

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT TAUNTON BID!

To: The Business Owner / Manager

Please pass onto your Head Office if the Taunton BID ballot voting decision will be made at Head Office level.



As the Taunton Business Improvement District (BID) proposal goes to ballot, the Taunton business community needs to be fully informed about BID and should strive for the highest possible voter turnout, so that the result is truly representative of the majority of businesses. To help achieve this it is only fair that both YES and NO voting opinions are made, so that each voting business can make a fully informed voting decision based on all the available information. Given Taunton has tried BID before and it was voted out in 2012, and we voted NO again to it in 2014, we have to be absolutely sure BID is the best scheme for our town and its' businesses.

You've listened to and received the YES campaign Business Plan and whether you have made up your voting mind or not, we suggest you owe it to your business to spend just a few minutes reading through this NO campaign information booklet. The Taunton BID Business Plan that has been presented has many problems and risks associated with it, so all may not be as it seems from the glossy brochure you've received, and we'd like to show you what we mean by this.

We hope this information helps your decision. Good luck and whether you're a YES or NO voter, just make sure you cast your vote so that the BID ballot result, whichever way it may go, is as representative as possible of Taunton BID businesses!



Introduction

The first thing we'd like to say is that we agree that a BID sounds like a great idea; all businesses put money into a pot and work together to improve their trading environment, but evidence (and Taunton's own prior experience) shows that the reality can be very different. So firstly, it's important to say that voting NO doesn't mean one is against the idea of businesses trying to help their own trading environment, that's commendable, the question is whether the BID tax is the right legislative vehicle to force on all businesses, whether they see value in it or not.

This information booklet provides only a fraction of the information we've published following diligent research and scrutiny of the Taunton BID development process and outputs since July 2019.

What you'll find and many people have complimented us on, is that we present very factual and well-reasoned alternative perspectives in regard to the objections, negative aspects and risks associated with Taunton BID.

In this information booklet we're only presenting you with a short summary of what we've published to date, so to find much more information in addition to more evidence backing up what we say in this booklet, then please do visit our website.

www.NoTauntonBID.co.uk



"Thanks for sharing the not so good things about BID, we really didn't realise this, it's definitely opened our eyes to the fact that it's not all it's made out to be."

You only have to do a bit of research to find evidence of the many problems many BID companies tend to exhibit;

undemocratic practices
over-promising & underdelivering
broken promises
poor return on investment
lack of transparency
poor governance
inadequate accountability

Even Taunton's last BID 2007-2012 showed many of the above traits, as was clearly documented by Taunton Deane Borough Council when the BID was voted out. We've been there and tried BID before, it didn't work for Taunton, and consequently the last two BID ballots in 2012 and 2014 were NO's!



Here are some of our objections to the Taunton BID Business Plan, which we introduce in this booklet.

It's an unnecessary cost when High Street running costs are high enough.



The Taunton BID map is biased and unfair.

Taunton already has one of the healthiest High Streets in the UK, and a bright future ahead of it without a BID tax!

All the evidence points to a District Council doing what it can to help BID in, and the BID company lining itself up to absolve responsibility for Taunton town centre from the Council.

If Taunton is to do BID again then lessons need to have been learnt from our prior failed BID experience 2007-12. However we've seen no willingness or evidence of this.

The Business Plan is a nice glossy marketing brochure but lacks substance, meaning it doesn't appear to be detailed enough or properly costed to invest £1.4mn in.

'Safer and Secure' is a crime scandal in itself!

Taunton BID is an events BID, is this what you expected and how will this benefit your business?

Operating costs are a concern.

Also read more at www.NoTauntonBID.co.uk

It's an unnecessary cost when High Street running costs are high enough.

We've spoken to both independents and nationals who just don't want the extra overhead at a time when running costs are high enough, especially when the BID Business Plan doesn't demonstrate any form of Return on Investment (ROI).

BID is also an emotive subject because if voted in it is a mandatory levy. Whilst some voters might see value and can easily afford it, there are many that just don't see the value and don't want to be forced to part with their hard-earned cash, be they big or small businesses. Perhaps the Taunton BID proposers and their YES supporters should actually give some moral consideration to those businesses that just don't need an extra business rate forced on them.

"As a business owner I make my own decisions on what to spend money on - that's why you have your own business - and to be told you have to pay into something against your will is a disgrace."



BID is a cost not needed

"As a new business we are concerned about this new levy. The taxes and charges on business make it really difficult to survive on the UK high street"



**Undemocratic
BID map
manipulation
at its finest!**

The Taunton BID map is biased and unfair.

If Taunton is going to try and embrace BID, it should do it as a whole town centre business community or not at all. Unfortunately the Taunton BID map seems poorly conceived and unfair to businesses both inside and outside the proposed BID area. A more equitable BID map would be best for Taunton.

- Businesses not in the BID area will be starved of the "investment" they are promising BID businesses.
- The "chosen" businesses in the BID area are unfairly taking on a disproportionate amount of financial responsibility for the greater good of Taunton.
- Potential NO voters have been deliberately excluded whilst YES voters included, yet it's just tough luck for anyone sat in between. Undemocratic!
- Is it fair Morrisons will not have to pay the levy if voted in just because they'll probably vote NO, yet neighbouring small independents and Sainsbury's will have to pay up?
- The BID area is too convoluted, we have businesses next to and opposite each other in and out of BID, some of which could be paying the extra business rate and neighbour not, all within what is clearly the town centre.
- As many public authority properties as possible (9% of all properties by rateable value) have been included in order to get their votes, which BID have subsequently been lobbying for.

All the above points to a heavily manipulated map in order to meet the limited ballot aims of a BID, of any shape and size, at any cost, even if it's not in the best interests of the whole Taunton business community.

"That map is crazy, can see what you've been saying about it being manipulated. So there are businesses literally across the street or next door to each other, but one will have to pay and one won't. Should be the whole of Taunton or not at all - one for all, and all for one and all that."

Taunton already has one of the healthiest High Streets in the UK, and a bright future ahead of it without a BID tax!

We find it disrespectful of the BID proposers to say that without a BID; *"livelihoods will be adversely affected if Taunton is allowed to slowly fail"*, *"there is no alternative or plan B"*, *"we will not be able to attract external investment"* and *"how else can our town grow and prosper?"* The BID proposers don't seem to appreciate or respect what Taunton has going for it, and the efforts already being made by the new LibDem District Council administration.

"Develop vibrant and economically secure Town Centres"

One of the six main themes in the Liberal Democrat Manifesto for the Somerset West & Taunton Council Elections 2019.

BID is not proven to be the "golden bullet" solution to High Street woes, in fact most of the worst High Streets in the UK have a BID, and Taunton is already fairing better than those! Let's be grateful for what we've achieved so far, embrace the current efforts of SWT Council whilst recognising their plans and initiatives already coming to regenerate and revitalise the town centre, in particular as the Council implements Taunton's Garden Town status. And if businesses want to collaborate more there are other ways to do this without the need to tax businesses for the sake of it.

Vote NO if you don't want a BID swung in by public authority votes, or to risk losing services currently provided by SWT!



All the evidence points to a District Council doing what it can to help BID in, and the BID company lining itself up to absolve responsibility for Taunton town centre from the Council.

Despite the good work our new District Council is doing, there are already worrying signs that a BID could start absolving them of their Taunton town centre responsibilities.

Unfortunately, many voters perhaps do not appreciate the risk of this BID being "pushed in" by the Local Authorities, and the BID taking on or paying for discretionary services currently provided by SWT Council. Here's just two pieces of evidence:

The massive voting influence of public authority votes in the Taunton BID ballot.

Proof is in BID's own Business Plan on page 9, where Municipal sector Rateable Value (RV) occupancy is stated as **9%**. So, if the Public Authorities all vote YES (and they normally do), then at 100% ballot turnout their RV vote alone is already 9% of the total RV vote. But at a more realistic average BID ballot turnout, that number quickly approaches nearly **20% of the total RV vote!** Is this what Taunton BID have openly told you? Clearly not, in fact they've been spreading mistruths to dumb down council voting influence, whilst actively lobbying for public authority YES votes!

Is this fair when we've been told BID is for the businesses, decided on by the businesses?

Taunton BID's Business Plan is falsely giving you the impression that the town centre won't lose SWT Council funding and services.

See Page 5, para 3, *"The BID cannot replace those services that are **statutorily** provided by public agencies"* The 'killer' word there is of **statutorily**, and with no reassurances of protecting **discretionary** services i.e. extra cleaning, marketing and events including Christmas lights event & ice rink etc. Funnily enough, the sorts of things Taunton BID wants to do, and last time 2007-12 the BID took over.

BID's normally try to protect all such council services by putting in what are called Baseline Agreements with all Public Authorities, but despite passing reference to these, to date a comprehensive set of Baseline Agreements have not been made public by Taunton BID, so we wonder if they even exist. Ask the BID proposers to view a copy of all their Baselines, including Christmas Festivities. But even with Baselines in Place, the British BID's survey 2019 reported that only 27% of BID's felt Council Baseline Agreements were being adhered to, so they aren't worth the paper they are written on anyway!



No lessons learnt

If Taunton is to do BID again then lessons need to have been learnt from our prior failed BID experience 2007-12. However we've seen no willingness or evidence of this.

Taunton BID Q&A	
No Taunton BID question:	<p>Will you be conducting a thorough review of the operation problems that contributed to the downfall of the 2007-12 Taunton BID? It's important that from experience risks are identified and mitigated against for the future should another BID be voted in. Please see our publication on this matter on our website "There's not much evidence Taunton BID have learnt lessons from the past." Note our recommendations which may help you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish whether Sainsbury's were ever asked to conduct a review of the Taunton BID programme, and if so try to secure a copy and publish it. • Conduct independent research into the lessons that can be learnt about the operation of TTCC 2007-2012, which attributed to it losing the confidence of the businesses. • Present and work any lessons learnt into the BID Business Plan, to show transparency and so that these risks can be mitigated for in the future.
Taunton BID answer:	You must know more than me.
No Taunton BID comment:	<p>Shocked there's no consideration for what happened before with Taunton's failed BID 2007-12, clearly no willingness to even pull out public records documenting what it's problems were, and research it further to understand the problems with how it operated; all in an effort to mitigate the risks of a new BID if voted in again. It's like they've written it out of history, don't even want to be bothered to learn from that experience, on Twitter Taunton BID even denied there was a BID in place before! It really is important to learn lessons from the past in order to hope it won't happen again if voted in, these were very constructive recommendations that have arrogantly been dismissed.</p>

Some published feedback we found:

"address it's reputational issues"

"no longer had confidence in"

"ensure it is fit for purpose"

"needs to re-win the confidence of traders through greater transparency and visibility"

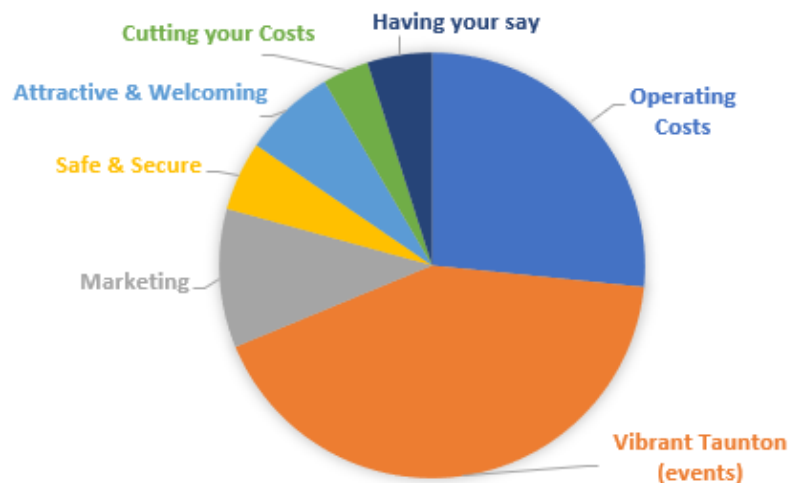
"the town centre was poorly promoted and marketed"

"it was promised that the baseline agreements would be published online for businesses to have access to – they are not"

Not a detailed & properly costed Business Plan.

The Business Plan is a nice glossy marketing brochure but lacks substance, meaning it doesn't appear to be detailed enough or properly costed to invest £1.4mn in.

The Business Plan is Taunton BID's detailed proposal to you, telling you exactly what they will deliver and how, ultimately this is what you will be voting on. To vote for it you need to be absolutely confident it's a properly costed business plan, with clear projects, deliverables, measures for success and a demonstrable Return on Investment, instead of what is a "nice vision or nice thing to do". We are concerned that the Business Plan doesn't include all this and thus suggest it's not a sound business investment, particularly when you take into consideration all the other negative aspects and risks with Taunton BID we've published.



Taunton BID 5 year budget allocations

We'd had concerns and shown throughout the BID development process the reputational problems exhibited by the proposers, and this also becomes evident through the business plan as well. We can demonstrate examples of their poor research, lack of transparency, poor consultation, derogatory statements and even the telling of mistruths; all of which doesn't sit well with people if we are to trust this private company going forwards.

Definition of *mistruth*

: a false or misleading statement



Here's just a flavour of some Business Plan response articles on our website www.NoTauntonBID.co.uk where you can read detailed analysis of each budget section and a lot more!"

'Safer and Secure' is a crime scandal in itself!

It appears BID might have "missed a trick" by not conducting a proper research and consultation process around crime, all because they decided very early on it isn't important and had a pre-determined agenda going into the Consultation process. This has led to a business plan containing nothing more than some token effort statements on crime, as opposed to any properly costed, targeted and tangible actions to help solve Taunton's big crime problems. There seems little point dressing the streets, running events and marketing the town in an attempt to increase footfall, if Taunton's crime and anti-social behaviour problems haven't been tackled.



Taunton BID is an events BID, is this what you expected and how will this benefit your business?

'Vibrant Taunton' (events & activities) with its' massive budget representing c60% of all the front-line project spending, effectively makes Taunton BID an events BID. After operating & administration costs, £120,000 a year is certainly one big events budget, have they put "too many eggs in one basket?"

"the group are concerned that significant costs will be expended on the administration of BID, at the consequence of funding additional front-line services."

A published comment by a TDBC Councillor, March 2019



Operating costs are a concern.

Operating costs are an important consideration when looking at a BID business plan. Before even £1 is spent on front-line project ideas like marketing, events or crime, there is a private limited BID company to be set up, run and be managed that will be responsible for delivering the Business Plan for BID members. On our website we review the BID operating costs and the money SWT Council will make out of BID.



Rather than force an additional business rate on Taunton's hard working businesses because BID seem's like a "nice idea", let's keep £1,425,000 in their pockets!



Here's some feedback we've received:

"The council are going to love this, we can now really see how they will benefit from us picking up the tab for the town."

"The wording is all 'look to install...' 'explore ways...' 'encourage'. None of this promises anything."

"Most of what they suggest should already be council responsibility."

"I'm still annoyed Morrisons won't have to pay, where's the justice in that for us small businesses struggling to keep our heads above water?"

"He (a Steering Group member) came in, I put questions to him but he couldn't answer anything. They clearly don't have a clue. He said the vote has to go through first then all business can decide what to spend money on that's why no costings have been done prior to the vote."

"It feels like they've come up with some nice ideas, but clearly it lacks detail on properly costed initiatives."

"Please emphasise that I feel like I have been bullied and called selfish for voicing my opinion, so in fact BID has split businesses not brought them together."

"They say they are looking to get businesses to extend their opening hours!!! Just like that! Extra hours = extra costs / wages / time."

"The crime bit is a joke. Considering the problems Taunton has there's nothing there."



"That map is crazy, can see what you've been saying about it being manipulated. So there are businesses literally across the street or next door to each other, but one will have to pay and one won't. Should be the whole of Taunton or not at all - one for all, and all for one and all that."

"Seems like I'm going to be paying to make sure the council do the job they should be doing."



No Taunton BID provides information on alternative perspectives to and is supporting businesses opposed to the 2020 Taunton BID proposal. This information booklet is not affiliated in any way to Taunton BID, and it has been produced as a non-commercial information booklet using publicly available information. Opinions have been expressed, and we have attempted to keep everything as factual as possible.