



Annual Report
2022-2023

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**Vanessa
Ross**

**Greg
Miles**

Introductions

Vanessa Ross
Greg Miles
Co-chairs of Kingston First

As recently appointed Co-chairs to Kingston First's Board we have witnessed first hand the crucial role Kingston First plays in supporting local businesses and organisations and contributing to a welcoming, and vibrant town centre enjoyed by everyone.

Over the last year we have met and worked with numerous members and partners on different initiatives, including the Town Centre Vision and Social Spaces project, and what has stood out for us both is the passion and commitment people share to create an amazing town centre. On behalf of all Board members, we'd like to thank all of you for giving up your time, getting involved and sharing your views on the different projects Kingston First have led on.

Looking ahead to next year, collaboration and co-creation will continue to be a common thread of Kingston First's work as we prepare for the renewal ballot with a new business plan for the next five years shaped by your views and feedback.

We look forward to meeting many more members over the next few months and continuing to work together to create a thriving destination and support the town's business community.

Kirsten Henly Chief Executive

Many town centre businesses and organisations have experienced yet another difficult year. From the increased costs in energy to the rising costs of doing business, challenges and uncertainty continue to be prevalent for many of our members.

I believe Kingston First's strong partnerships and close relationships with members has helped many of us weather the storm and deliver numerous projects and initiatives that benefit the town and members. Thank you for taking the time to be involved in these projects and for sharing your views.

A particular highlight for me this year is the work the team have led on to shape and influence the Town Centre Vision through collaboration with businesses, landowners and developers. We heard loud and clear the views and ambitions for Kingston from members, and have lobbied the council to create a more aspiring and future proof Vision for the town centre which Kingston deserves.

Responding to feedback from members, Kingston First has led on the next phase of permanently embedding our Social Spaces project, working with landscape architects, businesses and the community to develop designs for improved wayfinding, lighting, planting and seating across several locations

within the town centre. I'm hoping these proposals will pave the way for further improvements that help people get around the town more easily.

We have delivered another brilliant Christmas offer with new light installations and experiences to encourage people into the town. Our training programme and networking opportunities continue to grow from strength to strength, and it's fantastic that we are now able to meet more of our members in person and strengthen Kingston's business community.

Over the next 12 months the Kingston First team will be focused on listening to members and gathering feedback as we prepare for our renewal ballot and shape our priorities for the next five years. I'd like to extend my thanks to the Kingston First team and Board for their fantastic work over the past year, and thank you again for your support. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you to make Kingston a vibrant town where everyone has an amazing experience.



**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.

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. We are preparing for our fifth term renewal ballot which will involve balloting members in June 2024.

To view the Renewal Proposal 2020-24 and details about our projects and services, please visit our website. Our work focuses on the following areas:

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

Attractive streets & spaces

Social Spaces project

We appointed Ryder Architecture to take forward the next phase of the Social Spaces project.

The Social Spaces project consisted of temporary planting, seating, greening in three locations in Kingston town centre, outside the train station, on lower Fife Road and Thames Street. We led on engagement with businesses, residents, students and community groups to develop designs for permanent seating and greening, wayfinding and lighting interventions in these locations. We are now working with Kingston Council on how we introduce some of these recommendations across the town.

“More trees in Kingston town centre would be good”

Member of the public

“Create more barriers between the traffic and people to reduce air pollution. Seating and planting is equally important”

Member of the public



Eagle Brewery Wharf and Memorial Gardens

We have continued to work in partnership with Kingston Council to transform Eagle Brewery Wharf on Kingston's riverside and Memorial Gardens in the town centre into places where everyone can unwind, enjoy and connect with nature. Landscape architects have been appointed for both sites to develop designs in collaboration with businesses and the community. We are aiming to start on site and complete the work next year.



We removed over
100
pieces of graffiti and
repainted hoardings

Waste management
and cleanliness

We continued to lobby Kingston Council for an improvement in waste management and secured commitment to change the Big Belly bins in 2023. We continued to supplement the routine cleaning carried out by the council as part of our commitment to providing an attractive and welcoming experience. We have deep cleaned over 25,400 sqm of the town centre, this is equivalent, to four and a half football pitches. We provided 92,000 recycling sacks and stickers to members via First Mile, saving them over £200,000, and more than £40,000 in savings was made by businesses on the list price of additional waste collections due to our partnership with First Mile.



Activating the town centre

We organised and supported 47 markets, activities and events to drive footfall and raise awareness of Kingston, including the Christmas lights and Christmas market and Chimp trail.

Hanging basket/
sustainable planting

We installed 120 hanging baskets and introduced sustainable planting across the town centre. We replanted and continue to maintain flower beds with a mixture of pollinator friendly, evergreen and perennial plants.

We saved members
over
£200k
through the First Mile
recycling services

Marketing the town

Consumer brand and website

We continued our work to position Kingston as a destination, with traffic to our new consumer facing website kingstonuponthames.info receiving 13,000 visitors on a monthly basis.

We raised awareness of the brand throughout the town including branded wayfinding on hoardings and planters, deckchairs and an interactive installation with information and facts about Kingston in the Ancient Market Place.

83%

of members agree that a strong brand identity is important for Kingston town centre

Member research 2022



Summer activities

We set-up a screen to show the Wimbledon finals in the Ancient Market Place and helped promote businesses through advertising opportunities and pop-ups. We organised activities over the Summer period, from circus workshops, to storytelling and face painting and secured involvement from over twenty local businesses to help create a buzz during the school holidays. We launched a digital marketing campaign and created a film to help raise the profile of Kingston targeting new audiences. The campaign was viewed by almost 70,000 people, and made 728,000 impressions on Facebook and Instagram and 12,557 engagements.

Over
70,000
people saw our Summer marketing campaign

“So much fun!!! And barely cost a thing. We spent almost 7 hours completing the activities and it was a lovely day out!”
Member of the public



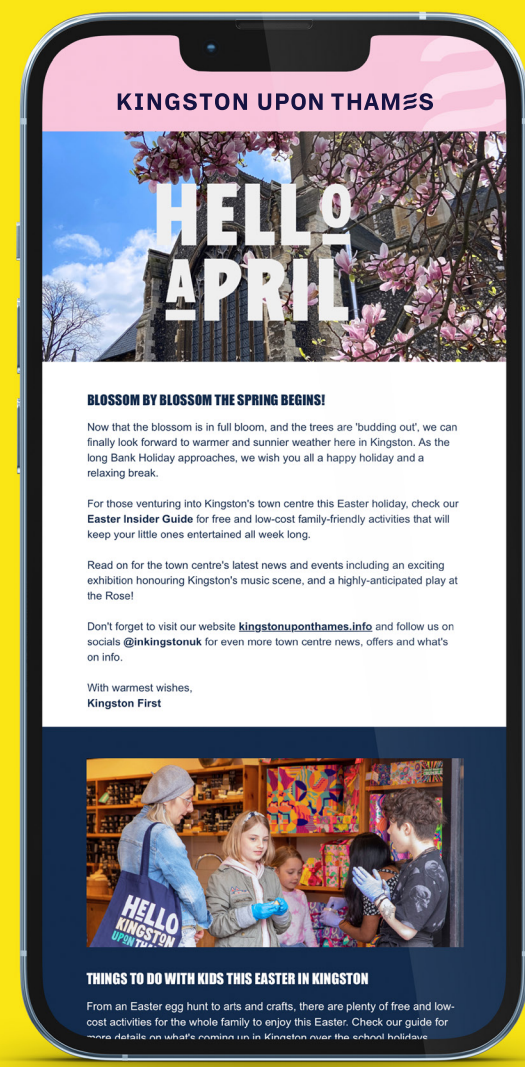
“We ran a pop up bar selling some of our fabulous cocktails & cakes! Was a super weekend, we are so lucky to be part of a community that has an organisation like Kingston First who supports neighbourhood businesses like they do - we look forward to all the future events/partnerships” Member



PR and Social Media

We raised the profile of Kingston by achieving 40 pieces of media coverage across the year: 25 Christmas-related media coverage, including articles from Metro, Primary Times, Surrey Live, and Londonist; 14 Chimp Trail related media coverage including articles from Time & Leisure, London TV and This is Local London. We also featured on BBC Breakfast and BBC London.

Our profile and engagement on social channels helps promote Kingston as a destination and its local businesses. We achieved over 28,000 followers on our social channels, an increase of 3,000 since last year. We created and sent out a monthly newsletter to local residents and those that are interested in what's on offer in the town centre, and now have 7,000 subscribers, an increase of 1,000 since last year.



COME FOR THE
PICNIC

STAY FOR THE
NIGHT OUT



86%

of members felt the Christmas experience in Kingston was successful in encouraging shoppers to spend more time in Kingston town centre



Christmas

We led, managed and delivered another successful Christmas experience and marketing campaign for the town centre, building on insights and learnings from last year. We installed the Christmas lights and new light installations including the reindeer and neon tree. We introduced new experiences including curling and children's areas - initiatives introduced to drive people to the town and increase dwell time.



Over **90%**
of visitors surveyed were satisfied with the Christmas Lights and Decorations

7 out of 10 visitors felt the brand new 'Make it a Kingston Christmas campaign' made them feel positive about what was on offer in the town centre

"I loved Kingston at Christmas this year and told lots of people to go!" Member of the public



Supporting & Informing

Training programme & networking

We delivered 13 training sessions on a variety of topics, ranging from first aid to social media and leadership. 91 businesses made use of these sessions, 98% would recommend the training sessions to a colleague.

We launched the 'Inspire' series, bringing together panel guests to discuss important leadership topics and allow members to connect with each other, network and exchange experiences and opinions.

We ran two networking events with 80 members attending from more than 30 businesses.

100%
**of attendees found
the training sessions
we provided useful**



“It was a great opportunity to meet with other businesses and exchange ideas and get to know them.” Member

“Everyone was extremely inviting and friendly. I felt very at ease talking to everyone.” Member

“Thanks again for such great training opportunities. Yesterday’s session was really really helpful.” Member

Cost saving support for businesses

In response to the rising costs of doing business and increased energy costs we introduced brand new services to support members and help them save money; including free procurement and carbon reduction advice, and a scheme to help reduce food waste.

We launched a new area on our website dedicated to cost savings for businesses highlighting existing services members could benefit from such as recycling, training, marketing and the Keep It Kingston app as well as the new services we set-up.



Member communications

We continued our bi-weekly newsletters, training emails, and communications on projects and other issues relevant to members, providing information about the town centre and services.

These communications received over 500 opens each month, with 96% of members reporting that they found them useful.

Keep It Kingston (KIK app)

Our Keep It Kingston app (KIK), continued to be popular with businesses and employees within the town centre, offering members an opportunity to advertise their offers and discounts, helping to encourage spending within the town.

We also introduced push notifications on the app, and quarterly email round ups to highlight new offers from businesses.

“Supporting local communities, brilliant idea!” Member

Town centre insight reports

We produced quarterly data and insights reports about town centre performance, a service highly valued by members with an increase in open rates of a third vs previous year.

“Data and insight information has been very valuable” Member



Almost 7,000 town centre employees signed up to Keep it Kingston, with average satisfaction of 8.5 out of 10, and 89% awareness.

Influencing & representing



Town centre vision

One of our key priorities has been the development and delivery of a Town Centre Vision and we successfully lobbied, and then went on to work with Kingston Council to make this happen.

We have played an important role in shaping the Vision development, representing the views of businesses and property owners as well as local communities through workshops, surveys and on-going conversations with members. Our recommendations for a Town Centre Vision focus on the following themes:

- **Riverside**
- **Movement and Transport**
- **Town Fit for Future Generation**

We also recommended a Vision which centres on the idea of connect (also relates to connection and connectivity) - a common thread between and within the themes we've highlighted. We will continue to shape and influence this work to make sure we have a Vision that is ambitious and reflects the views of members.



“It is the best Town Planning proposal I have seen in my 50 years in commercial real estate; congratulations to you and your team” Member

“I just wanted to say that I think you’ve done a brilliant piece of work in producing this response. It’s a robust critique but offers positive solutions and a good framework that I hope will be adopted. Good job!” Member

“Thanks also for involving me in the buzzy workshop.” Member

Vacant units

We continued our work on vacant units, producing regular data and insights on vacancies. We shared our knowledge and experience at the Institute of Place Management's (IPM) policy roundtable to influence the government's approach to tackling long-vacant high street units, part of the Levelling up Bill.

We have built strong relationships with landlords and developers and helped broker new businesses into Kingston.

We have also commissioned research into what the barriers are for businesses and organisations wanting to invest in the town centre, to help inform our strategic approach to managing vacant units and encourage a thriving town centre. We look forward to sharing the findings with you shortly.

London Vitality Index 2023

Lambert Smith Hampton's special edition vitality index for Greater London ranked Kingston the top London borough to live and work with the strongest growth prospects. It reviews various factors linked to quality of life, economic, cultural, social and environment. A great testament to the work of many across the borough and specifically Kingston town centre which we are very proud of.



Financial Statement

INCOME

Levy	
£882,156	Notes 1
Additional public and private sector contributions	
£58,992	Notes 2
Markets income	
£363,891	Notes 3
TOTAL INCOME	
£1,305,039	

EXPENDITURE

Attractive streets & spaces		Net surplus/(deficit) for the year 2022-23 (after tax)
£205,059		£91,757 Notes 7
Marketing the town		Net surplus brought forward from 2021-22
£215,447		£727,341
Supporting & informing		Net surplus carried forward into 2023-24
£205,061		£819,098 Notes 8
Influencing & representing		
£103,658		
Overheads		
£164,153	Notes 4	
Markets costs		
£299,488	Notes 5	
Contingency		
£10,000	Notes 6	
Public Realm Transformation		
£10,416		
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		
£1,213,282		

- Notes
- The financial statement covers the period of 12 months from April 2022 to March 2023 inclusive. Full audited accounts will be available at the Company’s Annual Meeting to be held in September and on the Kingston First website.

1. 2022 Levy collection rate of 95%, with additional 11% of prior year collections.

2. Includes 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 12.5% 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 0.75% of total income.

7. Net Surplus was higher than planned due to additional Income received in excess of the initial 2022-23 Budget, Expenditure on projects and services was in line with the Budget.

8. Surplus is carried forward for the projects and services detailed in the business plan, including £375,000 for Public Realm Transformation projects; details of these have been outlined in this Annual Report.

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



Christmas

We have already started planning the Christmas offer and experience, drawing on insights and feedback from last year to create an even better Christmas that encourages people into the town and creates a welcoming experience where people want to be. We will be introducing a new lighting scheme and look forward to sharing our plans and getting your thoughts in the upcoming months.

Ballot 2024

We will continue to seek feedback and engagement from members to help shape our priorities for the new Kingston First term, 2025-29. We look forward to sharing with you results from the member survey we conducted earlier this year and consulting with you on ideas for our draft business plan in the Autumn.

Public Realm projects

In partnership with Kingston Council we will continue with the projects to transform Eagle Brewery Wharf on Kingston's riverside and Memorial Gardens in the centre of the town. We expect these projects to be completed in Autumn 2024.

We will continue our work on the Social Spaces project, working with Kingston Council and stakeholders to take forward some of the interventions proposed to help improve wayfinding, lighting, seating and planting in key locations and we hope these become a catalyst for further change across the town centre.

Training and networking opportunities

We have recently partnered with SEEDL to create a brand new learning hub where you and your teams can enjoy free and unlimited access to over 200 live virtual courses. Topics include; leadership, customer service, office 365, mental wellness, communication, retail, hospitality and lots more!.

We will also be continuing with our networking events with several planned for the year including a new historic walking tour exclusively for members.



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