



30th November 2016
Hexham Business Improvement District

Launch meeting 2016 – feedback from businesses

Around 50 people attended an informal open meeting on 21st November to discuss the next steps for the BID. The BID Board asked attendees to join tables according to the projects they were interested in. The projects are markets, access and signage, Business Voice, cleaning and appearance, business support and marketing and promotion of the town. Attendees also commented on other matters as well as feeding in ideas across the various projects, and inevitably each table hosted much general discussion about the town and the BID. Clearly the BID will group together similar ideas into manageable projects for delivery.

Table discussions summary of feedback

- Communication around the BID was extremely important and had been less than ideal in the past, leading to some negative comments tonight.
- Markets and special events have mixed impact on businesses, sometimes negative, for example Hencotes is quiet on Farmers Market Saturdays. A Sunday market might add value for cafes/restaurants.
- Themed and specialist markets and events were thought to be attractive, eg Whitby goths, Victorian markets, antiques, flowers. Promotion further afield is key.
- One way system through Marketplace would make it safer whilst keeping it open, ditto adding a zebra crossing.
- Networking with other businesses extremely important for sharing good ideas, and increasing trade with each other.
- First impressions and the entrances to the town should have some priority attention.
- Cleaning was an important issue with various areas being suggested for more attention, even if that was about holding the local authorities to account rather than providing an additional service.
- Although the new bus station looks good, the old and its surrounding site was a concern – duration of build and type of units, information would be good
- Plenty of notice should be given for events, and opportunities for those who feel negatively to engage
- The BID should liaise with NE Chambers of Commerce and other similar organisations.
- We should consider holding several more open meetings.
- The "Business Voice" should definitely be able to gather views on a geographic basis.

- A Hexham Pageant was suggested as a potential new event, perhaps taking a cue from Son et lumière.
- We could benchmark/compare Hexham against other Market Towns and learn from their highlights/successes.
- Provide guidance to the developers of the old bus station site about which type of tenants they might seek to ensure a good offering within the town.
- Review the adequacy of the provision of public toilets.
- Have a Town Crier – used successfully elsewhere
- Some non-fixed advertising worth investigating, mobile, vehicle based etc
- A one town vision was through preferable, though some wanted to promote a distinctive ‘old town’, ‘historic core’, ‘walkable town’ etc.
- Play to strengths of quality, specialist, independent traders.
- When making new signs include historical information, maps, and walking/driving directions and times.
- Can lighting be improved: consistent, low energy, clear and pretty
- Signage could be improved and would make a big difference to whole town but planning permission and cost a major barrier – BID should support this. A consistent and attractive ‘brand’ is key, linked to general town promotion.
- Accessibility for those with disabilities and parents with buggies etc is important. Signage will help, removing street clutter and loose signs, can we have boards with braille or spoken signs.
- We should encourage businesses to tidy up and take responsibility for their own shop fronts and immediate area (eg painting, gutters, signs, window cleaning etc)– quality not shabby
- Things that would warrant additional work might be power cleans of the streets, new/repaired/better bins, and attention to gateway areas, more seating, and anything that would provide a ‘wow’ factor.
- Non-retail businesses could also be supported with business-to-business activities
- Concern expressed over the impact of flooding – could anything be done to reduce impacts in future?
- Making use of empty units
- Recognition that most people look to the internet for local information but print in some formats was still important too. Agreed the balance has changed and will continue to do so. Opportunities to improve/animate the Hexham website include blog/video (Hexham TV), and social media (Facebook/Twitter).
- Audiences are both local people, and day visitors from local towns/villages.
- Possible need for business directory (but Courant does a list). A comprehensive printed town map with trading estates and listing of businesses was needed. New town gateways – Bus Station and new garage – presents new opportunities for welcome and information.
- Shop Local – review/revise.
- Work with the many shops, cafes and restaurants in Hexham. Recognise that there is a distinct day time (coffee/lunch/afternoon tea + shopping market) and evening (pubs/restaurants linking with Queens Hall and Cinema) economies.
- Sunday markets/events – local shops in Ryton was cited as very busy on a Sunday and the Metro Centre.

- Parking – suffering from lack of capacity; workers don't like disc parking – prefer to pay/shoppers do spaces available during the day.
- BID set up looked closed; looked like 'a little gang who got together and inflicted it on everyone else'. Must be seen to deliver. Must be visible very quickly.
- Introduction of a discounted postage and distribution bulk buying deal to either save companies money on deliveries or on sending goods sold online to customers given this is a key part of many small traders business model now.
- Develop bespoke arts and culture business support linking to networks elsewhere in the region and nationally. There is support out there but not in Hexham so it could be that specialist training as well as sector specific network opps could be developed. ISIS arts was also mentioned in Hexham.
- Development of potential arts and culture trails / events - this would need to be developed carefully and curated properly depending on the focus of the activity e.g. the requirements of different types of art/sculpture etc and the market targeted.
- targeted marketing for arts and culture in Hexham internationally, perhaps adding to marketing that is more generic about Northumberland currently e.g. pieces in national papers / tour guides etc
- Proposed activities under business support such as developing new networking events, doing a business survey and developing a bespoke business support offer in addition to Business Northumberland and related existing provision.
- Tynedale business network and Network North were mentioned as existing networks that may be of use

Post it note comments

As well as the lively table discussions, we asked attendees to use some post its to note down their ideas on two things: something that would benefit the whole town, and something that would benefit their business.

Whole town issues raised by several people included parking and general promotion of the town. Whilst the BID is very committed to the latter, parking is a complex issue and we will raise members' opinions, however diverse, with the responsible bodies.

- Have a non business Board member
- Implement a one way system with lots of parking
- Market Hexham in the new A69 service station with maps and signs
- Find out what businesses are coming as part of the Dysart development, with an aim for a complementary offer
- Environmental sustainability is important could we encourage businesses to install LED lighting to lower energy bills
- Encourage the use of public transport into the town and make it more walking friendly

Finally, we asked what would help your business directly. There was much less input into this, but two issues raised were managing marketing and security, presumably because the relative costs of this for smaller businesses are high. The BID will likely be able to offer some cost free or discounted opportunities to promote your business.