

Chester BID
Annual Review
2020/2021



Chester's
Business
Improvement
District

Welcome to our Annual Review

It gives me great pleasure to present to you the 2020/2021 Chester BID Annual Review.

This document details the BID's achievements over the last 12 months and highlights the hard work and dedication shown by the BID team and BID Board who are committed to supporting you, the great businesses of Chester.

2020 was a year like no other, nobody could have predicted a crisis on the scale of COVID and the impact it has had on businesses. Multiple lockdowns and ever-changing tier restrictions meant businesses had to adapt and change on an almost weekly basis. For some, COVID proved too much, and they were forced to close their doors for good, highlighting the indiscriminate way the pandemic has impacted businesses not only in Chester, but around the country.

However, we know just how resilient the businesses of Chester can be and you all stepped up and tackled the challenges head on. We saw businesses change their operating models to offer click & collect and take away services, businesses adapted their shops and restaurants to make them safe and welcoming for consumers and the business community pulled together to support each other through the crisis.

As a solely private sector funded business, the BID has not been immune to the challenges brought about by COVID. We have had to restructure and make savings in order to be able to continue supporting businesses and the city into 2021 and beyond. With many of the BID's usual activities either delayed or postponed we focused on initiatives that would connect businesses with their customers and projects that would add value but not be impacted by COVID restrictions.

Our #ChesterTogether campaign grew into a massive online Chester community, underpinned by our interactive Digital High Street. We also upped our social media and marketing output considerably, embracing radio, PR and even good old door drops to reach as many local consumers as possible.



Carl Critchlow
BID Manager

We introduced the Chester Gift Card, locking in spend for a time when consumers can shop freely. We also funded free parking at Chester Racecourse over Christmas, making it as affordable as possible for consumers and giving the city a point of difference against our competitors.

In addition to the more visible activities, the BID is always busy behind the scenes representing the interests of businesses in the city. Throughout 2020 we collaborated with the council on the safe re-opening of the high street post-lockdown and shared important communications around business support and funding. The BID is a key stakeholder in Destination Chester, the group tasked with attracting visitors and tourists. Nationally we lobbied central government for additional financial support throughout the COVID crisis and locally we engaged with Cheshire Police and the Police & Crime Commissioner to tackle the growing issue of Anti-Social Behaviour in the city.

The next 12 months will be a challenging time for businesses in Chester as we all adapt to a post-COVID city. However, as I write this there is cause for optimism. With vaccines being rolled out and a pent-up demand amongst consumers to get back to normal life, Chester is well placed to capitalise on opportunities.

I look forward to working with you all over the next 12 months and beyond.

Carl Critchlow

Carl Critchlow, BID Manager

Our Team

The Chester BID team are always on hand to speak to you.

You can contact the BID office on **01244 403680** or via **hello@chesterbid.co.uk**

BID Team:

Carl Critchlow	BID Manager	carl@chesterbid.co.uk
Emily Ghazarian	Marketing & Events Manager	emily@chesterbid.co.uk
Luka Morrell	City Host	luka@chesterbid.co.uk
Monica Roman	City Host	monica@chesterbid.co.uk

BID Board:

The Chester BID Board is made up of representatives from local businesses and key city stakeholders. All Board members are volunteers and are responsible for overseeing the running of Chester BID and guiding the organisation's strategic direction.

Katrina Kerr	Chair
Nick Hodson (Deputy Chair)	Nick Hodson Consulting
Emma McGlinchey (Co. Secretary)	Aaron & Partners
Rebecca Bradbury	Wilko
Jamie Christon	Chester Zoo
Nigel Driver	Grosvenor Estate
Andy Farrall	Andy Farrall Limited
John Farrell	Ellis & Co
Ian Gordon	IKO Hospitality (Liquor & Co, The Cabinet Club and Craft & Company)
Katie Jones	Weasel & The Bug
Andrew Lewis	Cheshire West & Chester Council
Andy Mushet	Boots
Helen O'Sullivan	University of Chester
Will Powell	Powells Jewellers
Simon Radley	Chester Grosvenor
John Welsh	Hickory's / Parlounge



COVID Recovery

To help businesses manage the initial impact of COVID and support them through the subsequent lockdowns we quickly implemented a **4-point action plan**.

1 Keep businesses informed

- ▶ We utilised our networks and communication channels to signpost business to the latest guidance on **financial support, health and welfare information** and **business advice**.
- ▶ We hosted **webinars** allowing businesses to hear from expert speakers and raise the issues most concerning them.

2 Keep the public informed

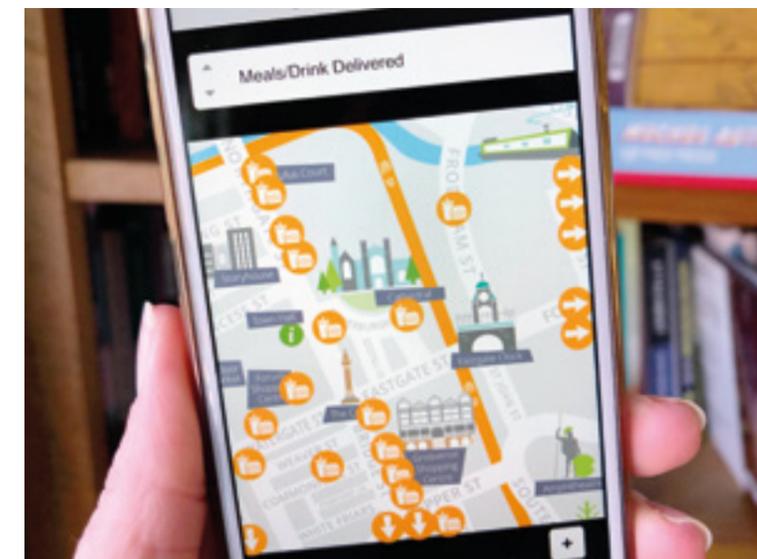
- ▶ We established a **Digital High Street** to advise consumers which businesses remained open and to allow them to interact with those forced to close. And as businesses evolved so did our Digital High Street, directing consumers to those businesses which started to offer take away and click & collect services.
- ▶ Our **#ChesterTogether** campaign exploited the power of **social media to build an online city centre community**. Nearly five thousand Cestrians signed up to our Facebook group, and interactions across all our social channels helped bring people together to support the city through these unprecedented times.

3 Learn from other destinations

- ▶ As COVID impacted towns and cities across the country in different ways, we watched and learned how other locations tackled the crisis and applied this best practice to our re-opening planning.
- ▶ We collaborated with the council to extend pedestrianisation in the city to allow for **distancing, queuing, and more outdoor dining**. We revised our temporary signage and guidance to visitors who made trips to Chester before and after lockdowns.

4 Represent our businesses

- ▶ To ensure the interests of BID members and the wider business community were prioritised, we took the lead on **Chester's recovery planning**. We produced the first City Centre Recovery Plan that was adopted by the council and its High Street Recovery Cell.
- ▶ We teamed with **Cheshire West & Chester Council and partners such as CRAG, Marketing Cheshire and the LEP** to lobby local and national government for additional business support.



Enhancing

The BID's 'Enhancing' function has three clear objectives; we want to create a city that is safe, attractive, and welcoming for shoppers, tourists, workers, and residents.

Lockdown restrictions meant that many of our usual initiatives, such as our summer floral displays, were just not possible, so we turned our attention to those issues where we knew we could make a difference.

To achieve our enhancing goals, we have stepped up our collaboration with strategic city partners. Our Enhancing Working Group now includes representatives from the private sectors as well as CW&C, Chester Residents Associations Group (CRAG) and Cheshire Police.

Crime & Anti-Social Behaviour:

We continued to raise awareness with Cheshire Police and Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) about the negative impact that crime and ASB has on our businesses. This resulted in a Chester-specific action plan being developed by Cheshire Police directly focused on tackling the issue.

To help businesses report incidents more effectively we worked with Cheshire West & Chester Council to secure funding for over 75 additional city radios that link directly to the CCTV control room. We also co-funded the installation of new CCTV cameras overlooking ASB hotspots on Northgate and Eastgate Row.



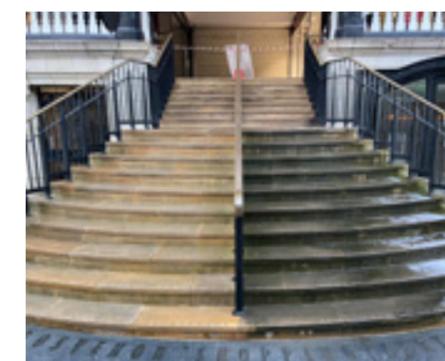
Cleansing:

Ahead of lockdown ending we undertook additional cleaning of shop fronts and problematic grot-spots to ensure the city was looking at its best for the return of shoppers and tourists.

Cleansing Stats:

CLEANED
120
SHOP
FRONTAGES

WE DEEP CLEANED OVER
37,000m²
OF WALKWAYS AND
SHOP ENTRANCES



Parking:

Parking continues to be a challenge, but by working closely with our partners at Chester Racecourse we were able to provide free parking facilities during lockdown for key workers and visitors. We also funded free parking for over 3000 vehicles in the build up to Christmas helping to make Chester as attractive as possible to shoppers and tourists.



City Hosts:

Monica and Luka are 'the faces' of Chester. They dedicate their time to welcoming visitors whilst also logging environmental issues and reporting anti-social behaviour to the relevant authorities.

They are the first port of call for BID Member businesses, hand delivering Chester BID communications, disseminating relevant information and providing support on a case-by-case basis to suit specific needs of the diverse businesses and distinct units within which they operate on street and row level.

Previously an outsourced service, this year we brought the service in-house, enabling us to expand their role and provide more direct business support.



Christmas and Chester Gift Card

This year we asked consumers to Give the Gift of Chester with the launch of 'The Chester Gift Card' programme in early November.

Working with local film maker, Jonny Noakes, we created the first Chester Christmas ad which was picked up by national press and featured next to the likes of John Lewis, Amazon and Disney!

The Chester Christmas video reached over 200,000 people and resulted in over £28,000 worth of Chester Gift Cards being sold – money locked into Chester’s high street. Over 100 businesses signed up to accept the gift card as a payment either in store or on their website, a new benefit of being a BID Member business.



Marketing

The BID's marketing and events activity is all aimed at driving footfall, increasing dwell time and encouraging consumer spend.

2020 was certainly a different year to most with many of our established event activities, such as the Chester Comedy Festival and the Customer Service Awards, having to be cancelled. To counter this reduction in event activity we stepped up our promotion of the city through additional marketing, PR and social media and invested in initiatives that were less susceptible to COVID restrictions.



Consumer Engagement:

This year more than ever we worked to establish strong connections with the press, achieving **128 pieces of PR coverage locally, regionally and nationally.**

Highlights: The Express, iNews, ITV Granada Tonight, BBC NW Tonight, BBC Radio Merseyside, Dee 106, Cheshire Life, Cheshire Live, Chester Standard.

Social Media:

Growing our social media channels has been a key focus for this year. Working with our social media guru, Rachel Quayle, has enabled BID channels to keep consumers engaged and aware of how they can access and support Chester city centre during this hard-to-navigate year.

The fastest growing channels have been Instagram and LinkedIn. These have very different audiences that represent the unique aspect of Chester BID as an organisation that connects and supports businesses across all sectors, whilst simultaneously marketing and connecting with consumer audiences. We've also dropped the CH1 from our branding to make us easier to search for on social and google.



20/21 FY Mar-Apr	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn	MailChimp	TOTAL OVERALL GROWTH
2020/21 % Growth	9%	36%	87%	75%	6%	29%
2020/21 Audiences	7123	6374	4874	570	3386	22327

Conversions to sales

After being featured on @ChesterBID Instagram and Facebook Stories: **Haus of MOB** sold **60 pairs of glasses**; **Nichols & Co** **SOLD OUT** of their **heart bracelets** and **Leonidas** sold **10 'freak shakes'** at **£10** each on Easter weekend.

Don't forget to engage with our BID channels and reach out to the BID team to get your products, services or events featured.

Website:

We streamlined our branding across both our consumer and business websites. Formerly known as CH1 Chester BID, we have now dropped the CH1 from our name to aid communications and improve SEO. We also created Chester icons that represent the heart of the city. **ChesterBID.co.uk** has a new events page enabling hosting and promotion of business events that support Professional Services and connect high street businesses with support networks.

Consumer traffic is signposted to **ExperienceChester.co.uk** which receives over **8,000 visits per month** on average, and **100,000 visits annually** with **48,000 unique users.**

Chester Together

In March 2020 Chester BID created the **#ChesterTogether** campaign as a reaction to the **COVID-19 crisis.** The campaign initially focused on:

- ▶ The immediate needs of businesses' recovery.
- ▶ Consumer engagement connecting supply / demand.
- ▶ Delivering a communication plan with safety and welcome messages to drive spend.



Between 16th March – 31st August 2020 the campaign delivered:

- ▶ **Radio:** 6 week promotion with 3852 airtime credits for the city centre broadcast to 63,000 listeners.
- ▶ **Print:** Suite of posters and social distancing floor markers for businesses.
- ▶ **Advertising:** 4 full page ads in local press, a 4 page leaflet drop to 15,500 households.
- ▶ **Installations:** 18 large scale vinyls/banners across the city centre, digital posters at Chester Racecourse and Chester Visitor Information Centre.
- ▶ **Digital High Street Map:** with links and tips on how to remotely access and spend with city centre businesses.
- ▶ **Plan Your Visit Map:** 'Know before you go' messages about parking, queue management, hand sanitiser, face coverings, pedestrianised areas and one way systems.

During that same time the campaign's outcomes included:

- ▶ **PR:** 60 pieces of positive press coverage including 10 radio interviews (BBC Radio Merseyside, Dee 106) and 2 TV features (ITV News, BBC Northwest).
- ▶ **Social Media:** Reached 975,000+ organically with #ChesterTogether used in over 1000 posts and creating a #ChesterTogether Facebook Group of 3000 followers.
- ▶ **Website:** 67,000+ views on: **ExperienceChester.co.uk**
- ▶ **Parking:** 800 FREE spaces daily, secured for over 4 months in partnership with Chester Racecourse.
- ▶ **Footfall:** steady increase performing approximately 10% better than the UK average.

The campaign has continued to pivot as this crisis has evolved and will continue to connect the people and businesses of Chester for mutual support.



Supporting

The BID's 'supporting' role is all about bringing the city together, joining the dots and building networks and connections that support Chester and our businesses. By working in partnership with city stakeholders to minimise the risk of duplication, we have been working to ensure resources are put to best use and city initiatives have the biggest possible impact.



Independent Business Guide

While Chester has seen several high-profile closures over the last 12 months the city has actually bucked the national trend with more new businesses opening than closing. This renaissance is being driven primarily by the city's thriving independent sector with over 20 new 'indies' opening in the last 12 months alone.

Speaking with many of these new businesses it was clear the path to opening their own businesses was often a difficult one, especially if they had never run a business before. To capitalise on the interest in Chester and to help make it as easy for potential new business as possible we created our own Independent Business Guide. The guide included advice from a broad range of local experts and covered everything from picking the best location for your business, through to the financial plans you need to make.

Destination Chester

The BID played a key role in the creation of Destination Chester - the newly formed organisation, chaired by Chester BID Board Member and CEO of Chester Zoo Jamie Christon, whose sole aim is to lead the development of Chester city centre and surrounding cluster of attractions as a major tourism destination, by attracting more visitors, improving visitor experience, dwell time and spend.

With representation from over 20 city stakeholders, the group is working on a cohesive, post-COVID tourism strategy for the city to be implemented this coming summer and beyond.

Professional Services

Identifying a lack of opportunities for our professional services sector to network and interact, we established the Chester BID - Professionals in Partnership. So far over 120 representatives of the sector have attended a series of online webinars to hear expert speakers from organisations including Manchester Business School, HSBC and Storyhouse.

Chester Growth Partnership - Retail Core Working Group

Following the announcement that Chester's Debenhams Store faced imminent closure the BID began talks with Chester Growth Partnership, Cheshire West & Chester Council and partners to explore future potential uses for the site. A formal sub-group of the Chester Growth Partnership has now been set up to guide the repurposing of the city centre's retail core in order to support the sustainable economic recovery of Chester. The group has appointed commercial property specialists CBRE to look at national trends and market opportunities to identify new uses and investment opportunities for the city centre.



Strategic Direction

I took over as Chair in August 2020 after the first wave of COVID with an agenda for change and an ambition to work with all willing partners to help Chester evolve into a city with sustainable and innovative businesses and an enviable lifestyle offer. The second wave of COVID has delayed that somewhat and the demise of Debenhams is a significant blow. There is no doubt there has been much economic devastation and many broken hearts.

But as I write this, we appear to be finally conquering the pandemic, we are still on track to open up on time and move forward and I now believe that the next couple of years are going to be good ones for Chester. I've lived in Chester for 23 years and I don't think I've ever felt more confident about the city's future.

COVID has made many people reappraise what they want, and for many what a city like Chester can offer ticks a lot of boxes: a walkable city, top schools, a great food and drink scene - no less than 8 entries in this year's Michelin guide, low unemployment, green space and river walks, a great mix of retail, lovely places to stay, all enclosed in a beautiful and historic setting. With Storyhouse, we have an arts centre that refused to be cowed by COVID and is now coming back stronger than ever, the future of Chester Zoo looks bright, Chester Races are raring to go, the Northgate development complete with new market is now only a year away and all across the city we are seeing new start-ups. The disparate groups responsible for marketing the city are now all working together under the Destination Chester brand to promote the city both to locals and visitors and their chair, Jamie Christon, has agreed to join our board to ensure seamless cooperation and coordination. Over the last few years we have seen lots of investment in hotels and restaurants, and this summer the city will be in a position to welcome millions of people who have never been before and who we hope will become real advocates for Chester.

The board of Chester BID are determined that we will play a significant part in helping Chester to re-establish itself as a must-visit city by deploying our resources into activities that add value, being bold and ensuring there is always a great reason to come to Chester. We will continue to develop relationships with the council - we now have the Council CEO on the board, the residents' association and the university



Katrina Kerr
Chair Chester BID

to ensure that the issues that trouble our levy payers are raised, solutions found, and we can move on. We recently created a guide to starting an independent business in Chester and we hope to see new entrepreneurs coming into the city, filling some of the empty units, as well as our current businesses thriving again. We have created a 'professionals' network to encourage cooperation and ensure that Chester is seen as a hotspot for great professional services. We are leading on a pilot for sustainable and innovative transport solutions so that more people can get into Chester quickly, easily and cheaply. And we are part of the Heritage Action Zone tackling the issue of how doing business on the Rows could be made easier.

Richard Florida said that to make a place great you need to address, "who's there, what's there and what's going on there." In the next year there is going to be a whole lot more going on and Chester BID will be up at the front beating the drum.

Katrina Kerr

Katrina Kerr, Chair Chester BID

Finance

Chester BID has not been immune to the impact of COVID on its financial position over the last year. Being funded almost exclusively by the private sector means any impact to payments of the BID Levy have a direct impact on BID funding. Slow BID Levy collection rates in the first half of the year meant it was necessary to undertake a review of overheads and staffing structure. In addition to scaling back and postponing several planned activities, the BID reduced its number of full-time staff from six to four in order to conserve cash reserves. Chester BID qualified for a small amount of direct government support as part of a £6million sector support package as well as the COVID grant based support offered to all small businesses.

As we head into 2021/2022 the BID is in a stable position. To account for continued uncertainty around COVID, contingency levels have been increased and most support services will be procured on a freelance basis to minimise long term commitments.



John Farrell
Chair Audit &
Finance Committee

BID INCOME	April 20 - March 21 Actual	April 21 - March 22 Budget
Income from BID Levy (Total Levy Billed)	319,998	320,000 (396,000)
Grants Receivable	20,375	20,000
Commercial Income	-	30,000
Other Income	42,043	1,500
C/F Balance	35,095	150,394
Total	417,511	521,894

BID EXPENDITURE	April 20 - March 21 Actual	April 21 - March 22 Budget
Management	152,428	157,880
Marketing	68,042	106,900
Events	2,370	59,000
Enhancing	1,977	60,345
Operating	42,300	39,909
Supporting	-	10,000
Total	267,117	434,034
Contingency		40,000
Surplus C/F		47,860



Chester BID Objectives:

- ▶ **Understand the needs of our levy payers and other supporters** and to serve their interests so that their businesses can thrive.
- ▶ **Champion Chester** as a place to live, work, study and visit and to support and collaborate with all other organisations, partners, and local councillors.
- ▶ **Enhance and add real value to the city experience** with high quality interventions and improvements.

About Chester BID:

- ▶ **Chester BID is a business-led initiative** that was voted for by the businesses of Chester in September 2014 and July 2019.
- ▶ There are currently **over 450 businesses**, with a rateable value of **more than £18,000**, situated within the BID designated city area.
- ▶ **Each of these members contribute a levy equal to 1% of their premises rateable value every year** to fund a wide range of improvements identified by the businesses themselves and set out in the Chester BID business plan.
- ▶ **The term of the BID runs for five years and means that approximately £2m will be generated and reinvested back into the city centre**, focusing on marketing, events, enhancing and supporting businesses and the city.



ChesterBID.co.uk



ExperienceChester.co.uk

Contact us on: **01244 403680** or email: hello@chesterbid.co.uk

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