



## Bradford's BID-ding for a return to past glories

Bradford, the fourth largest metropolitan district in England with a population of well over half a million, could well be the last major city in the country without a Business Improvement District.

Neighbouring towns and cities in West Yorkshire, including Leeds, Halifax and Keighley, have been up and running for some time which, perhaps, makes Bradford's tardiness even more surprising.

All that could be about to change, however, with the Bradford city centre BID project going to a ballot in September, with the result due on October 12.

Some idea of how keen the city now is to get a BID off the ground can be gleaned from the turn-out of more than 150 people to the launch of the Bradford BID's Business Plan at the end of June. The event, which took place at the Pictureville cinema, within the prestigious National Science+ Media Museum, was attended by representatives of the more than 630 businesses and organisations within the demise area.

It would be easy to think that a city the size of Bradford should have far more businesses – and you'd be right. But many of them are based on major

thoroughfares such as Leeds Road and Manningham Lane which radiate for miles out from the city centre and which could, one day, be ripe for BIDs of their own.

The demise was drawn deliberately tightly to take advantage of the city's geography which places its retail and office core around the sides and at the bottom of a natural "bowl." It's a flat bottom which has seen a dramatic transformation in recent years, with the development of a stunning, and multi-award-winning City Park. Costing £25 million to build, it showcases the stunning Victorian masterpiece that is Bradford City Hall and features an expansive "mirror pool" – a shallow lake which can be drained to facilitate major events and concerts but which, for most of the time, is alive with a vibrant, multi-coloured display of fountains.

Edged by a boardwalk, the mirror pool and City Park have become an immensely popular meeting place for all sections of the community, especially on warm summer days when dozens of children flock to play among the fountains while their parents take refreshment at nearby eateries.

It's a development, along with the opening of a sleek and shiny £320 million shopping centre, that has helped

give Bradford a new confidence and created a rallying point for business leaders who want to give the city back some of its old swagger, from the days when it was one of the largest retail shopping centres outside London with the highest percentage of Rolls Royces per head of population!

The starting point for the BID scheme was more than 18 months ago, when a project team was formed. A feasibility survey at the end of last year showed that more than 70 per cent of those who responded – about a third of the prospective voters – thought the BID was a good idea.

Ian Ward, chair of the BID Development Board, described the journey from there to the Business Plan launch as featuring "more than 3,000 interactions with local businesses" through open meetings, presentations, and face-to-face discussions and almost 75 drafts of the plan itself.

He told guests at the launch: "We had to make sure we got this right, that we represented exactly what local business wanted, so we could deliver the best for Bradford."

"Realistically, we haven't delivered anything yet; the real hard work starts now because we need to win the hearts



and minds of those 630 businesses in the BID demise area and persuade them to vote in favour of setting up the BID. “But the sheer number of people at this launch shows just how much the Bradford business community wants this to happen.”

Guests were treated to some specially-devised and produced entertainment, organised by Bradford-based community arts organisation The Brick Box, featuring a “flash-mob”-style breakdance and new BID-themed dance performance by city-based Clean North dance group, and inspirational performances by Bradford poets Haris Ahmed, aged 16, and Kirsty Taylor, who has appeared on BBC Radio 3’s Verb New Voices.

The final business plan document sets out a strategy for improving the city centre with money invested by businesses through an annual levy, based on a small percentage on top of their business rates. A typical small business would pay just £3.61 per week, a medium-sized business with a rateable value of, for instance, £65,000 would pay less than £16 per week and the cost to a large business, with a rateable value of £150,000, would be about £36 per week. If successful, the BID will raise more than £2.5 million over the five-year term. The Business Plan is already being backed by a host of small businesses

as well as The Broadway and Kirkgate shopping centres, Little Germany Action Ltd, the University of Bradford, Bradford College, Bradford City Football Club, Provident Financial, Yorkshire Building Society, SunbridgeWells, Bradford Civic Society, Kala Sangam Asian arts group and others.

It sets out four key strategic pillars for improving the city centre, under the Clean, Safe, Alive and Promoted banners.

“Clean” projects will include improving the appearance of empty shops, carrying out extra street cleansing and washing, chewing gum removal, cleaning up graffiti and improving problem areas.

“Safe” objectives will feature work to change negative perceptions of Bradford, establish initiatives to reduce crime and the fear of crime and working with partner organisations to help make the city centre a safe and secure place to be, especially after 5pm.

New seasonal events, including more Christmas activities, more street markets and street entertainment are among schemes to bring the city centre “Alive”, and the “Promoted” pillar will include projects to encourage investment into Bradford, greater lobbying, representation and championing of the

city and marketing and promotion to a far wider audience to attract more visitors and shoppers to Bradford. “It’s all about additionality,” said Mr Ward. “The BID will provide services and enhancements over and above the basic service Bradford Council can provide. “It will give businesses the power and funding to take action to make significant, targeted and sustained improvements to our city centre.

“Local businesses have decided what those improvements should be and now we need to ensure they vote to support the setting up of the BID when it goes to a ballot on September 13. All they need to do is ‘Vote Yes’!”

The result of the ballot will be declared on October 12. If a majority of those who take part vote in favour – and if, between them, they represent more than half of the total rateable value of the area’s properties – the BID will be formally established before the end of 2018 and will operate until December 2023.

No-one would wish to tempt fate, but if reward is in any way proportionate to the effort expended, Bradford surely deserves to be the next big things in BIDs!