

Harrogate BID Limited

Thursday, 30 April 2020

Dear Sara & Simon,

Directors' Notice of Resignation

We are writing to you as the Deputy Chair and Acting Manager of Harrogate BID Limited ("BID") to give notice that we are with immediate effect resigning as directors of the company.

The principal reasons for our decision are as follows:-

1. Without a consensus view on the board of the dire state of the town's economy, particularly its retail heart, and its causes, addressing the key issues cannot be achieved. The strong influence of Borough and County Council on the board of an organisation that according to government guidance is supposed to be a 'business-led' partnership means that any initiative that addresses the councils' input is endlessly debated, and sensible options resisted. It has not even been possible to garner cross-board agreement that the current aesthetic state of Harrogate town centre is not adequate, something that is self-evident to business leaders and residents alike but is constantly denied or excused by the councils.
2. Even were these realities to be commonly agreed by the board, the intransigence of the original Business Plan would not allow enough funds to be spent on the most needed areas and allows for further wastage of funds on others. The meagre funding allocated in the Business Plan to the vital area of 'Safe, Clean and Welcoming' is one example of its unsuitability to the current situation. BID's current strategy and Business Plan (which were conceived at an early stage in BID's creation and before the worst effects of the retail crisis in the town, the substantial economic damage following the UCI Championships and now the COVID-19 lock-down) are really no longer appropriate to the situation we face today, and should have been re-written and budgets re-allocated.
3. From the start, Harrogate BID was set up not to operate in the open or transparent way it should, with addended confidentiality provisions for directors that other BIDs, for instance York's, do not have and which we are informed are incompatible with it performing a public function. Recent events reinforce this view, and BID is currently pursuing an approach that appears to be more about suppressing criticism and spinning positive messaging than acknowledging the hard realities of the situation.
4. We have lost confidence that we are part of a team that will spend its levy payers' money wisely. Such transformative commercial imperatives as free parking would be unlikely ever to be championed by Harrogate BID, as they have been by other BIDs across the country, while there is such a strong council influence on its board, and the business plan forces spending on areas that do not address the key issues.

Much as it pains us to state this, Harrogate was struggling before COVID-19. Now, the reality of the situation is becoming very serious indeed. We are glad that there is now an acting manager in position, and while we will not be part of BID's governance going forward, would like to wish all the board members every success.

Signed for and on behalf of

Robert Spencer, Director

Robert Ogden, Director

Christopher Bentley, Director

Robert Kennedy-Bruyneels, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Kennedy-Bruyneels', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Kennedy-Bruyneels