

## **Summary of Responses to Otle BID Survey**

### **1. PURPOSE**

Otle Business Improvement District has started to put together a Business Plan for a third five year term which will run from April 2024 - March 2029.

Levy paying businesses will receive this new Business Plan in summer 2023 and a ballot will be held in October 2023.

Accordingly, in December 2022 we sent out a survey with the aim of :

- getting a feel from levy payers as to which of the projects we have undertaken during the last 4 years have benefitted businesses
- which have done less so, and
- what levy payers would like more and less of and what the priorities for businesses are looking forward.

The Survey went out 3 times to all levy payers on our mailing list (447 email addresses), as well as going out multiple times via our social media platforms.

We received 38 replies, an 8.5% response rate.

**Survey Results** - The results of the survey are available to view in full **BELOW**.

Additionally, what follows is an overview of how we have interpreted and intend to act on these results.

### **2. SURVEY OVERVIEW**

Although the best guide we've got, the low return rate means we cannot rely on this survey exclusively to direct the future plans and projects of the BID. The popularity of the BID has dropped slightly from the 71% Yes vote in the 2018 ballot to 61% in this survey

The 5 most popular ways we spend the BID levy we collect are:-

- Lobbying Otle Town Council and Leeds City Council so they know the issues affecting businesses
- Co-funding the Visit Otle marketing strategy
- Co-funding the town caretaker
- Information sharing

- Floral displays

The 5 least popular ways we spend the BID levy we collect (and our immediate actions on them) are:-

- Breeze events in the summer. (We are currently looking at how this is run to see if we can reduce the cost whilst still acknowledging that some businesses do very well from those events)
- Otley Business Awards. (This is now a bi-annual event so the cost per business is much reduced)
- Marketing and Accessibility training. (There are no plans to offer any further funded training at present, however the offer of free accessibility audits for businesses wanting to make sure they are disability aware still stands)
- Business of the Week. (This is a relatively new project and has massively helped the reach of our Visit Otley & Buy in Otley marketing which was a well-liked benefit, so we will continue with this but try to encourage businesses to come forward to be business of the week. At present we try to cover new businesses and any we feel are offering something a bit 'out of the ordinary' by showcasing these businesses on social media as we try to catch the attention of the 'Instagram generation')
- Co-funding Christmas lights in areas not covered by Otley Town Council lights (any further work in this area will be focussed on areas that businesses highlight to us as being deficient such as Kirkgate and Gay Lane)

The remaining projects had average responses showing that some businesses benefit from some projects more than others.

Going forward, our projects are likely to fall into 2 categories; lobbying/information sharing and town marketing/ things which make the town attractive.

### **3. INDIVIDUAL BUSINESSES COMMENTS RECEIVED AND BID DIRECTORS' RESPONSE**

Bearing in mind the old saying 'there are lies, damned lies and statistics' we looked particularly closely at comments that had been made by individual businesses. These are like gold dust as, over the years, appeals for suggestions as to what businesses feel are important or issues they want addressing rarely receive a response. These fell into 9 categories and below is a selection of the comments, expressed in italics as received, on each topic and a response/ explanation from our Directors:-

## a. Marketing

### Comments Received:

***“The town in general has benefitted and so our business has by default. Marketing the town is key - drawing people in and informing them about what is available.”***

***“From a personal stand point. My business requires the influx of non-residents coming into town to grow trade. Any influence the BID can offer in raising the attraction of the town in order to boost holiday/recreational visitors would be appreciated.”***

***“Promote all the class shops and people who don't come will.”***

***“Funding a website acting as a directory for local businesses.”***

***“Keep promoting shop local.”***

***“Collective promotion of Otley businesses.”***

***“I ask my clients where they have found me and it is via my own website marketing not anything with BID or other town websites.”***

### BID Directors' Response:

The success of marketing strategies are notoriously difficult to quantify, but because the Otley marketing strategy is co-funded by Otley Town Council, we must be accountable. To do this we have co-funded the Benchmarking Survey for the past 3 years which shows how Otley is doing in comparison to other market towns of a similar size.

The first two Benchmarking Surveys are available on our website:

<https://otleybid.co.uk/benchmarking-survey/>.

Benchmarking Survey - The overall takeaway is that the footfall in the town is increasing, there is less turnover in business premises than the national average and it is not just residents who use the town, but also visitors from further afield. We want to continue those upwards trends by continuing to do what we do, including by supporting some of the newer festivals and events in the town, building on the Coach Friendly Status the town has that brings coach parties into town and championing the amazing range of businesses we have.

Business Directory - When the BID first started 10 years ago a town-wide business directory was set up. Given the set-up, up-keep, maintenance problems of the constantly changing business community, and the lack of visits the website received, this was mothballed and replaced with the Buy in Otley area of the Visit Otley website that aims to promote businesses to their potential clients. Here is the link FYI; <https://www.buyinotley.co.uk/>. Buy in Otley and Visit Otley are the 2 social media hashtags we use to grow our audience. The users of Buy in Otley has increased 73% year on year in the last quarter of 2022, due mainly to the Business of the Week Campaign, and the users of Visit Otley has increased 12.5% in the same time period.

## **b. The Range of Businesses the BID Represents**

### Comments Received:

***“I do think there is more 'benefits' to retail businesses, simply due to the nature of a lot of the help (we are a service business with global clients so location is less critical), but I think actually what's more beneficial to me is benefitting as an Otley resident because of the town initiatives, making it look nice and attracting nice retail businesses.”***

***“Otley BID area includes businesses other than shops and pubs, ie. service providers, manufactures.”***

***“Have some promotions for businesses other than pubs, cafes etc. Some of us feel that other areas of enterprise in the town get ignored and it's only food, drink, etc that get promoted.”***

### BID Directors' Response:

We do know that our levy paying businesses represent many sectors including service sector, manufacturing and large international businesses. Of our 7 directors, 2 are from retail, 2 from hospitality/events and 3 are from the service sector. We accept that we sometimes promote retail over service sector because as part of our social media strategy we believe that retail businesses are more likely to draw people into town and then they will stay to use the service sector.

We have also particularly focussed on the food, drink and night-time economy post-Covid as we felt they needed a particular boost and the Benchmarking Survey showed that the perceived poor offering in this sector meant people came to Otley for a day out, but were not likely to stay overnight.

We thought that initiatives such as training and free membership of the Chamber of Trade would benefit some of those service sector businesses, but these initiatives are often not very well attended. So perhaps it comes down to us trying to improve the town for the people that live, work and visit it.

## **c. Caretaker**

### Comments Received:

***“More street cleaning.”***

***“Caretaker. I have never seen the caretaker. What does he do please.”***

***“Arrange for the pavements to be washed rather than just swept- not that that has happened for a long time.”***

***“Keeping the streets clean, not just in the centre but on the immediate area off it as well.”***

BID Directors' Response:

The Caretaker is co-funded with Otley Town Council, and was originally hired to work 8 hours a week (Mon, Wed, Thurs and Sun) covering 2 routes in the town centre and focussing on sweeping pavements.

This is no longer a service which is carried out by Leeds City Council.

Otley used to have 3 x LCC funded Street Cleaners, but due to cut-backs, this is now down to 1 x part-time Caretaker.

Last year we agreed to increase the number of hours our Caretaker does to 12 per week in response to those LCC cut-backs. The work tends to be carried out early in the morning.

The exact routes and the administration of the Caretaker's role is carried out by Otley Town Council.

**d. Parking & Kirkgate Planters**

Comments Received:

***"White line free car park on Charles Street."***

***"Campaign for first hour free in all pay & display car parks."***

***"Remove planters on Kirkgate & re-introduce parking in Market Square (non-market days of course)."***

***"Lobby to get the planters removed from Kirkgate."***

***"Pedestrian and cycling access around Otley and to the centre. I believe more people would shop local if access was car free and easy, and pedestrian areas in the town centre were more accessible with wider pavements and easier road crossing. Pedestrianising Kirkgate would be a great step forward and really benefit all businesses in the town centre."***

***"Removal of the planters as traders were not consulted on the placement of these planters and also parking was reduced to 30 mins without any consultation. We need spaces for customers to collect or deliver items for repair and those heavy items bought in store. Bargain Booze also need quick and easy parking at their shop."***

***"Get rid of the Covid bollards on Kirkgate, we need more parking not less. When I have had call to shop in Ilkley, their free period of parking before needing to pay gives you the opportunity to get the few bits you need and keeps the spaces turning over, not taken up for hours."***

BID Directors' Response:

We have highlighted to the Town Council the 'leading' nature of questions in the StreetVision Survey to support a pre-determined agenda for changes to

Kirkgate. We have pointed out how the survey does not explicitly ask if respondents would be in support of having car parking spaces removed.

Having taken opinion about parking and planters on Kirkgate, especially from the businesses most affected, Otley BID has lobbied Otley Town Council and Leeds City Council very, very hard and often on behalf of the businesses. Our statement can be viewed on our website here: <https://otleybid.co.uk/plea-to-remove-planters-from-kirkgate/>.

Parking is always a contentious issue as we are in a historic market town that wasn't designed for the size and volume of traffic it currently has to deal with and everyone has a different perception of what they want parking to be.

In the StreetVision Survey results (available to view in full here [StreetVision 2030 | Otley Town Council](#)) 669 people responded to that questionnaire and 64% of those were in favour of widening of the footpath on Kirkgate. However, Otley BID has argued forcefully that the business owner's opinions should have more weighting than those 64%, because they would be directly and financially impacted.

We will continue to state the case for the businesses that will be affected, whilst acknowledging that some businesses and the town as a whole may benefit in the long term from more pedestrianisation and we need to work with Otley Town Council not just on this issue, but on many of our projects.

It's worth remembering that OTC is elected by residents, so it is those who it has to work for, whilst Otley BID can only ever state the case of the businesses and also highlight how residents would be affected if the business community struggles.

Good suggestion regarding Charles Street car park, we've contacted LCC to ask about white lining it.

#### e. **Business of the Week Campaign - Promotion of Individual Businesses**

Comments Received:

***“The Otley Business of the Week, it's difficult to know how this is decided. Do businesses put their own names forward? It's all pretty woolly.”***

BID Directors' Response:

This is a relatively new project and has massively helped the reach of our Visit Otley & Buy in Otley marketing which rated highly in the survey. So we will continue with this but try to encourage businesses to come forward to feature in the Business of the Week Campaign.

At present we try to cover new businesses and any we feel are offering something a bit out of the ordinary. By showcasing these businesses on social media we hope to catch the attention of the 'Instagram generation'.

If you would like your business to feature, please email:

[james@endurecommunications.co.uk](mailto:james@endurecommunications.co.uk)

The users of Buy in Otley has increased 73% year on year in the last quarter of 2022, and the users of Visit Otley has increased 12.5% in the same time period.

#### f. How the Town Looks

##### Comments Received:

***“Look at more direct issues to increase trade in the town rather than spending money on cosmetic items. Actively seek larger business’s to trade in the town. Physical projects in the PRIDE & PROFESSIONAL areas to improve the local environment are where the biggest impact is likely to be made for business. We need to ensure the Town Centre is an attractive place for visitors and shoppers in order to allow the town to thrive.”***

***“Things that will improve the aesthetic appearance of empty/ neglected shop fronts eg virtual shop fronts; removing fly posting; encouraging more of the chains & charity shops to participate in Otley business community activities such as things the Christmas trees. The old Jack Fulton’s is an eyesore in the centre of town (inside & outside), could the BID lobby the council/ landlord/ property owners of empty buildings to ask for basic maintenance. Is the interior of Jack Fultons a health & safety matter as it’s an abandoned food store that not been cleared out? I feel strongly that these empty and/or neglected buildings are a blight on the town centre and our efforts to promote Otley. I’ve made some suggestions but not sure if the BID can have impact? It would be useful for the BID to provide feedback to all members on this.”***

***“It’s all well and good having the town looking nice but if the shops aren’t making profits they will close and you will have a lovely floral space with no one coming to shop in the town.”***

##### BID Directors’ Response:

Otley BID removes fly posters, expired planning and street closure notices and other street detritus from the town centre several times a year.

Otley BID has commissioned a window artist to decorate several empty shop windows with colourfully painted murals. Landlords of some empty shops decline to co-operate.

With regards to the disused Fultons store, we have been trying to contact the owners for many months and had been studiously ignored. However we have recently made contact within Poundland (now owners of Fultons) and received the advice that they are currently negotiating an early termination of the lease with the landlords, but that they will arrange for the internal windows to be masked off and waste removed from site as a matter of urgency. Before

Fultons closed we also contacted a chain with a similar business model to alert them to the opportunity.

Otley BID co-operates with Otley Town Council to decorate and animate the town with flag displays for Yorkshire Day, and regional and state occasions.

More generally, how the town looks and the number of visitors it attracts is a 'chicken and egg' situation. We feel that the money we spend on floral displays, for example, amounts to 6.5% of our annual budget (so 6.5% of your levy bill). So it seems like a small price to pay to hopefully bring a few more visitors into town and make life nicer for residents.

#### **g. Value for Money**

##### Comments Received:

***"I reckon we get zero extra sales from BID, if it goes another 5 years we will have had to have £12000 plus of sales to cover the cost. If you could reduce our rates bill by more than the cost of BID we'd be interested I've probably said enough, I don't want to undermine the work you guys have done but it just isn't relevant to us and brings no return. the money to pay for it comes directly out of our pockets and the amounts get big over periods of 5 years. Thanks."***

***"I feel there is a lot of grasping at straws and looking for stuff to spend on when you could widen the footprint of things that we do to improve Otley for everyone. Again, bring the lights at Christmas to everyone who is paying. It has been a hard 3 years for everyone I am sure and paying this levy isn't value for my business but the money spent would be very useful in the current climate."***

***"Look at what other BID's do. Too much of a talking shop."***

##### BID Directors' Response:

We want to clarify that the BID is **not** a profit making business. It's income comes from a 1% levy charged to each business within the Business Improvement District.

For example: if your rateable value is £10,000 you will pay just £100 per year or £1.92 per week. That £1.92 per week will be contributing to a yearly BID income of over £75,000. If your net profit margins were 25%, then you would have to have income of £400 to cover a £100 bill.

The Directors are all unpaid volunteers.

We are in contact with a group of other BID's and we do share best practice. For example, Otley BID's Covid response in terms of business to business information sharing, grant availability information and co-ordination with Leeds City Council's Rates Department to get Otley businesses paid out early and fully during the 2020/21 crisis, and the 'Otley Says' Re-opening Precautions



Campaign of free issue sanitiser, social distancing tape, and signage was the envy of many similar towns.

*See below for more information on Christmas lights.*

## **h. Christmas**

Comments Received:

***“Allow Xmas lights to be done by local people who care like Burley and Wharfedale.”***

***“Sort some Christmas lights on Kirkgate.”***

***“Again all this is away from where my business is... I am also shocked to see that the £40 Christmas trees are subsidised as they don't cost that much. I would like you to do something about the flooding on Gay lane and look at hanging baskets for our lamp posts and Christmas decorations this end as well.”***

***“They take and don't give back even a free Christmas tree that the council did!”***

BID Directors' Response:

Christmas Trees Above Businesses

The Christmas trees on businesses project was started by Otley Chamber of Trade around 2010 to fill in when Leeds City Council funding to Otley Town Council was reduced. Businesses were asked to pay £40 towards each tree, about half the cost, with the rest of the cost met by Otley Chamber of Trade through a small grant from Otley Town Council and Chamber volunteer fundraising, such as a Dinner Dance.

After a couple of years the social event no longer provided enough funding and the Leeds City Council grant stopped.

As the project grew from the original 100 or so trees to 200 trees, the administration of the project became onerous and the BID were asked to step in.

For a couple of years the BID offered each business that had a Christmas tree bracket a tree for free, this made the administration easy but came at a large cost, and not every levy payer has a Christmas tree bracket or indeed a shop front to put it on. Having said 'yes' to a free issue tree not every business then switched the lights on.

The breakdown of costs this year was:

- a tree supplied wholesale = £20.40
- the local company to supply PAT tested lights, dress the tree, install the tree, check the bracket, deal with any issues that arose if lights stopped working, remove the tree and dispose of it = £56.40

- a small amount of admin time = £6
- Total = £82.80 inc VAT per tree.

The project has been put out to tender at several points, but we do find that the companies we work with do a good job that is often challenging and time critical.

The Council **never** funded the Christmas Trees Above the Businesses Scheme.

### Christmas Lights

We can look at installing Christmas lights on Gay Lane lamp posts and more on Kirkgate. We will need to liaise with Leeds Lights, LCCs retained contractor, and it involves a change to the internal electrics of the lamppost (which is not always possible) which we can cover the cost of. It may also be that Gay Lane is considered 'too residential' for decorative lighting. We will look into this for next year.

Whilst Otley Town Council pays for the lamp post Christmas decorations, we will pay for the upgrade of any lampposts to make it possible to put a decoration on them and continue to subsidise the trees on businesses.

A couple of years ago we looked at trying to get a different supplier to install a more dramatic display, but the cost was beyond the combined budget that the BID and Otley Town Council could or wanted to pay. There were also issues about having to arrange to pay for the electricity supply separately if it wasn't done by Leeds Lights (part of LCC) who have an arrangement with the SSE electric company.

If a group of local people wanted to get together and look at whether the Burley in Wharfedale model would work for us, I'm sure that we would be happy to join that conversation.

### Christmas Tree in the Market Place

Otley BID pays for the large Christmas tree in the Market Place. It is the maximum allowable height.

### Floral Planters on Gay Lane

We will also look at if any lampposts on Gay Lane are suitable to host a floral planter.

## **i. Other Issues**

Other comments received from the survey respondents, with BID Directors' comments below, were:

***'Civic centre in particular the frontage – it's a mess with pigeons nesting. Chase up who now is responsible for this.'***

Otley Civic Centre is in private ownership having been sold at auction by previous owners, Leeds City Council. Otley BID is active in highlighting and pursuing the restoration of run-down and disused buildings around town (e.g. Best Kebab, Fultons, Summercross etc) and submits comments on planning applications both in support and in objection, as appropriate.

***“Intensify pressure on regional transport Companies to improve and expand access to Otley from across the region.”***

***“Transport. We need frequent and reliable buses.”***

Otley BID has lobbied First Bus to improve services from Leeds.

***“Relief road being progressed as a matter of urgency. To free up town of some traffic.”***

Some issues raised are all beyond the scope of what the BID can do. We do join in with monthly meetings with Otley Town Council, Otley Town Partnership, Otley Chamber of Trade and Leeds City Council. Otley BID has made representations to Leeds City Council Planning Department on the East of Otley scheme and accompanying relief road and has produced a ‘position paper’ explaining its stance. Details are available to read on our website.

***“Energy saving lobby for grants to retail businesses. Solar panels heat pumps etc. Heat pumps.”***

An interesting one! We’ll add this to our agenda. Earlier terms of Otley BID did seek to establish a group buying scheme for items such as stationery, waste disposal etc. but lack of uptake prevented the intended next step, ie. Utilities.

***“Bring back Otley Loyalty Scheme.”***

The Otley Loyalty Scheme was a Chamber of Trade project. With only 30 businesses joining in and administration that was too onerous for a group of volunteers to keep up with the scheme fell by the wayside. There are companies who will run similar schemes but at last investigation the cost was too high for the relatively small number of levy payers who would participate or benefit.

***“All run by the select few. If the businesses of Otley really considered what the BID does and how their money is spent then they should all pull out only a select few decide and have you seen the number of directors resign?”***

***“Stop the nepotism Step down.”***

***“Ask local people to help and we will.”***

It is true that some of the same faces appear in volunteer roles in several town organisations such as Otley Chamber and Otley BID. It’s not nepotism as we have nothing to gain directly by giving our time and commitment for free, we just believe that we can contribute to make a difference and that if Otley has a strong commercial sector we all benefit. It does seem to be always the same people willing to put their hand up, although new thinking is always welcome.

Any Board of Directors expects a turnover as Directors retire, move from the area, step down to allow ‘new blood’ etc. Over the course of 10 years there have been 5 resignations, all expected after those volunteers had served at least one full 5 year term. We currently have 7 Directors but would welcome more. The time commitment is between 2-5 hours per month. During 2022 Otley BID has welcomed some fresh faces onto the Board which have added some welcome new input and insight.

***“No breakdown given of financial benefits.”***

As it is required to be, Otley BID has always been transparent with regards to our Financial Accounts. The breakdown of how the levy is spent can be found in our Accounts here <https://otleybid.co.uk/financial-accounts/> with the income and expenditure detailed on page 5.

***“More events going on to get people to come to the town.”***

We are often approached by groups wanting to put on events, many of which Otley BID has supported with financial contributions over the years, enabling them to happen. If we believe there will be a benefit to at least some businesses by extra footfall and town publicity we will help where we can either by offering financial support or seed funding an event.

***“While you may mean well. There are no significant improvements in the town.”***

We can all agree that all town centres across the country have needed help during the tough last decade. Otley has borne up fairly well, especially in comparison to those without support from within their business communities.

#### **4. DIRECTORS**

Finally, it is worth mentioning that at least one/two Directors are required to step down at the next AGM and seek re-election (if they wish to continue).

Also, if any local business owners would like to volunteer and get involved in shaping the future of Otley over the next 5 years, we would welcome your input and support. Please email: [katie.burnett@otleybid.co.uk](mailto:katie.burnett@otleybid.co.uk).

**Katie Burnett - Chair**  
**Otley Business Improvement District (BID)**

January 2023