£1,404,537

EXPENDITURE

Attractive streets & spaces

£337,115

Marketing the town

£258,630

Supporting & informing

£150,129

Influencing & representing

£108,485

Overheads

£159,862 Notes 4

Markets costs

£227,702 Notes 5

Contingency

£20,000 Notes 6

TOTAL EXPENDITURE

£1,261,923

Net surplus/(deficit) for the year 2021-22 (after tax)

£142,614 Notes 7

Net surplus brought forward from 2020-21

£584,727

Net surplus carried forward into 2022-23

£727,341 Notes 8

Notes

The financial statement covers the period of 12 months from April 2021 to March 2022 inclusive. Full audited accounts will be available at the Company's Annual Meeting to be held in July and on the Kingston First website.

1. 2021 Levy collection rate of 92%, with additional 7% of prior year collections. £125,000 income has been deferred for 2022-23 Public Realm projects.

2. Includes grants, sponsorships, project contributions and bank interest received.

3. Income related to the running of the Ancient Market Place and commercial spaces in the town centre.

4. Overheads at 11% of total income include non-project staffing, office accommodation, 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 and commercial spaces in the town centre.

6. Operating contingency at 1.4% of total income.

7. Net Surplus was higher than planned due to additional income received in excess of the initial 2021-22 Budget. Expenditure on projects and services was in line with the Budget.

8. Surplus carried forward includes 2022/23 levy received during 2022 for use in 2022/23 financial year. Surplus is carried forward for the projects and services in 2022/23 and the remainder of the term as 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

Working in partnership with businesses and organisations and seeking feedback and engagement from members to help shape our priorities and the support we provide will continue to be an important theme for Kingston First this year. We will be sharing the results from the recent member survey and Kingston First's response with you in Autumn.

We are looking forward to working with Kingston Council, businesses and the communities in Kingston to develop a vision for the town centre. We believe a vision not only sets the direction for the town but brings people together to help shape the future of the town.

Our work to make improvements to the public realm will continue as we move into the next phase of Happy Spaces - two projects in partnership with the local authority that will transform Eagle Brewery Wharf on Kingston's riverside and Memorial Gardens in the centre of the town.

We are also working with Kingston Council to make the temporary scheme (Social Spaces) of planters and seating a permanent feature across the town. We understand and recognise the importance of connecting the town and are exploring how we can introduce wayfinding interventions to help people better navigate the town and discover the unexpected.

Our new training and workshop programme has been created in response to member feedback and is designed to upskill and inspire. With training in digital skills and health and safety to a series of in-person panel style talks, featuring a diverse selection of speakers followed by informal networking opportunities, there is something for everyone.

We are already starting preparations for Christmas and are looking forward to working with members to provide an exciting and varied offer and experience this year in Kingston.



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