

## **Experience Guildford Annual General Meeting**

**Wednesday 18 October 2023**

**6.00 pm The Long Bar, Harbour Hotel**

### **Present:**

Sally Anne Lowe – Chair/Yvonne Arnaud Theatre

Andy Wood – HSBC

David Goddard – Biddles

Pip Ellis – The Star

Carl Gravett – Weir Rhodes

Sam Orledge – White Lion Walk

Greg Foster – Decade

Lisa Tylor – The Guildford Institute

Laura Keen – MacDonalds

Matthew Cooper – Banham Security

Helen Planeta Paine – Planeta Learning and Development

Bex Bolland – Sustainable Business Network

Amanda Masters – Experience Guildford CEO

Vida Ragbir – Experience Guildford Marketing Support

David Kirk – Experience Guildford

Jane Lyons – Vice Chair, The Keep/PubWatch

Steven Meredith – Alliotts

Abigail Bowden – Metro Bank

Robert Folly – Marks & Spencer

Mal Gilbertson – Silverback Studios

Nick Wyschna – The Fallen Angel

Magdalena Matuszkiewicz – Decathlon

JonJo Jierman – Obsidian Security Services

Ian Forward – Aux

Gary Jeffrey – McDonalds

Andy Locke – G Live

Steve Bookham – The Friary

James Carpenter – JC Coaching

Frankie Gale – Experience Guildford Business Support

Emma White – Experience Guildford

### **1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

SAL welcomed everybody to the 2023 AGM and noted that the AGM was a good opportunity for BID members to meet and contribute to the town centre.

Apologies were received from Dawn Hudd (Guildford Borough Council), Tom Hunt (Guildford Borough Council), Ian Blyth (The Mandolay), Georgina Winfrow (Indigo Moon Holistics), Pete Lambert (Experience Guildford), Vicky Hickson (The Friary) and Jackie Saunders (Mooch).

### **2. Minutes of last AGM**

The minutes of the AGM on 23 November 2022 were not signed off due to a request raised by GF that they be amended to reflect, what he saw as, an inaccuracy. SAL said the minutes would be discussed at the next board meeting which he was welcome to join.

### **3. Election of the Board**

The following members are standing for re-election:

Sally Anne Lowe – Yvonne Arnaud Theatre - Chair

Andy Wood – HSBC

Nick Wyschna – The Fallen Angel

Ian Forward – Aux

Dawn Hudd – Guildford Borough Council

Jane Lyons, Pub Watch/The Keep – Vice Chair

Ian Blyth – The Mandolay Hotel

Abigail Bowden – Metro Bank

Tom Hunt – Guildford Borough Council

David Goddard – Biddles

SAL thanked the board and commented that the directors are all volunteers and claim no expenses from the BID company for their time.

#### **4. Financial accounts overview**

Steven Meredith from Alliotts presented the accounts for the year to 31 January 2023 commenting that the year to 31 January 2023 was different from previous years as more activities took place with a corresponding increase in expenditure. There was also an increase in income from levy payers. The deficit for the year of £103k was funded from reserves built up over the past few years including during the Covid period, and the balance sheet still shows a strong position with reserves of £200k. Overheads are in line with expected levels, with less bad debt provision.

GF asked why the level of debtors was so high. SM replied that the debtors value includes £100k of prepayments, and that the level of levy fee debtors was due to timing. SM explained that not all dues are paid on time, and the debtors figure of £85k represents an average amount.

GF asked why the reserves were at £200k and added that they should be returned to levy payers. SM commented that the BID has a 5 year programme during which time reserves are built up for use later on in the tenure, and that all the reserves have been allocated to future projects. Additionally, as part of the audit process, the provisions are assessed and should the BID not continue, the reserves would cover the liabilities due during the winding up process.

GF questioned why the cost of sales had tripled and requested a breakdown. SM advised that these are the direct costs related to activities, and that there was a lot more going on. AM advised that the accounts are available to view on the Companies House website.

SAL expressed her thanks to Steven Meredith and the team at Alliotts.

#### **5. Overview of activities 2023-2024**

##### **Marketing, Promotions and Events**

- Urban parklet with children's activities
- Summer flowers on the catenary wires
- Coronation bunting and flags on lamp posts
- 40 new hanging baskets
- Adverts on billboards outside town
- Initiatives to drive footfall into the town including bike race, children's business fair, Guildford in Bloom, British Sign Language team-up, Guildford Lions fireworks
- Summer events including Fun Time Thursdays with almost 1,500 parent and child participants, Coronation windows competition and trail, Celebrate Guildford brand
- Customer Service Awards with approximately 2,600 votes
- Christmas 2023 – Little Book of Offers has a new design and will launch on 19 November, free parking on Thursdays in December, Real Change Christmas gift wrapping sessions, wandering entertainers. Decorations to go up before 19 November, and e-shots with details and information to go out on 23 October.

## **Business Support**

- Support given online and in person, attending markets and Fresher's Fairs, handing out marketing collateral.
- Training provided through the year including First Aid at Work, Mental Health First Aid, Sign Language. If there is training you would like, please contact FG.
- Indies feature in the Guide to Surrey highlighting 8 independent stores each month, down from 10, so information included is more detailed.
- Social media covering Farmers Markets, Children's Business Fairs, job vacancies, offers
- Networking – the Summer Social, sponsored by Pews, was successful and EG will look to do this type of event more frequently.

## **Experience Guildford App & Website**

SAL welcomed Malcolm Gilbertson of Silverback Studios to talk about the EG App and Website.

MG gave an overview of the new website and explained that it was an extension of the existing EG identity, with attention grabbing animations on the landing page. Businesses themselves can add events, update their business hours and be creative with their own pages. It is easy to use if businesses or EG wish to add pictures or new pages. There will be an approval process for all changes – EG will aim to approve updates within 2 working days. It will include offers, initiatives, parking information, safer places updates and jobs, amongst other things, and there will be a specific BID area.

AM advised that a launch email will go out when ready and thanked MG for the presentation.

## **Safe, Clean and Welcoming**

- BCRP – DISC system linked to Surrey Police contact centre for a trial period since August. In 2022, 837 reports were sent to DISC, however 582 of them were not reported to Surrey Police. Between July and August 2023, there was a 251% increase in reporting, giving Surrey Police a truer picture of crimes being committed in Guildford. Surrey Police gain valuable intelligence on offenders – 300 letters were issued with 90% of recipients not reoffending.
- Rangers – EW thanked the team and highlighted that they are the eyes and ears in the town centre, keeping the town safe, assisting businesses with reporting issues, walking information points, and attended over 40 First Aid incidents.
- Blitz Days – go undercover with Surrey Police and try to detect and detain criminals.
- Safer Business Action Week – resulted in 1 arrest and 2 letters being issued.
- JL nominated the team for their work in tackling anti-social behaviour for which they received a commendation from Surrey Police.
- Safer Places – initiative has been resurrected with 23 businesses across the day time and night time economy signed up. Businesses receive an information pack and training including dementia and autism awareness. New signage has been produced and there is a support link on the website.
- Knife Angel – PubWatch supported the Knife Angel at Guildford Cathedral to raise awareness of knife crime.
- Best Bar None – now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year with 38 venues participating in the Government approved scheme, all of whom were accredited. Guildford BBN is in the top 3 schemes in the country.
- Purple Flag – country wide accreditation scheme so the town can be “safe, clean and welcoming” and which includes refuse collection, street lighting, safe spaces. PL looking to take over the administration from Guildford Borough Council. The 2023 assessment has

been deferred to January 2024 due to time constraints. Perception study is to close on 10 December 2023.

- PubWatch – part of project group getting DISC and Surrey Police linked up; currently only applies to day time economy, and wish to extend it to include night time economy. WhatsApp group has been set up to pass on information due to lack of effective CCTV.

### **Car Parking and Access**

- Promote free parking after 3pm on Thursdays at Christmas in cooperation with RingGo, and usage shows that parking increases on Thursday without detracting from other days.
- Parking charges – EG makes sure the views of the business community are put forward when GBC raise charges. Increases cannot be stopped, however they can be delayed.
- Access – public transport has to be improved with regular services, campaign for Park & Ride to open earlier and close later to get people into the town. Talk with Guildford Access Group who inform EG regarding what is wrong from a mobility perspective and which helped to achieve improvements to Swan Lane.
- Signage – help with getting signage installed more quickly when there are issues so people can always get to where they should be.

AM thanked SAL and the Board for their support and thanked the team for their hard work in the past year.

## **6. The Future – 2023-24**

- During 2023-2024, EG will deliver the projects in the business plan.
- Behind the scenes: AM emphasised that there is work ongoing which is not immediately apparent. EG will continue to pursue important issues and connect businesses to those who can help resolve problems including reinstating 24 hour CCTV coverage especially for the night time economy and Street Angels.
- Negotiate with street market operators whose positioning affects shops and businesses around them while ensuring they can trade effectively.
- Push for the resurfacing of Swan Lane to be put back on the agenda. Worked with Cllr Fiona Davidson to get it over the line and support businesses during the works.
- Free parking for staff, and the need to balance this with early starters and late finishers, has been in discussion for a number of years.
- Work with major projects teams at GBC, SCC and Highways, and communicate with businesses affected by any works which take place.
- Explore “meanwhile” projects to fill in between other larger projects – minimum effort with maximum results, eg unkempt planters, weed removal, railings
- Attract new businesses into Guildford. It might often appear there is little or no movement on the empty units, however work is going on in the background with legal and planning; keep up communications with agents so EG knows who is coming into Guildford. Also, supported by the property portal, will identify and reach out to brands who look to expand in the UK.
- EG is here to support you and your business – if there is something you would like, please ask.

## **7. Sustainable Business Network**

FG & BB explained that the Sustainable Business Network was funded by Surrey University and part of Zero Carbon Guildford engaging with 300 businesses to reduce carbon emissions and create a

sustainable future. It is spread across Surrey, supports SMEs and micro-businesses, works with existing organisations and sets up workshops. Please contact FG if you would like to get involved.

Urban Greening – a 2 year pilot to improve air quality and create green corridors.

## **8. Questions and Any Other Business**

NW asked if the North Street market move had been decided; AM replied that unofficially, it was going to move to the bottom of the High Street, however discussions are still ongoing. The North Street scheme still needs to go through the Section 104 negotiations so will most likely be in 2024/25.

CG queried if free parking at Christmas was helpful; AM said that car parks are not always full and that free parking attracts visitors to the town centre.

CG asked about the requirement to use RingGo only as not all car park users have smart phones, and that if parking was by app only, then some visitors will turn around and leave the town centre. AM agreed to try and identify a way to extend the offers to those without smart phones.

Debenhams site – Native Land are looking to sell the site with planning permission citing logistics of demolition as a reason.

GF asked if Board members had to be based in Guildford and that AW was no longer based at HSBC in Guildford; SAL responded that the Board members represent levy payers in the town centre. It is the levy payer's decision as to who from their organisation represents their business.

CG asked if there was an update on the vacant House of Fraser unit; AM replied that Fenwick's are due to take some of the space, although there is no indication of when.

There were no further questions tabled.

## **9. Close**

SAL thanked AM, VR, FG, PL, EW and the Rangers for their great work during the year.