

BTM annual report

It has been another extremely busy year for Town Centre Management as we continue to deal with the impact of the pandemic and undertake activities to support the vitality and viability of the town centre.

The partnership:

- Due to the restrictions and ongoing uncertainties, the partnership has met virtually on an ad hoc basis.
- Through the virtual briefings/ consultations the partnership has played a key role in the development of the Future High Street Fund projects, Barnstaple branding, use of the Welcome Back Fund and overall Barnstaple vision.
- As well as the ad hoc meetings, regular contact with the partnership has been maintained through regular email newsletters and one to one business visits. Whilst the official membership of the partnership has remained unchanged the relationships made with a wider group of businesses has grown significantly this year.
- The partnership does require a review as some members have left and there are many new businesses in the town centre. The partnership is an opportunity for town centre businesses to meet with the various authorities / agencies to discuss current issues, have their voice heard, receive updates, make plans and work collaboratively together as we continue to recover from the pandemic. There is also a need to ensure that the partnership is delivering actions that are important to businesses. This review will take place in the first quarter of the next financial year.

Business support:

- Much of the work this year has been around business support; getting the messages out in a timely manner to businesses regarding both the Covid restrictions and the various grants that were available to them.
- The closed Facebook group for members has been a useful tool to get these messages out and for businesses to talk to and support each other.
- The support put in place using the Re-opening High Streets Fund / Welcome Back Fund with measures such as signage, Place Makers and events were all well received by the partnership.

Anti-social behaviour / Street scene:

- One of the key issues for the partnership over the year has been the perceived rise in anti-social behaviour, homelessness and begging in the town centre. The partnership has had many debates on the subject and whilst understanding the complex nature of these issues traders do have concerns that members of the public often feel unsafe. The partnership has worked closely with the Police to ensure that traders know how to report issues and what work is being done to address them. This work is ongoing with a Street Marshal scheme currently in place.

- The street scene also continues to be area of concern for many traders and again discussions and projects are ongoing with partners such as Barnstaple Town Council and Barnstaple in Bloom as well as internal NDC services.

Events:

- Events are a big part of the work carried out as they are proven to increase footfall, dwell time and hopefully spend. Although last year was difficult with the restrictions in place BTCM did put on a packed Christmas programme throughout December designed to increase footfall throughout the month rather than on one day.

It has been a difficult couple of years for the town centre and the long-term impact of the pandemic is starting to become clearer. However, it is also an exciting time for Barnstaple with a huge amount of investment coming into the town centre. The partnership will continue to give local businesses a platform to debate issues that are important to them, share ideas and input into strategic projects to ensure the town remains vibrant, economically prosperous and an exciting and enjoyable place in which to live work or visit.