

# Watford Town Centre priorities - led by BID businesses

The spring and summer months that lie ahead will be brighter, not only due to the weather, but also thanks to vibrant & colourful enhancements that will soon be introduced!

As well as our BID-funded floral displays that will return in the summer, we will also be introducing brand-new Watford Town Centre branded lamppost banners and the neurodiverse umbrella project will be coming to our town for the very first time.

The BID team and board of directors have been hard at work planning for the 4th year of Watford BID Ltd's second term, and we have ensured that every project we deliver and every service that we provide is shaped by our town's businesses, including the aforementioned townscape enhancements.

In this edition of the Watford Town Centre BID newsletter, we outline what we delivered in response to our 2023 levy payer survey, an insight into the priorities outlined in 2024's survey and what we have planned for the year ahead.

There's a focus on crime & safety as that has been outlined as the main priority by our businesses,

including our initiatives, the launch of the new Herts connected platform and the brand-new Watford police station.

We also provide information on the business support and offers that are available to you, including marketing support, Watford Market stall availability and a recruitment and retention workshop for Watford businesses.

You'll also be provided **footfall reports, vacancy rates** and a number of **dates for your diary** as we welcome the warmer months to our town!



#### 1. Introduction

### **About** the BID

Formerly known as Watford BID, we have changed our name & branding to be Watford Town Centre BID, as we manage the new Watford Town Centre brand & website.

**A Business Improvement District** - or BID - is a way for local businesses to work together to tackle issues that affect their trading environment. Problems which are too large or widespread for any one business to address can be solved by all businesses coming together to finance and manage improvements. This can increase footfall, make it easier to retain staff, solve difficult issues and ultimately result in higher profits.

Watford BID Ltd. was established in April 2016 covering Watford Town Centre. In 2021 our businesses voted in favour of a 2nd BID term, meaning that Watford Town Centre BID will continue to provide its service until 31 March 2026.

## Meet the **BID** team



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#### Social media









O C M G WATFORDTOWNCENTRE



in WATFORD TOWN CENTRE BID

#### 2. BID projects & campaigns

## Annual levy payer survey

Watford Town Centre BID is funded by levy paying businesses and directed by levy paying businesses. The BID team are dedicated to deliver your top priorities for our town.

For the past two years, we have conducted a comprehensive survey that has been accessible for all Watford Town Centre BID levy payers to

complete. We utilise this data to plan ahead and learn what projects and campaigns need to be prioritised.

Both the 2023 and 2024 surveys received over 100 responses across all sectors, representing a significant sample size for us to analyse.

#### 2023

#### You said the top 3 priorities were:







#### We did:

- Increased our Town Centre Ranger hours over busy periods to monitor street drinking, begging and rough sleepers and immediately notify the relevant authorities of antisocial behaviour issues.
- Continued to grow our Watford Business Against Crime scheme, helping members prevent thefts and recover stolen items.
- Contributed to the town's CCTV scheme.
- Contributed to Shopmobility to encourage and support accessibility.
- Installed an additional defibrillator outside Glow in One, on The Parade, for town centre use and connected it to the national network.
- Increased our partnership working with Watford Police and other Watford Town Centre partners to support the reduction of crime in the town.
- Supported and actively participated in the ASB forums to identify and establish solid action plans for the most prolific offenders in Watford Town Centre.

- Held a Crime & Safety Partnership Event, enabling businesses to meet the town's policing team and gain valuable insights on the police priorities in Watford Town Centre.
- Introduced the new Watford Town Centre brand and website to help improve promotion of the town and its businesses.
- Ran marketing 1-2-1 sessions for Watford Town Centre businesses to gain insights and grow their online presence.
- Launched the cardboard collection scheme and recycled over 5 tonnes of cardboard in partnership with Atria Watford.
- Ran the gift swap event for the second year, totalling over 300 items repurposed and avoiding landfill.
- Joined and regularly attended the Environmental Manager Network alongside other Watford Town Centre partners and businesses to support the town's wider sustainability strategy.

#### 2024

#### You said the top 3 priorities are:



1st: Crime & Safety



2nd:
Marketing



3rd:
Town Centre
events & activities

#### We will:

- Continue to deliver all those projects and campaigns that met the demands of our levy payers in Year 3 of our BID term.
- We will be looking to increase town events and activities, ensuring they meet the needs of the diverse communities that use Watford Town Centre.
- Grow our social media following and utilise digital marketing techniques to increase website visitors.
- Introduce lamppost banners that raise awareness of watfordtowncentre.com – our website where visitors can find out about all things Watford Town Centre and its businesses.
- Work closely with the police and the evening and night-time economy businesses to find the best methods of making Watford Town Centre a popular and safe place to visit after 5pm.

Full survey insights are available on request, please contact the BID team for further information.

# Watford Town Centre enhancements

Enhancing the look & feel of Watford Town Centre is one of the key themes for us to deliver as a BID. We want you, your staff, customers and clients to have a positive experience when visiting our town.

As we enter Year 4 of Watford Town Centre BID's term, we are delighted to share with you some of the plans for our town's appearance during the warmer months of the year:

### Watford Town Centre branded lamppost banners - NEW

Scheduled: May 2024 - March 2026

We will be introducing newly designed Watford Town Centre lamppost banners for the remainder of the BID term.

The lamppost banners will be a colourful and vibrant addition to improve the look of the town, whilst also raising awareness of the new Watford Town Centre brand and website.

#### Floral displays

Scheduled: June 2024 - September 2024

We will once again be introducing a colourful array of tiered, colourful floral displays throughout the outdoor parts of Watford Town Centre to brighten up our town and add some greenery.

#### The umbrella project - NEW Scheduled: Summer 2024

The neurodiversity umbrella project is an uplifting visual representation of all the different minds we have here in Watford and beyond.

Dozens of colourful umbrellas will be strung up together and hung overhead in public spaces within our town, creating a stunning visual whilst raising awareness and understanding of neurodiversity.

#### 2. BID projects & campaigns

# Watford Town Centre website & social media

In July 2023 we were delighted to launch our vibrant new branding and website for Watford BID Ltd.

We worked with Watford-based agencies to produce a fantastic, cost-effective new look and feel for our BID. Our levy payers are always at the forefront of the projects the BID undertakes; we created our new branding and website with the aim of improving the marketing & promotion of

Watford Town Centre and its businesses - in line with Theme 3 of our business plan.

The new Watford Town Centre brand and website is proving to be a big success, as shown by these Year 3 stats:

776%

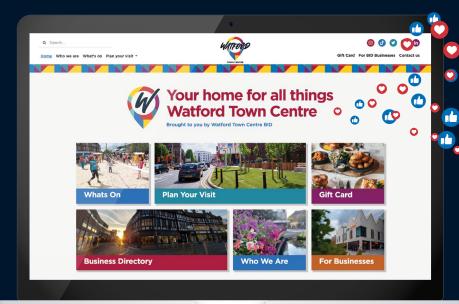
watfordtowncentre.com users increased by 776% compared to previous website 2,200+

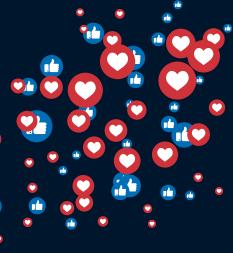
@WatfordTownCentre social media followers increased by 2.2k+ since the rebrand, a percentage of over 10% Top 3

Our all-time top 3 most engaged Facebook & Instagram posts have all come since the rebrand 170k+

Our most viewed video of all-time was from Winterfest: 170k+ views!

We are excited to grow the Watford Town Centre brand and website so that we can help raise awareness of our activities and events in our town, increase Watford Gift Card sales and showcase the brilliant array of businesses that we possess!







# Winterfest recap

Watford Town Centre BID hosted a brand-new Christmas event called 'Winterfest' on Saturday 18 November, marking the beginning of the festive season. The free-to-attend event included funfair rides, festive activities, food & drink stalls, a high street parade and live street performances to entertain locals.

The event took place on Watford high street and The Parade from 2-6pm, filled with activities for all ages. There was a fantastic community feel as locals flooded the town to spend the afternoon with friends and family.

The free funfair rides included a rodeo reindeer, penguin skittles, a giant snow globe, test of strength, teacups a train ride and even more. It was wonderful to see so many children gleefully enjoying the Christmas-themed rides and even winning some great prizes!

One of the main features of the day was the Winterfest parade, which began at 4pm outside of Metro Bank and McDonald's on the lower high street. The festive parade included a marching band, costume characters, local community groups, and a very special visit from Santa Claus himself as his sleigh produced snow whilst travelling alongside the delighted crowd!

Once the Winterfest parade concluded by the pond at the top end of town, Watford Town Centre's stunning LED Christmas light installations were switched on.

The entertainment continued into the evening with truly spectacular street performances including Watford Rock Choir, jazz musician (Chris Harvey), violinist (Monika Suder), LED dancers and fire breathing performers.

Winterfest proved to be a big success in driving footfall into Watford Town Centre, and a survey that went out to attendees received more positive feedback than our previous year's Christmas lights switch-on events.

We are delighted to have put on an event that boosted footfall, enhanced perceptions of Watford Town Centre as a Christmas destination and encouraged dwell time – all whilst coming at a lower cost than previous year's switch-on events. For the reasons outlined, we will be continuing with Winterfest as our annual Christmas event and look forward to bringing it back to our town in November 2024!

#### 2. BID projects & campaigns

# The Gift Swap

In January 2024, Watford Town Centre BID partnered with Atria to organise a gift exchange for locals to trade their unwanted gift for something they really do want!

The Gift Swap is a fun, sustainable, award-winning initiative that took place on the Lower Mall in Atria, Watford on Sunday 28 January.

We have now seen over 300 unwanted gifts repurposed from our Gift Swap events - avoiding the amount of wastage that goes into landfill. We're always proud to host these extremely lowcost initiatives that help to raise awareness of environmentally practices in Watford Town Centre, whilst putting a smile on the face of visitors!

# Cardboard collection service

As part of Watford Town Centre BID's service, our team member Jeremy collects & recycles cardboard from small businesses in Watford Town Centre. The service comes at no additional cost to them and was introduced as an initiative to save local businesses' money, whilst also being proactively sustainable.

Jeremy collects cardboard twice a week, with 26 businesses currently signed up. We are proud to have collected 26 cages of cardboard a month since we launched the pilot scheme earlier in 2023 - equating to over 5 tonnes of cardboard!

In Autumn 2023 we revealed our fully Watford Town Centre branded electric vehicle that is used to get



# Watford Gift Card growth

The Watford Gift Card was introduced in 2020 as a way to keep money in the town centre. Atria Watford is a popular place for people to buy the local gift card, with over £15,000 of sales in December 2023 with at the gift card kiosk.

The BID team hit our target of **£50,000** worth of cards sold in 2023. Sales of the Watford Gift Card were up 35% on 2022, showing a marked move towards the town's local gift card in place of alternatives.

Over 140 businesses now accept the Watford Gift Card across a range of sectors including retail, hospitality and leisure.

The success of the Watford Gift Card also bucks the national trend of consumers spending less on gifting in December 2023, according to Gift Card and Voucher Association (GCVA) data, with a focus on 'fewer, more considered purchases'.

Christmas shoppers were keen to pick up the gift card whilst out and about with £15,000 of Watford Gift

Cards sold in Atria Watford during the festive period alone. Cards can also be purchased online, with both physical and E-card versions available.

Simon Plumb, Atria Watford centre manager, said it has been a great success: "We are delighted to continue to support the Watford Gift Card. The year on year growth overall and over £15,000 of sales made at the mall kiosk in December alone demonstrates that customers want and value the flexibility that the card provides.

"Shopping local is now an important driver for consumer spend and tenants of the shopping centre and the town centre as a whole benefit from increased sales and meeting the needs of those loyal Watford customers."

Glen Hempenstall is marketing and communications manager at Watford Town Centre BID and said: "It's fantastic to see the Watford Gift Card going from strength to strength and fast becoming the gift of choice in our local area. Even against a backdrop of consumers spending less at Christmas 2023, people see our card as a gift that offers flexibility, choice and support for local too. We know that convenience is key when people are purchasing gifts, and that's why our partnership with Atria Watford is so important, it puts the gift of choice in customer's hands right when they need it."

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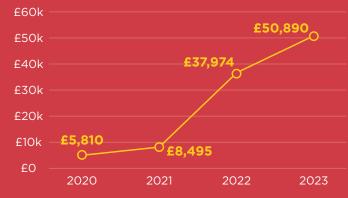
GIFT CARD

The Watford Gift Card is part of the multi-award winning Town & City Gift Card programme from fintech Miconex.

Colin Munro is the managing director of Miconex and said:

"Over 90% of people spend over the value of their gift card on redemption with 33% spending 100%-125% more than the value of the card. With over £50,000 Watford Gift Cards sold in 2023 alone, the impact for Watford businesses as cards are spent is significant. In 2024, the shop local trend will continue to gather pace, as consumers and organisations seek out options that offer choice, flexibility and support for local, which is exactly what the Watford Gift Card provides."









#### 3. Business support & offers

# 1-2-1 marketing support

Watford Town Centre BID's marketing manager, Glen Hempenstall, is offering support to any town centre business wanting help with marketing their business.

Glen specialises in digital marketing and can help your business to set up your social media profiles, grow your follower count, and provide useful tips on maintaining a good digital marketing strategy.

- Qualification as a Digital Marketing Specialist (Strategy & Planning) with Digital Marketing Institute
- 6+ years' experience of social media & digital marketing
- 6+ years' experience working with and promoting town centre businesses
- Manages Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok accounts
- Advice on SEO, Display Ads, Google Search Ads, working with agencies

Simply email through to marketing@watfordtowncentre.com if you'd be interested in arranging a 1-hour session to aid you with your marketing needs.



# 20% discount on Connect98 setup fee

98% of text messages are read, compared to 22% of emails, 29% of tweets and 12% of Facebook posts.



Launched at The Restaurant Show in London in 2014, the Connect98 text marketing platform has been helping the Hospitality and Retail sectors bring people in through the door, increasing sales as well as creating customer loyalty.

Data capture, knowing who your customers are and having the ability to communicate effectively with them is central to the success of our platform. Proactively broadcasting messages to your customers, letting them know what you have going on, helps to build a brand and encourage repeat business.

With an industry recognised open rate of 98%, SMS is by far the most effective medium for communicating with your customers. On average text messages are opened within three minutes of receipt, making them ideal for 'same day' offers and filling booking voids. It also doesn't matter what social media platform your customers frequent, text is a common denominator across all platforms. Every mobile phone irrespective of age will receive a text message.

Fully GDPR compliant, Connect98 have low start up and running costs. Data is exclusively your own and not shared with any other third party and most of their customers achieve a ROI within the first month of deployment.

Visit connect98.com for more information, and reference Watford Town Centre BID when getting in touch with them for your 20% discount!

# Recruitment & retention workshop for Watford businesses

Hertfordshire Growth Hub in partnership with Watford Borough Council are holding a workshop for Watford businesses to support them with recruiting and retaining staff. With a fantastic lineup of expert speakers this event is not to be missed!

#### What will the event cover:

- How to develop a strategy to 'bring in' and retain vital skills within your organisation
- How to effectively market what your business has to offer a candidate
- Effective selection and onboarding of candidates
- Student and graduate recruitment options
- HR best practices in recruitment and retention
- Support available from Hertfordshire Growth Hub

#### What will be the key take aways for those who attend:

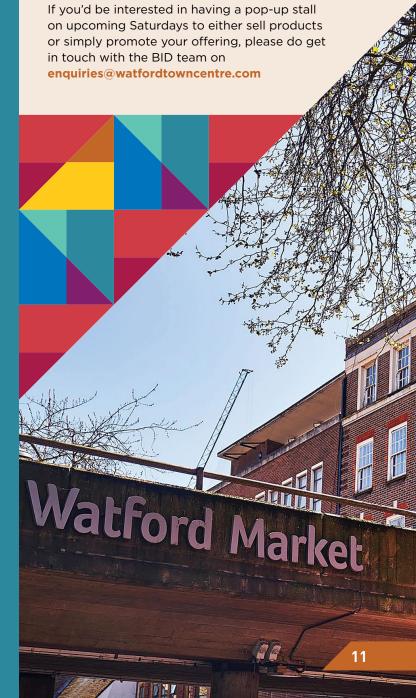
- The tools available to help you build the right organisational culture and retain top talent
- How to position yourself as an 'employer of choice'
- How to select the best candidates to fit your business culture and values
- Effective ways to attract a diverse pool of candidates
- Where to go for further support and advice

For further information on the event and the line-up of speakers please visit

www.herts growth hub.com

# Watford Market stall availability

Watford Market includes a number of traders selling food, drink and products on The Parade in Watford Town Centre. The BID have entered into an agreement with Watford Market to help facilitate Watford Town Centre businesses to have a pop-up stall on bespoke dates.



#### 4. Our town centre

# **Footfall reports**

Watford Town Centre footfall data is provided by Town and Place.Al.

Month	Footfall	Change from previous month	YTD Year on Year 2023 / 2024
January '23	1,068,211	-6%	+25%
February '23	961,564	-10%	+20%
March '23	1,075,695	+12%	+17%
April '23	1,084,092	+1%	+13%
May '23	971,535	-10%	+11%
June '23	1,132,335	+17%	+9%
July '23	986,320	-12%	+6%
August '23	939,579	-5%	+5%
September '23	1,002,659	+7%	+3%
October '23	947,111	-6%	+1%
November '23	962,747	+2%	0%
December '23	948,598	-1%	0%
January '24	999,822	+5%	-6%

# Vacancy rates

National vacancy rate data is provided by British Retail Consortium.

	Quarter	National	Watford High Street
Vacancy rates - National data provided by British Retail Consortium	Q1: Apr '22 - Jun '22	14.1%	7.6%
	Q2: Jul '22 - Sept '22	14.0%	5.6%
	Q3: Oct '22 - Dec '22	13.9%	5.6%
	Q4: Jan '23 - Mar '23	13.8%	7.8%
	Q1: Apr '23 - Jun '23	13.9%	7.0%
	Q2: Jul '23 - Sept '23	13.8%	6.9%
	Q3: Oct '23 - Dec '23	13.9%	7.4%
	Q4: Jan '23 - Mar '24	Awaiting data	Awaiting data



The Watford Jazz Junction was founded in 2020 with a focus on inclusion, improving mental well-being for all through sharing in live music, and presenting the greatest jazz musicians working in the UK!

They have a number of events to get excited about in Watford Town Centre between **12-19 May 2024**. Venues include Halsey Hall, Watford Palace Theatre and Watford Pump House Theatre.

Full details including timings and artists can be found on the 'What's On' page of www.watfordtowncentre.com

# Watford Fringe Festival

The Watford Fringe is back for 2024 with a whole month of the best of festival entertainment right on your doorstep.

Venues across Watford will be hosting an extraordinary live line-up of great theatre, music, comedy, dance, magic and family fun-filled shows from 1 July to 3 August.

Every year, venues across Watford host an extraordinary live line-up of great theatre, music, comedy, dance, magic and family fun-filled shows. 2023 was the biggest Watford Fringe yet with more than 100 performances and over 2,000 tickets sold.

There was everything from powerful drama to laugh-out-loud stand-up comedy, bubbles, hypnotism, puppets dance and live music ranging from Big Band to folk, rock, soul, funk and blues. The festival staged world premieres and five star shows form the Edinburgh Fringe. And it welcomed West End stars, TV legends, international singers and fantastic local talent.

There's still time to get involved as a venue, performer or volunteer for this year's Watford Fringe! Find out more at: www.watfringe.co.uk

#### 4. Our town centre

# **Upcoming Watford Borough Council events**

#### **Market Lates**

- Watford Market
- **3 May 2024, 2 August 2024**
- 6:00pm 10:00pm

Visitors will be able to enjoy the ambience of market dining and be treated to a menu of fresh dishes plus drinks in the covered casual dining space.

There will also be craft beer, a pop-up bar and delicious street food from around the globe, including Caribbean, Asian and Korean street food.

#### **Big Screen**

- The Parade event space
- **5-11 August 2024**

#### **Big Beach**

- The Parade event space
- **iii** 16-30 August 2024
- **●** 10:00am 4:00pm

Bringing the beach to Watford Town Centre to save locals travelling to the coast! A large sandpit with a beach vibe and a seaside hut will be situated on The Parade.

The big beach is also completely free – and is the perfect chance for people of all ages to lap up the summer sun, with deck chairs and tables provided to help attendees relax.



#### 5. Crime & safety



### **Herts Connected**

As you may be aware, Herts police are replacing OWL (Online Watch Link) with a new community messaging system - Herts Connected - which residents can sign up to through via herts. police.uk, with the platform launched on 1 April 2024.

They will continue to keep residents updated on local, relevant news including crime prevention advice as they know that being part of a community messaging system helps prevent crime in local neighbourhoods. They hope residents will continue to receive the free, local messages and let them know about the issues they face in their local areas.

Email communications from Herts Connected will come from Neighbourhood Alert, which is already used by more than 30 police forces across the country.

Herts Connected will give residents bespoke and more targeted messages based on their choices of what they want to receive messages about, including the Police and Crime Commissioner, Action Fraud and Neighbourhood Watch - not just based on their postcode.

# New location for Watford Police Station

Watford's Police Station officially moved from Shady Lane to George Street from late 2023 into the beginning of 2024.

The new police station in Watford Town Centre was officially opened with a ceremony attended by local partners and dignitaries in February.

The new building on George Street is a stone's throw from Watford Town Centre, and much closer to the High Street than the former police station on Shady Lane. It was acquired by the county's Police and Crime Commissioner David Lloyd in late 2021, after the Shady Lane site had reached the end of its economic life and was beginning to require costly maintenance.

Mr Lloyd said: "The opening of this new station is a positive step for those living and working in Watford. It also ensures officers and staff will benefit from having modern fit-for-purpose facilities. It was crucial for public confidence and effective policing of the area to find a suitable property which maintains a police station in Watford Town Centre."

The location means it is close to the High Street ensuring officer foot patrols can be conducted easily, while it is also close to the ring road enabling a rapid vehicle response."



#### 6. Dates for your diary

# **Breakfast** with the **BID**

Suite 5 Kings Court, 153 High Street, WD17 2ER

30 April 2024

8:30am - 10:00am

Come along and meet the BID team, learn more about the BIDs priorities for 2024 and how we might be able to support your business and also see our newly rebranded office.

To ensure we can cater for all those able to attend. please RSVP to enquiries@ watfordtowncentre.com by Friday 26 April and let us know if you have any dietary requirements.

We look forward to seeing you.





Thekaa, 151 The Parade, WD17 1NA

21 May 2024

6:00pm - 8:00pm

The social event takes place from 6-8pm at the new Indian gastropub: Thekaa

Not only is it a great opportunity to have a fun night out with your team, but it's also an opportunity to meet in an informal setting with others who work in our town.

It costs nothing to attend and there will be free drinks and food tokens provided to enjoy - Thekaa have an incredible selection of authentic Indian dishes for you to try!

To RSVP, please email through to enquiries@watfordtowncentre.com with the number of guests you will be bringing along to our social event.











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in watford town centre bid

Keep in touch

Send your contact details to enquiries@watfordtowncentre.com to subscribe to our weekly e-updates and receive important information for Watford town centre businesses.