



UPDATE



Last month we circulated details of the BID propositions to all businesses in Royston. We invited business owners to indicate via a questionnaire which projects they felt would be beneficial to their businesses and to the town as a whole. Below we discuss the results of that consultation and the implications with regards to the Business Plan we are preparing for the referendum.



The industrial estate and the town centre at loggerheads?

Unsurprisingly, businesses in the town centre favoured town centre economic propositions whilst those on the industrial estates leaned towards security propositions.

A problem? Actually, no. In terms of financial contribution to Royston First, the balance between the two areas is pretty even – with many smaller ratepayers in the town centre while the industrial companies are fewer in number but much larger. To the credit of both sets of businesses, social projects featured highly in their respective Top 5 activities:

The industrial estate Top 5 projects

- 1 Purchase an additional two-person, uniformed police foot patrol for late night duties in the town centre and around the industrial estate
- 2 Projects to be funded to enhance current youth provision and generate much needed additional activities
- 3 Install advanced CCTV systems at both entrances to the industrial estate to record details of drivers and number plates
- 4 Purchase a mobile CCTV camera and a mobile digital display. Construct power columns at key points throughout the town
- 5 Bring Community Cinema to Royston

The Town Centre Top 5 projects

- 1 Test the potential for a retail revival by attracting a quality butcher into Royston
- 2 Introduce a better 'look and feel' to Angel Pavement
- 3 Projects to be funded to enhance current youth provision and generate much needed additional activities
- 4 Enhance the twice-weekly Charter Market
- 5 Encourage and support local community groups in running more events in Royston

BID to put the community first!

The Royston First BID is highly unusual in the world of Business Improvement Districts for two reasons:

- the BID area identified encompasses the entire town
- our propositions include a number that are targeted towards community activity.

Any concerns there may have been regarding business support for the 'social' projects have been swept away by the appearance of four of them in the Top 10... including taking the number one spot! (see page 2).

Four propositions to be axed

Of the 24 projects proposed, only four received little or no support from either industrial estate or town centre businesses:

Providing vouchers (Proposition J) that could be purchased for spending in the town was felt to be impractical.

Boosting the current loyalty scheme (Proposition I) was deemed unnecessary.

The current town centre signage (Proposition M) is considered adequate (so we will just focus on the industrial estate in this respect).

Our ideas on street furniture (Proposition Q) were thought to be too vague and the responsibility of the local authorities anyway.

Royston First listens to feedback and responds



During the period of consultation with the town's businesses, a number of useful suggestions were received and our propositions have been amended accordingly:

One of the more exciting new ideas was suggested with respect to Proposition F (assisting the retailers). A suggestion came from one of the technology companies on the industrial estate that expertise would be available to help Royston's high street to compete in the world of e-commerce. Although this only resulted in a minor change to the wording of the proposition, it has now turned into an exciting and far-ranging concept;

With regard to the security propositions of additional policing and mobile CCTV, it was suggested that what were originally envisaged as town centre initiatives could also be usefully employed on the industrial estate. This would probably mean a mixture of car and foot patrols, with potential for mobile CCTV to be deployed into hotspots such as car parks as and when necessary.

Propositions to be considered for the Prospectus, listed in (combined) order of priority:

- 1 Projects to be funded to enhance current youth provision and generate much needed additional activities
- 2 Purchase an additional two-person uniformed police foot patrol for late night duties in the town centre and around the industrial estate
- 3 Introduce a better 'look and feel' to Angel Pavement
- 4 Test the potential for a retail revival by attracting a quality butcher into Royston
- 5 Enhance the twice-weekly Charter Market
- 6 Encourage and support local community groups to run more events in Royston
- 7 Return Community Cinema to Royston
- 8 Introduce new sustainable events such as a Food Fayre
- 9 Buy back parking in the town centre to offer as one-hour free spaces
- 10 Secure/create a large footprint store in the town centre to attract a major high street retailer
- 11 Assist retailing with shopping guides, advertising, promotion and e-commerce
- 12 Run a shuttle bus between the industrial estate and the town centre at lunchtime
- 13 Create a support fund for business initiatives
- 14 Establish an empty shops policy delivering an improved appearance
- 15 Purchase a mobile CCTV camera and a mobile digital display. Construct power columns at key points throughout the town
- 16 Install advanced CCTV systems at both entrances to the industrial estate to record details of drivers and number plates
- 17 Upgrade signage leading to and within the industrial estates
- 18 Boost the visibility and visitor experience for the Royston Cave. Introduce a tourism function for the town and heath
- 19 Create 'Gateways' to either specific areas or the entire town highlighting features and attractions
- 20 Persuade Royston's pigeons out of areas where they constitute a nuisance

We pay our rates already, don't we?

So were all the responses received unequivocally positive? Unsurprisingly, the majority of the businesses that took the trouble to reply were supportive, enthusiastic even! There was, however, the odd negative comment... mostly along the lines of 'we agree with your ideas but they should be paid for out of current levels of business rate'.

The drive behind Royston First is the Royston Town Centre Forum – a body that has spent the past four years searching for resources and funding to complete local projects. The local authorities have been very supportive of the Forum and its aims, but the plain fact is that their funding is fully committed to fulfilling their statutory obligations, of which there are many. Don't forget, when North Hertfordshire District Council collects your business rates, they do so on behalf of National Government who only return 13% of it to be spent on services that keep the entire district running efficiently and smoothly. Budgets are always tight and there are many competing pressures for the little cash that is available. The district council (and the police service too) want to do more but simply have not got the resources to do so.

With the BID levy money, the BID company gets to keep ALL that is collected, to spend entirely on the things you know you want doing around Royston.

Our BID prospectus will include an undertaking from NHDC to continue current levels of support and services for Royston. The BID company will constantly monitor the situation and the quality of the services being provided via the business rate system. However, the plain fact is that if we want to see your priority actions actually happen here, we're going to have to raise the additional funding ourselves.

What happens now?

Royston First will work up the top 20 supported propositions and flesh out details of budget, 'deliverability', timescales, etc. Assuming these come together into an affordable budget that can be made to work within a realistic business plan, a full blown prospectus will be delivered to Royston Uniform Business Ratepayers in the autumn. The entire programme will then be the subject of a vote in a formal referendum that will be conducted by the electoral services department of the district council, as is required by the BID legislation.

In the meantime, anybody wishing to share opinions or ideas with us can contact Royston First on 01763 878242