



Annual Report

2023-2024

(April 2023 - Sept 2024)

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**Vanessa
Ross**

**Greg
Miles**

Introductions

**Vanessa Ross
Greg Miles
Co-chairs of Kingston First**

As we approach the end of our fourth term we are pleased to share with you Kingston First's annual report highlighting our work and achievements over the last 18 months.

We have been successfully operating for the last twenty years and this year a ballot was held giving members the opportunity to vote on continuing with Kingston First and the support and services we provide. We are delighted with the overwhelming support we received. We achieved a 58 per cent turn out rate, well above the national average for a BID renewal ballot of 41 per cent, with 94 per cent of members voting in favour to continue with Kingston First and 96 per cent of members in favour by rateable value.

Our new business plan for 2025-29 has been created following extensive engagement and feedback with you, and we are proud to be entering into our new term knowing that our business plan centres on areas that you have told us are important for you and for Kingston. Our priorities will focus on investing in safety and creating a better connected town centre. We will continue to promote and celebrate Kingston and save you time and money through various initiatives and services. Over the last 18 months, we have very much enjoyed

getting to meet more members and to better understand your experiences and the challenges you face as well as hear positive feedback on the important role Kingston First plays in supporting you and the town.

Our priority remains for Kingston to be a vibrant town where everyone has an amazing experience.

On behalf of all Board members, we'd like to thank all of you for sharing your views, providing feedback and supporting us with the renewal ballot.

We look forward to continuing to work together to build on the successes of the last BID term with new projects and services and stronger partner relationships to help create a vibrant town centre where businesses and organisations thrive.

Kirsten Henly Chief Executive

Our focus over the last 18 months has been about understanding your needs and listening to your feedback to help shape our priorities for the new business term. Thank you to all of you who took the time to share your views, either through surveys, workshops, networking events or face to face visits. We are delighted to have secured a strong mandate to continue our work and support for you over the next five years beginning in January 2025. Thank you for all your support.

During the last year we have introduced new initiatives and events to help drive footfall to the town including our first ever Light Up event which saw the town animated with interactive and engaging installations for all to enjoy. We are looking forward to building on this inaugural event with new installations and experiences for 2025. We also welcomed the popular Bear Trail which brought new visitors to the town, creating a buzz and excitement throughout the streets and we will continue to explore new and unique experiences that help position Kingston as a destination for arts and culture.

I was also delighted to see the launch of our new Town Centre Community Fund aimed at funding projects and services that bring a positive impact to the town, support local businesses and promote community engagement. I'm confident the fund will nurture the community spirit that thrives in Kingston and help support local community groups and charities.

Behind the scenes, we've been building closer relationships with the Police and are starting to make progress on the issues and challenges on Eden Street. Investing in a safe and welcoming town centre will continue to

be one of our priorities as we move into our new term. Other areas of focus include new and exciting initiatives, such as building on our successful Christmas offer in the town centre. While we step down from managing the Ancient Market Place and the daily market from April 2025 we look forward to working closely with the new provider to create cohesive experiences across the town and to ensure the space and its assets continue to play an important role for communities and businesses in the town centre. We will also continue to strengthen our popular training and networking opportunities as well as our employee discount app, Keep it Kingston, and consumer facing website www.kingstonuponthames.info and marketing of the town and its offer.

It's been an incredible year and I'd like to thank the Kingston First team for all their hard work and dedication as well as the Board for their support and direction. Once again thank you to all of you for your feedback and contributions over this past year - we look forward to continuing to work closely with you to deliver projects and services that create a successful, vibrant and diverse town centre.



**Kirsten
Henly**

Who is 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.

VISION

Kingston will be a vibrant town where EVERYONE has an AMAZING experience.

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. Following a successful renewal ballot, we will begin our fifth term on 1 January 2025.

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



The new bespoke Christmas lights this year were fabulous, a really good investment. They really represented Kingston and looked very classy!

Kingston visitor



Eagle Brewery Wharf and Memorial Gardens

In collaboration with Kingston Council, we have invested in two key locations within the town centre which are much in need of improvement. Eagle Brewery Wharf has now secured planning permission with the work commencing early next year so the space is ready for all to enjoy in Summer 2025. Similarly, subject to planning permission, the work to transform Memorial Gardens will commence early next year and will be ready in Spring 2025.

Activating the town centre

We have continued to bring a diverse mix of activations to the town to help drive footfall, including 48 events such as a range of markets to community and sporting events as well as the new Christmas lights, Christmas market, the Bear Trail and Light Up Kingston.



Waste management and cleanliness

We successfully lobbied the council to improve waste collection in the town and new bins have been introduced helping to create a clean and attractive town centre.

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 delivered over 26,855 sqm of deep cleans in the town centre, this is equivalent to four and a half football pitches. We provided 213,400 recycling sacks and stickers to members via First Mile, saving them over £575,000, and more than £80,000 in savings was made by businesses on the list price of additional waste collections.

Hanging basket/sustainable planting

We installed 120 hanging baskets and 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

£575k

through the First Mile recycling services

Before:



After:



Marketing the town



We've loved seeing all of the excited families coming in to ask for Bear Hunt maps and badges once they have finished the trail. Kingston First have organised the trail incredibly well and have been on hand to help out with any extra queries too. Callum Newton & Natalya Chapman - Bookshop Managers, Waterstones Kingston



Consumer brand and website

The average number of monthly visitors to the website for April 2023-June 2024 was almost 10,000, with noticeably higher numbers of visitors over the months of Light Up Kingston, Christmas in Kingston, and the Bear Trail. The consumer newsletter currently holds over 8,000 subscribers, an increase of over 1000 since last year and an open rate averaging over 52 per cent which is way above industry standards.

Over

8,000

subscribers to our consumer newsletter



Light Up Kingston

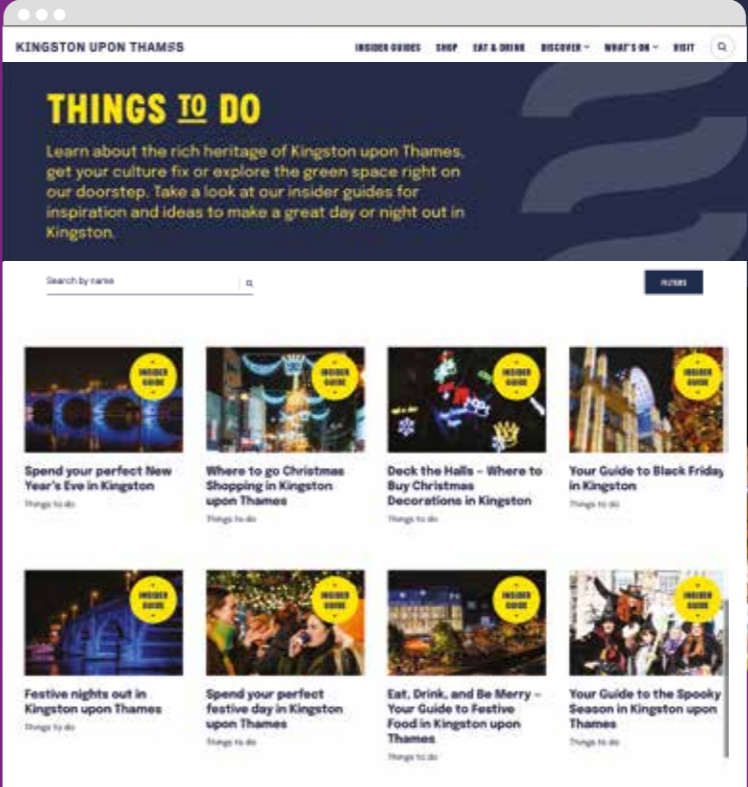
We delivered Kingston's first ever Light event, Light Up Kingston which animated the town with different interactive installations free for everyone to enjoy, aimed particularly at supporting the late afternoon and evening economy. We developed a marketing campaign to promote the event which generated a combined social media reach of almost 100,000 with 3,568 engagements. We attracted an additional 111 subscribers to our consumer newsletter, a significant increase over a short period of time. Overall, the event received a high level of engagement both in terms of attendees and through our channels. We look forward to building on its success in future years.





Christmas in Kingston campaign

We led, delivered and managed the Christmas market and experience in the town. We introduced new and bespoke lighting to help encourage people to spend time in Kingston. We developed a marketing campaign to promote Christmas in Kingston which generated a combined reach of 109,000 with over 1100 engagements. Our Christmas landing page received a total number of views of 20,427 throughout the campaign 1 November 2023-31 December 2023. Our consumer newsletter saw a growth in subscribers of 126, with an average open rate of over 53 per cent and a click through rate of 8.5% which is extremely high compared to industry standards showing a high level of engagement.



PR and Social Media

We raised the profile of Kingston Upon Thames by achieving 32 pieces of media coverage across the year: 12 Christmas related media coverage, including articles from Time Out, The Evening Standard and Reader's Digest featuring Kingston's Christmas market as one of the best within a 2 hour drive from London. We received positive praise and features from local press for Light Up Kingston and Kingston Bear Hunt Trail, including from BBC Radio Surrey, Nub News and Kingston Courier, Primary Times, Raring2Go, and Time and Leisure.

Our profile and engagement on social channels helps promote Kingston as a destination and its local businesses. We achieved over 33,000 followers on our social channels, an increase of 5,000 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 8,000 subscribers, an increase of 1,000 since last year.



Town-wide Bear Trail

We delivered an interactive Bear Trail, inspired by Michael Rosen's story 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' to encourage visitors and locals to discover different parts of the town. We developed a marketing campaign to promote the trail which generated a combined social media reach of nearly 390,000 with over 3,000 engagements. Our 'Bear Trail' website page was one of the highest-viewed pages on our website during this time, with over 8,000 views, while our digital trail map had 2,185 downloads. The QR codes on various advertisements received over 1,500 scans and we handed out approximately 4,000 physical Bear Trail guide maps, demonstrating how well-received the Bear Hunt Trail in Kingston was.

Over
33,000
followers on our
social channels



Supporting & Informing



Kingston has so much to offer, and it's a great perk for our employees to have access to the Keep It Kingston app, so that they can enjoy discounts in the shops and leisure sites that the town has to offer.

Richard Sharp, Head of Unilever UK.



Staff training programme and networking

We delivered 17 training sessions on a variety of topics, ranging from first aid to fire safety to conflict management. 109 businesses attended these sessions and 99 per cent said they would our training sessions to a colleague.

We also launched our new online learning hub, Seedle, which gives businesses access to over 200 live online courses. So far over 100 bookings have been made for courses, with over 35 businesses benefiting from the service.

We ran nine networking events to bring together the business community, with 159 attendees from 73 businesses and organisations.

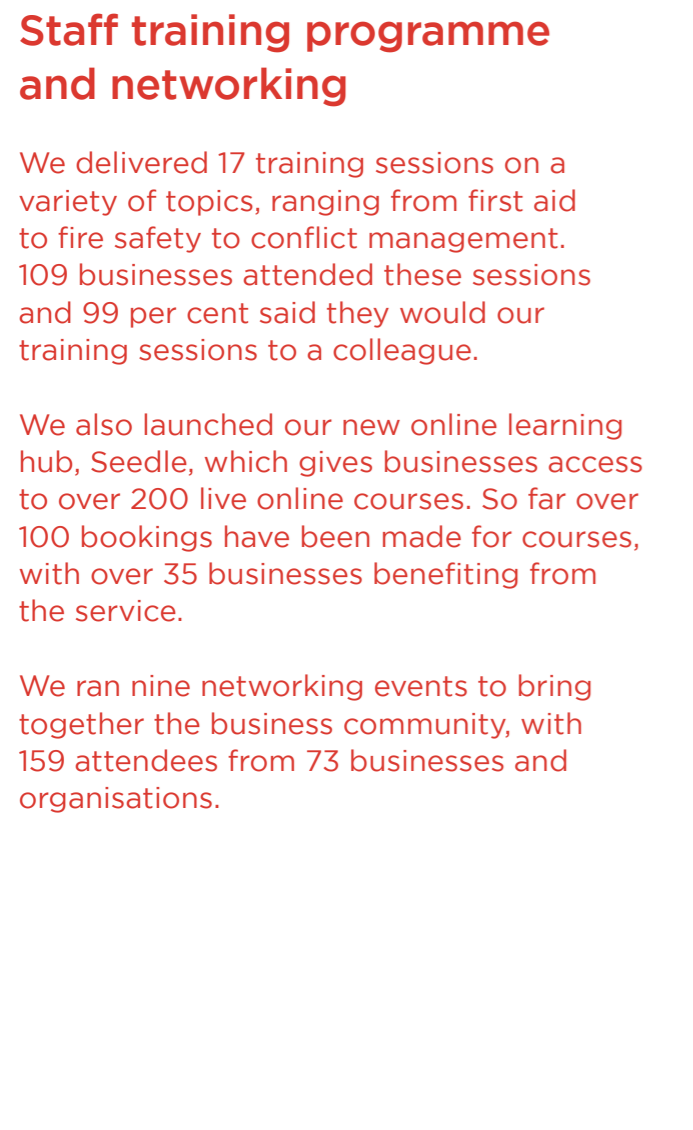


So a bit of feedback on SEEDL, I think it is excellent. I did a 1 hour session on problem solving and I've signed up for another one soon. I've strongly encouraged everyone here to access it and I think it is fantastic that KF is providing this for us.

Lesley Rowden,
Rose Theatre



Through Kingston First, we used Beyond Procurement to negotiate a significant saving on backdated gas payments as well as ongoing rates, saving over £70,000
Al Forno Restaurant



Cost saving support for businesses

We continued to respond to the increased costs of doing business with services to support members and help them save money, including free procurement advice which have saved businesses thousands of pounds, free recycling, training, marketing, car parking costs, and the Keep It Kingston app.



Keep it Kingston App (KiK)

Our Keep It Kingston app (KIK), continues 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.

Almost 7,000 town centre employees are signed up to Keep it Kingston, with average satisfaction of 8.5 out of 10, and 89 per cent awareness amongst businesses and employees in Kingston

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

Member communications

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

These communications generate on average 500 opens each month, with 96 per cent of members reporting that they found them useful.

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 versus previous year.

“

Full marks on your new look Insights report. So much more detail and insightful insights, very useful. Well done.

Terrence Le Poer Trench,
Pangea

”

Kingston First Town Centre Community Fund

We launched our first ever Town Centre Community Fund aimed at providing funding to local community groups and organisations who could deliver projects and/or services that:

- ▶ have a positive impact on the town,
- ▶ support local businesses, and
- ▶ promote community engagement.

It also provided an opportunity to be more transparent about the causes we fund and support to ensure they aligned with our key priorities and focus. The funding pot was £15,000 and after a successful application and selection process we were delighted to fund the following:

- ▶ Training for new Street Pastors and the provision of additional volunteers in the town.
- ▶ Celebrating Kingston's heritage with the new Seven Saxon Kings Embroidery Project.
- ▶ Activating Kingston Riverside in July with a new festival with theatre performances, workshops, music, and visual art installations over 10 days.



Influencing & representing



I thoroughly enjoyed the networking event; it was a fantastic experience making some valuable connections. I must commend you on the Kingston First initiative and your dedication to supporting and empowering local businesses—truly impressive!

Adam Secker - Fight for Sight



Building regular links with the Met Police

We introduced monthly catch-ups with representatives of the police and members to help increase awareness of the police's work and address specific concerns. We facilitated introductions and visits to businesses from the town centre policing team.



Working group for Eden Street

We set up a working group of members, landlords, council officials and police officers which meets regularly to address concerns around anti-social behaviour and homelessness on and around Eden Street.

Outside of these meetings we are working with authorities and agencies to raise concerns around organised begging and antisocial behaviour within the town centre. We also collaborated with Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness (KCAH) during Christmas to encourage giving to a local charity to support homelessness.

We heard from more than

350 members

across 12 sectors within the town and are using this insight to develop our new business plan.



Vacant units

We continued to manage and update the only town centre database on vacant units, helping us and others to understand the diversity of the town centre offer. We commissioned research into the barriers facing small, independent businesses and will be using this insight to convene a working group with landlords, estate agents and stakeholders to facilitate a more diverse town centre offer including more start-ups and meanwhile use.



Research and feedback on the town and Kingston First

We've carried out extensive research with our members through online surveys, workshops, face to face meetings and networking events. We heard from more than 350 members, over 60 per cent of our membership, across 12 sectors within the town about what our priorities should be for our next business term and have used this insight to develop our new business plan.



The next five years

Following the successful renewal ballot, we have a mandate to continue delivering for Kingston for another 5 years. Our new business plan has been shaped by members' views and feedback that we are looking forward to delivering from January 2025. The business plan focuses on four key priority areas that we know are important for you and the town centre.

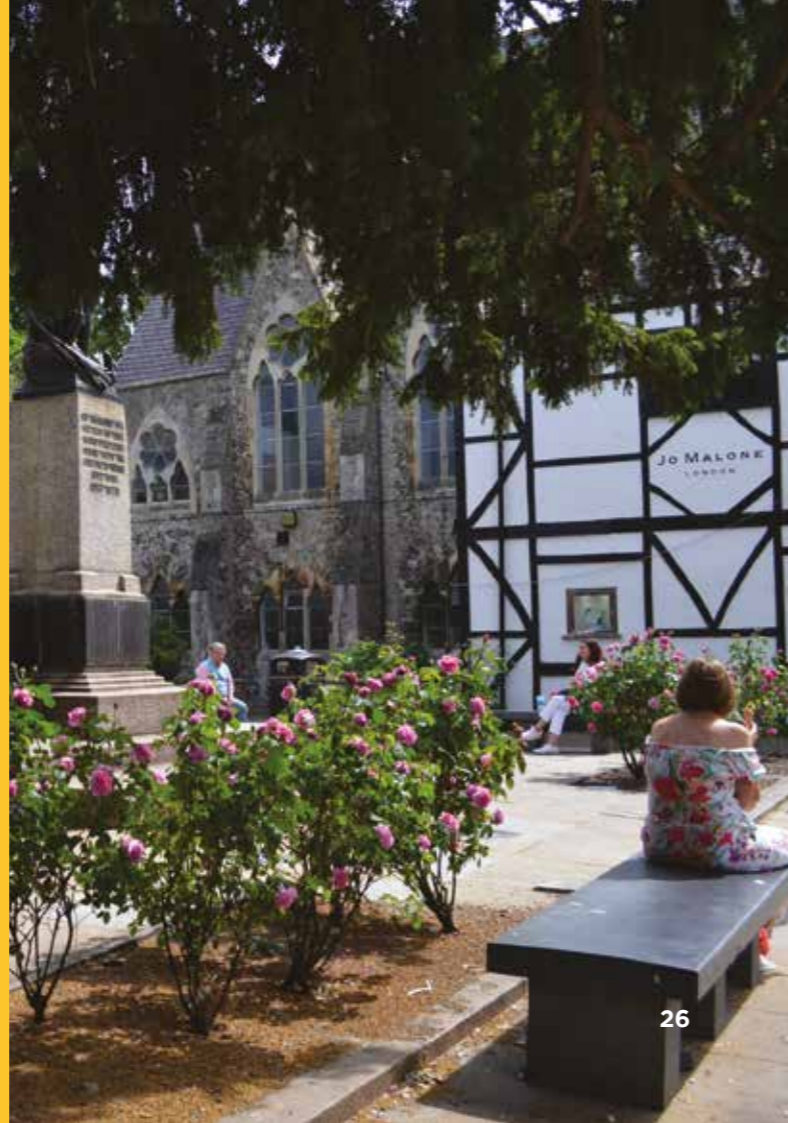


Delivering a better connected Kingston town centre

Working with partners and members we will invest in a pedestrian friendly town centre so it is easier for people to find their way around with better wayfinding and connections within the town centre. We will lobby and campaign for better transport links to and from Kingston and will work with South Western Railway to transform the train station into a welcoming entry point into the town.

Investing in a safe and welcoming town centre

Kingston First will deliver projects and initiatives that create a town centre where businesses, residents and visitors feel safe and are proud of Kingston. Cleanliness and welcoming appeal will be rated positively by everyone. Kingston's riverside will become a destination in its own right with new activities and experiences and better connection to the town centre.



Promoting and celebrating Kingston as a unique destination

We will provide something new and interesting to do and experience every year in Kingston which helps support footfall and dwell time in the town centre. Through our initiatives, marketing and promotion, Kingston will be known nationally as a destination for its retail and leisure offer as well as for its history, arts and culture experiences.



Supporting your success by saving you time and money

Kingston First will continue to support and help businesses and organisations so they can thrive in the town centre. Our support and profile will help attract new businesses and investment into the town. We will focus on making sure all employees in the town centre are signed up for and enjoy the benefits of our loyalty app Keep it Kingston (KiK).



Christmas 2025

We are also really excited about delivering a new vision for Christmas in Kingston, building on the success of the recent bespoke lighting we introduced across the town. We are looking forward to bringing new activations and experiences as well as making sure the Christmas magic touches all corners of Kingston to create special memories for locals and those new to Kingston. We look forward to sharing our ideas with you as they develop.



Ancient Market Place from 2025

We recognise and value the cultural, historic and economic significance of the Ancient Market Place and the important role it plays for the community and the success of Kingston town centre. We look forward to working with the new operator for the Ancient Market Place to make sure Christmas and other activities in Kingston provide a cohesive and enjoyable experience for everyone.

Financial Statement

INCOME

Levy	£920,457	Notes 1
Additional public and private sector contributions	£88,942	Notes 2
Markets income	£359,594	Notes 3
TOTAL INCOME	£1,368,993	

EXPENDITURE

Attractive streets & spaces	£327,181	
Marketing the town	£260,895	
Supporting & informing	£260,039	
Influencing & representing	£108,742	
Overheads	£179,951	Notes 4
Markets costs	£312,121	Notes 5
BID5 Renewal	£37,011	
Public Realm Transformation	£153,196	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£1,639,136	

Net surplus/(deficit) for the year 2023-24 (after tax)	(£270,143)	Notes 6
Net surplus brought forward from 2022-23	£819,098	
Net surplus carried forward into 2024-25	£548,955	Notes 7

Notes

The financial statement covers the period of 12 months from April 2023 to March 2024 inclusive. Full audited accounts will be available at the Company's Annual Meeting to be held in November and on the Kingston First website.

1. 2023 Levy collection rate of 95% with additional 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 13.0% 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. Net Deficit from Expenditure on projects and services was in line with plans.

7. Surplus is carried forward for the projects and services detailed in the business plan, 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.

