

Barrow BID Strategy

BETTER BARROW • BUSIER BARROW • BRIGHTER BARROW • BOOSTING BARROW

Background

In the BID Proposal, we said that we would deliver on five key objectives:

To market and promote Barrow as a sub-regional service centre and shopping destination offering distinctive choice of shops, festivals and events, as well as some of the best entertainment, leisure and recreation in Cumbria.

To make access to Barrow town centre easier and more attractive for residents, visitors and workers throughout the day.

To take pride in Barrow, filling empty units with new or expanding businesses and growing the town's offer.

To establish Barrow town centre's evening and night time economy as a welcoming, safe environment for people of all ages to enjoy food, drink and entertainment.

To build, through the BID, an effective partnership between the town's businesses, organisations and local authorities for the benefit of Barrow's business and wider community.

These would be implemented by a Programme for Improvement that includes projects and activities designed to meet these five objectives. These were summarised as:

A comprehensive multi-media campaign to publicise and promote the shops and services in Barrow town centre.

A package of offers and incentives to make Barrow town centre an easier, more accessible place to visit.

Improvements to the appearance of the town centre, filling vacant premises and extending the town centre's retail and services offer.

Promotion of a welcoming, safe and accessible town centre in the evenings.

These in turn were grouped into our four 'B's:

Better Brand and Promotion – BETTER BARROW

Busier Shops and Services – BUSIER BARROW

Brighter Streets and Buildings – BRIGHTER BARROW

Boost the Evening Economy – BOOSTING BARROW

Each of these was further broken down into a series of Projects so, dealing with each of the four 'B's in order:

BETTER BARROW

Project 1: A Barrow Town Centre Brand – Love Barrow Town Centre

Commission work to create a distinctive identity and brand for Barrow town centre – this is separate to the BID's own brand. To potentially become more involved in the Love Barrow Awards, perhaps as a category sponsor (new category: Town Centre Employee of the Year?).

Project 2: Barrow Online

Commission the design, build and maintenance of a consumer website and dedicated town centre App, including a directory of shops, services and live promotions, incentives, discount vouchers etc.

Project 3: Digital Marketing Strategy

Commission the preparation and implementation of a co-ordinated social media campaign including promotions, incentives and discounts, to make Barrow more appealing to customers and visitors.

Project 4: Festival and Events

A modest budget to sponsor specific events where these have potential to deliver commercial benefits to BID members and raise the public profile of Barrow town centre.

BUSIER BARROW

Project 1: Car Parking Incentives

Barrow BID will incentivise people to visit and use the town centre through the delivery of car parking promotions and incentives that will raise awareness of the parking options and, in partnership with Barrow Borough Council, offer discounts to the standard ticket charges, such as 'buy one hour, get one free' or 'free after three'. To also look at potential of 'pay on exit' or 'double ticketing'.

Project 2: Improve Bus and Rail Connections to the Town Centre

Barrow BID will also incentivise people to visit and use the town centre wherever possible by promoting greater patronage of public transport into the town centre through promotions and incentives, in partnership with bus and/or rail operating companies. This also includes projects relating to road signage.

BRIGHTER BARROW

Project 1: Pride in Barrow

Establish 'Love Barrow Town Centre' initiative between key stakeholders in the town, including Barrow Borough Council, Cumbria County Council, our MP and the NWEM. This will involve a number of key projects (both leading and sponsoring) and activities that contribute to brightening up the town centre with a view to entering the Great British High Streets Competition.

Project 2: Filling Empty Shops Strategy

The BID will work with Barrow Borough Council and private sector partners to commission a strategy and implantation plan to tidy and fill empty shops in the town centre. This will not only improve the overall appearance of the town centre but also expand the retail offer, for example, by supporting pop-up shops. We will develop a database of empty properties and produce evidential literature about Barrow so that we can work directly with agents, landlords and/or retailers.

BOOSTING BARROW

Project 1: Extending the Offer

The BID will organise and co-ordinate late night shopping and Sunday trading where there is potential to do so.

Project 2: Dining Out

Introduce an annual 'Restaurant Week' from year two, something that appears to be proving successful in other towns and cities and which will promote all that the town centre offers after 5pm.

Project 3: Entertainment

Organise a co-ordinated programme of weekend events and entertainment to enhance what the town centre currently offers to customers in the evenings. This overlaps with Project 4 of Better Barrow (above).

This summarises the information that was submitted as the Barrow BID Proposal prior to the ballot last April and, in essence, determines our strategy going forward.

Strategy and Sub Groups

So, with our strategy effectively determined by the four 'B's and their respective projects, the key is how to implement. This is where the sub groups come in. Each of the sub groups that we have put in place will naturally pick up Projects from the four 'B's.

The Sub Groups will be:

Marketing & Communications

This will pick up Projects 1, 2 & 3 from BETTER BARROW: the brand identity of both BID and Love Barrow Town Centre, the website and app and the digital marketing strategy.

To achieve this, the sub group should concentrate on developing the specifications required to enable us to go out to tender on:

Our identity and brand

The website and app

Our digital marketing strategy

The sub group therefore needs to set out the framework for what we want, then put out to tender to ensure that our procurement process is transparent and stands scrutiny.

These specifications should therefore be the immediate focus for the Website (or Communication) Sub Group.

Transport

This will pick up Projects 1 & 2 under BUSIER BARROW: the car parking incentives and the transport (bus and rail) issues. I would pull all items pertaining to the Mott MacDonald report into this, too and therefore signage and the one-way system. This comprises pretty much all of the 'collectively agreed' Phase 1 items of the MM report.

Immediate issues for this sub group will be to work with BBC to monitor the effectiveness of the current 'free after three' and to discuss other potential schemes as well as continuing to look at signage, especially in the knowledge of having additional funds from BBC specifically to undertake projects from the MM report.

The sub group should therefore be liaising with Cumbria Highways to determine specific criteria and regulation, determining what signs are needed – e.g. road direction signs, signs in the town centre to identify stores in streets (such as the backs of the one way signs currently in place) and pedestrian wayfinding signs.

Healthy High Streets

The HHS principles fit nicely into the BID strategy and so the HHS sub group will pick up Projects 1 & 2 from BRIGHTER BARROW: Pride in Barrow and filling the empty shops.

So, the immediate task for this sub group will be to engage with our MP, BBC, CCC and the NWEM to kick-start the Pride campaign. In readiness for this meeting, the sub group should consider and agree the key principles of the campaign and what the campaign is looking to achieve.

The sub group should also be developing the relationship with the letting agencies in the town (e.g. Peill & Co) and working on the literature to promote Barrow to the absent landlords as well as looking at the potential of provision of pop-up shops wherever possible.

I would suggest that the HHS sub group also picks up Project 1 from BOOSTING BARROW: the co-ordination of late night and Sunday trading as and when applicable.

Events

The Event Sub Group will pick up Projects 2 & 3 from BOOSTING BARROW as well as Project 4 from BETTER BARROW: arranging Restaurant Week and devising a co-ordinated programme of weekend events as well as managing the sponsorship of events where there are clear commercial benefits to BID members.

I would suggest that building relationships with the likes of Barrow Underground Music Society, who are looking to put on a Barrow Music Weekend this year, that will morph into a Barrow Music Week in 2018 and with the social group that put on the Christmas lights event last year is key.

Then there is the potential of festivals or trading fairs to be explored and we need to be engaging with the schools early in the year if we are looking to put on something like the Roving Nativity at Christmas.

Other seasonal events should also be considered, such as the Easter Egg Treasure Trail that is presently being looked at and we should consider theming with other events as they occur (e.g. the World Cup or the Olympic Games).

Governance

The Governance sub-group will look at the areas of finance, corporate governance, procurement and legal processes. It will also take responsibility for areas such as footfall and sponsorships, with overall control of budgets and spending. It will also monitor the success (or otherwise) of the various events and projects of the BID and therefore, in turn, will ensure that there is a positive delivery on behalf of the BID levy payers with tangible measures put in place to determine the success of the BID.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the key to our strategy actually lies in the BID Proposal and the sub group structure that has been put in place supports this beautifully. Indeed, the Projects in the BID Proposal were written to specifically respond to the surveys undertaken during the pre-BID period – in other words, to give the town centre stakeholders what they want.

Each sub group will concentrate on its key Projects and will meet at least once a month. It will prepare a brief report each month to submit prior to Board Meetings. This report will comprise key activities and recommendations, the latter to gain Board approval. Reports should be circulated by close of play on the Friday before each Board Meeting so that Board Members have time to read prior to the meeting, enabling key decisions to be made at the meeting.

The BID Manager will work as instructed and guided by the Chair and will work with each sub-group to deliver the respective projects. The BID Manager will also explore additional funding opportunities and liaise with other key stakeholders and organisations, as appropriate, as well as working with the Governance sub-group to develop and monitor KPIs to demonstrate the success of the BID.

And on a final note, it should be remembered that the BID is about the long game. We are coming to the end of the first year of a five-year journey (and beyond). Speaking to other BIDs, it seems that slow starts are not unusual as this primarily revolves around getting the structure of the Company and the Board in place and developing the strategy. Years 2 and beyond will be much more visible and will demonstrate the real value of the BID.