

Stockport's Business Improvement District – 2023 AGM Chairman's Statement:

As the modern-day role of the traditional High Street continues to change and the way in which we live, work and spend our leisure time evolves to suit more contemporary times, so town centres face ever-increasing challenges from uncontrollable external influences. The explosion of retail parks, the digital era, the role of the Internet and connected devices reduced the need for personal interaction – with contrasting consequences; while some sectors thrived, town centre retailers in particular began to suffer from depleted footfall and reduced earnings. There has hardly been a time when our town centre businesses need more help and, as Stockport's Business Improvement District, or BID, Totally Stockport is ideally placed to deliver support to our levy payers.

Many of you will already understand the role of a BID but to give you some background - Stockport's first Business Improvement District was initiated in 2016 by Vision Stockport, a Community Interest Company, set up to be the catalyst for change and with a vision for the town centre to once again become the heart of a vibrant town that has something for everyone, every day. Maximising on Stockport's £1bn plan of investment that brings opportunity and will oversee the biggest transformation of Stockport for 50 years, Vision Stockport's first project was to initiate a town centre Business Improvement District to work with partners to drive change; to deliver projects that will help already established businesses to thrive; entice new businesses offering a wider choice, change perceptions and attract more visitors.

Following a successful campaign, in October 2016, town centre businesses voted in favour of Stockport's first Business Improvement District. Launched in April 2017 for an initial five-year term, Stockport BID, branded Totally Stockport, worked with partners on projects that proved to improve the overall visitor experience, change often out-dated perceptions, and generate additional footfall in the town centre, drawing in new businesses attracted by positive change and who could see the increasing opportunities for all town centre-based businesses to succeed.

Now in its second year of a second five-year term, and as the role of the high street continues to change, we are looking to leverage and capitalise on opportunities for businesses across all sectors to succeed and thrive. New homes, either already occupied or planned for the near future, provide a boost to town-centre living – new residents who are in part attracted by Stockport's growing reputation as a great place to live, the ideal town for first time buyers to invest and an ever-increasing number of quirky, independent businesses choosing to locate their business in the town centre.

Visitors are attracted by the town centre's vibrant hospitality and leisure offer – where there is no online substitute for personal interaction – which in turn supports businesses with recruitment. People are no longer attracted by a particular role; they want to be assured that the town also offers a good out-of-office experience – that it is Alive After 5! So, we were delighted that in March, Stockport **retained its Purple Flag status in recognition of the town centre's evening and night-time economy.**

Over the past 12 months, our team have focused on projects and initiatives that attract more people and ensure our town centre is better equipped to thrive in a more digitised economy. By working in collaboration with the Police, the Council and local businesses to make Stockport a safe place, and by hosting diverse, successful town-centre based events, we have seen an increase in town centre footfall and a boost to trade.

Since my last report at our AGM in November 2022, Totally Stockport has worked with our partners to deliver events that are bigger and better than ever before. By ensuring that we host high-calibre events, we know that we attract both new and returning visitors, taking advantage of the opportunity to showcase all the great changes taking place.

Over 15,000 people lined the streets of Stockport to cheer on and enjoy the Town's first soapbox Derby, Krazy Races. Thirty local teams made up of businesses, charities and independent teams, designed, built and raced their hand made soapboxes, powered by nothing more than gravity and the cheers from thousands of local spectators. And to top it all, we all enjoyed a fly-past by a Lancaster Bomber!

Stockport's Town of Culture year kicked off in style as we worked in partnership with Stockport Council to host a day of free inclusive activities at the flagship event, Stockport Moves. The town centre was packed; over 350 people crossed the finish line of the Stockport Mile; the atmosphere was buzzing as the people of Stockport came out to support the runners and enjoy the event. St Peter's Square was bursting with energy and activities including jaw-dropping bike and scooter displays from the Extreme Mountain Bike Show.

Stockport's summer art trail saw the return of the Stockport frogs in **the Great Frogtastic Inventions Art Trail.** 19 frogs, many sponsored by local businesses and organisations, hopped into Stockport for the summer, creating a magnificent, educational, and fun trail, and attracting thousands of visitors of all ages. At the end of the summer the frogs were sent to auction, raising 000's for local good causes.

Art Battle returned to Stockport with a party in a park. A carpark. Another sell-out event, to witness live artwork creation, street food, pop-up bars!

Stockport will be building on its fantastic street art trail later this year after securing funding for four more new sites in the town centre. The street art project was first revealed to residents in 2021 forming part of Rediscovering the Underbanks. Following a tender application process, the new artwork is expected to be unveiled in 2024.

And Stockport's Spectacular Sunday, held just a couple of weeks ago, saw Stockport town centre come alive in a totally unprecedented way! Celebrations brought enchanting festivities including a huge line-up of over 60 breath-taking shows featuring 220 artists alongside roaming acts, carnival fun, live music, and festive food stalls – capturing the imaginations of youngsters whilst bringing extraordinary entertainment to families on a scale not seen before across the town. Footfall increased by 56% across the town, making it the town's busiest Sunday on record since 2019 with an even bigger increase of 73% at Merseyway compared to the previous Sunday, attracting the local community alongside new visitors to the town ready to shop, eat and celebrate the start of the festive season.

By changing perceptions, we have encouraged more repeat visits; more diverse businesses are choosing to locate here provide greater choice and making Stockport town centre a more enticing place for shoppers, visitors and for employees, assisting businesses with both staff recruitment and retention.

We are also proud to support 3rd party events including **Stockport Pride**. Totally Stockport has been a strong advocate for showcasing the rich cultural heritage and community spirit of Stockport. By supporting Stockport Pride, we are helping to celebrate diversity and foster inclusivity in the local community.

Totally Stockport was once again a finalist for the Stockport Award at the business awards, which recognises organisations that have made a positive contribution to the borough. This year, we were up against two very strong contenders, and both BID levy payers - Stockport Gin and the Vernon Building Society. Congratulations went to The Vernon!

While the BID Business Plan sets out our full five-year strategy driven by consumer and business demand, it is flexible and nimble enough to swiftly respond to changing circumstances. The current rise in inflation and the cost of living is inflicting greater hardship for us all. We appreciate how hard it is for businesses and our focus is on helping to protect

businesses from further hardship and the threat of closure. We will concentrate on supporting our BID-levy paying business with initiatives that continue to ensure Stockport remains resilient and continues to be the destination of choice for everyone.

Through regular engagement with all town centre businesses and the BID levy payers, we will listen to concerns, ideas, and challenges to ensure our actions are in keeping with requirements. KPIs are predetermined, agreed, and set against BID projects so that success can be measured and inform on future actions.

Over 100 businesses are benefitting from our free StoreNet Radio scheme; our monthly Business Watch Meetings, chaired by GM Police, ensure a free flow of information on crime trends and an opportunity to highlight concerns.

More great events are planned for 2024 including the return of 'Krazy Races', all designed to attract many diverse audiences who will have the chance to see how Stockport's £1bn plan of investment is underway to create a 21st century town centre to rival its contemporaries.

And finally, Paul Taylor, **The Manager of Stockport's Business Improvement District, Totally Stockport, has left after 6 years in the role.** Paul, who along with fellow Director's at Vision Stockport was instrumental in establishing a BID in Stockport, is leaving his position to concentrate on his broadcast, marketing, and events businesses. We all wish him every success as Stockport is granted its own DAB platform.

Mike Lamont

Chair – Stockport Town Centre Business Improvement District Limited.