



Explanatory Notes

**1 January –
31 December 2023**

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. These are set out below.

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.

As set out in the Renewal Proposal 2020-24, our work will focus on our key themes:

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

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

How is Kingston First funded?

Kingston First is principally funded through a levy on non-domestic premises operating within the BID area. The BID area can be viewed on our website. For 2023, the levy is set at 1.06% of the rateable value of properties on the 2017 Non-Domestic Ratepayers rating list in accordance with the Renewal Proposal. The projected levy income for 2023 is approximately £869,919. In addition to the levy, Kingston First is able to generate additional funding to contribute towards the delivery of the Renewal Proposal; this includes running commissioned services and applying for grants, project and service contributions.

Financial overview

The below forecast and budget are indicative and based on our Financial Year (April to March). Full year-end 2022/23 accounts will be provided in Spring 2023, alongside 2022/23's Annual Report.

Business priorities reflect our Renewal Proposal themes. Additional funding includes running and managing the Ancient Market Place and project contributions.

2022/23 Forecast

Levy income	£857,941
Additional funding	£408,476
Total	£1,266,417

Spend against business priorities is forecast as follows:

Attractive streets & spaces	£318,535
Marketing the town	£265,000
Supporting & informing	£219,899
Influencing & representing	£147,720
Overheads	£160,357
Markets	£325,612
Contingency	£10,000
Public Realm Transformation	£125,000
Total	£1,572,124

2023/24 Budget


Levy income	£869,919
Additional funding	£408,357
Total	£1,278,276

Spend against business priorities is forecast as follows:

Attractive streets & spaces	£254,187
Marketing the town	£270,909
Supporting & informing	£214,690
Influencing & representing	£137,405
Overheads	£166,185
Markets	£295,325
Contingency	£20,000
Public Realm Transformation	£125,000
Total	£1,483,700

How do I pay?

Payment instructions are found on your bill. Kingston Council issues the BID levy bills, collects the levy and transfers the funds to Kingston First. For all billing queries, contact the Council team shown on your bill.



Our work and achievements in 2022

Attractive streets & spaces

Investment in public realm and town centre experience

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 the Station Plaza and are hoping to develop plans for making these permanent later this year.

Hanging basket/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.

Deep cleaning programme

We have undertaken three deep street cleans and graffiti removal in the town centre to supplement the routine cleaning carried out by the local authority, 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.

Marketing the town

Christmas

We delivered a successful Christmas experience in the town centre in 2021 with a diverse offer and bold marketing campaign to encourage people into the town. Footfall and spend in December 2021 were stronger in Kingston than London and the UK, with Kingston's footfall up 1-3% against 2019 in the last two weeks of the year while London and the UK experienced declines against 2019 of 20-30%.

9 out of 10 visitors surveyed were aware of the Christmas offer and 90% 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 to the town and its businesses. We also saw the return of our popular Thumbs Up It's Thursday programme which ran over the Easter and Summer holidays. With nearly 40 activities put on by over 20 Kingston businesses, 95% of people said they would recommend our Easter activities to friends or family and 80% came into town specifically for our Easter activities.

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 28,000 followers on our social channels with almost 12,000 followers on Facebook. Over 7,000 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. The consumer survey highlighted that out of 438 respondents 80% rated the new brand good or very good and 9 out of 10 agree the website is easy to use and provides ideas and inspiration for spending time in Kingston.

We have bought the consumer brand to life across the town, highlighting the breadth of things to do and helping people better navigate through Kingston using artwork on planters and hoardings. We've organised and supported a range of events in the town centre to encourage footfall and dwell time including showing the Wimbledon Championships on a large screen in the Ancient Market Place, bringing in the Antique and Vegan markets and supporting Kingston Carnival.

Supporting & informing

Training programme

We continued to provide our free training programme to local businesses and organisations and offered 13 training courses covering First Aid, Fire Safety, Marketing, Social Media and River Safety. 146 employees from 105 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.

Town centre insight reports

We share 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.

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 6000 users and hundreds of redemptions each month.

Influencing & representing

Cost of living crisis

We joined a nationwide campaign with other BIDs and sector associations representing over 100,000 businesses to lobby the government for support for businesses including reform of the business rate system, an energy rate relief and VAT reductions.

Working with the Police

We have built closer relationships with the Police facilitating and encouraging partnership working between the Police and members.

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.



The year ahead

We will continue to work in partnership with businesses and organisations, regularly seeking feedback and engagement to help shape our priorities and the support we provide. This will continue to be a key focus for the Kingston First team in the year ahead.

We are working with Kingston Council, businesses and communities in Kingston to develop a vision for the town centre which sets the direction for the town and brings people together in shaping Kingston's future. We will keep you updated on progress and how you can get involved.

Our work to make improvements to the public realm will continue as we work in partnership with Kingston Council and businesses to transform Eagle Brewery Wharf on Kingston's riverside and Memorial Gardens in the centre of the town.

We are also working on ideas to make the temporary planters and seating scheme, Social Spaces, a permanent feature across the locations it is sited in 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.

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.

Delivering new art for Kingston

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



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