

Canterbury Business Improvement District's Response: Canterbury City Council's Consultation on the Corporate Plan 2024

We support the Council linking the Corporate Plan to the UN SDGs, not least in relation to climate change and biodiversity, but so many other areas as well – health, wellbeing, education (including HEFE), equality, economic growth, innovation and infrastructure, affordable and clean energy, peace, justice and partnership.

Urban centres consume over two-thirds of the world's energy and account for more than 70% of global CO2 emissions. Cities are heat islands, and therefore vulnerable to extreme weather, due to the amount of asphalt, concrete and stone combined with the loss of biodiversity. A focus on reducing carbon emissions and improving biodiversity will benefit everyone. A sustainable urban environment means a better place for businesses and a better place for customers. However, there needs to be a strategy in place to support not only residents, but economic development, innovation and related infrastructure as well.

Overall

We would like to see business better represented in the Corporate Plan, and to understand specifically how the Corporate Plan will support the needs and ambitions of businesses and organisations in Canterbury that contribute so significantly to the city's economic and social wellbeing.

Canterbury has been a city of pilgrimage / tourism, retail and hospitality for over 850 years. The city's economic drivers are heritage and culture, tourism, HEFE and shopping, and we would like to see this reflected in the Corporate Plan. The Cathedral is not mentioned, higher education only in passing, and the significant role that tourism plays is not mentioned except the reference to the 2020 ED and Tourism study.

There is a strong synergy between a thriving commercial sector (shops, professional services, social enterprises, charities – all sectors, all sizes) and the health and wellbeing of users of the city (residents, students, staff and tourists), and we would like to see that reflected in the Council's Corporate Plan.

Business is only mentioned five times in this draft, and there is no reference to the economic and social impact they provide, and how they can contribute to meeting the UN's SDGs and also how businesses need to be supported.

From a funding perspective, the Corporate Plan is a key strategic document that not only sets the agenda and priorities for the Council's activity but also has the potential to enable investment and activity led by other organisations and groups. This is because, in order for other organisations to leverage in additional funding, key local authority strategies and metrics need to be in place.

Also related to funding, we would also like to understand the vision for investing UK Shared Prosperity Funding over the coming year and how businesses will be supported and benefit from this funding.

Theme 1 -Protecting our district for future generations

Protecting the district needs to include the commercial space as well. How will businesses be supported?

Theme 2 – Feeling safe, secure and healthy

We would like to see a more holistic vision in this area of work, including strategies for preventing and designing out anti-social behaviour alongside the need for Council enforcement to be present in the city centre so that staff and customers feel safe, including the high numbers of school children who pass through the city every day. We suggest a strong focus on “designing out” anti-social behaviour – again, working in partnership. In particular, there is a need to provide and/or enable leisure services for young people. For example, a skate park and also indoor entertainment so that young people have somewhere safe and worthwhile to go.

Enforcement is only part of the answer. On this point, we would like to see more proactive involvement from the Council regarding shop fronts. The Council has recently produced Shop Front Guidelines, but in order for the guidelines to be successful, we need a joined up approach that combines education, support and enforcement.

Housing developments require a holistic vision for how people will live, work and socialise as referenced above.

Theme 3 – Growing our district sustainably

See business support needs mentioned above.

Regarding affordable and clean energy, will this relate to business and the city as well? Could this be an opportunity to evaluate the heat network pilot ?

This section references education, wholesale and retail trade, human health and social work activities as the most common industries across our district are. This list is missing *hospitality and tourism*.

Theme 4 – Listening to our residents

Please could this be amended to include business – “Listening to our residents *and businesses*”.

Final thoughts

There is nothing in this draft Corporate Plan that acknowledges the role the BID plays and the £5.6 million businesses have invested through the BID over the last ten years. Whilst the work of the FSB is helpful for small businesses, the BID supports all businesses and all sectors, and we have a crucial role to play in supporting a thriving city centre economy. The Council is also a member of Canterbury BID and works with us on multiple



projects, including Visit Canterbury, Safer Streets / Canterbury Community Safety Partnership, marketing campaign, UKSPF-funded business training for the whole district, and more.

Businesses and organisations of all shapes and sizes have a role to play in Canterbury's economy – from independents to national brands, hospitality and leisure businesses, charities and social enterprises, and also our higher and further education institutions, the Cathedral and the whole of the World Heritage Site.

Canterbury is a successful city but in a precarious transition. The city needs co-ordinated investment to make the most of its strengths and help overcome the challenges that lie ahead. We would like to understand in more detail the Council's proposed role in economic development, inward investment and and in supporting the business community within the four themes.

Cities will always be a place where people gather to live, work and socialise. As we head towards a new Local Plan, we need a strong Corporate Plan in place so that the Council can not only fund its vision for Canterbury, but enable others to fund it, too. The development of the action plan and metrics mentioned in the draft Corporate Plan will be essential and we would like to understand how Canterbury BID can be involved with this.

We want Canterbury to be a thriving place for business, their clients, customers and staff, and for the important role that business can play to be reflected in the Corporate Plan. Our vision is for Canterbury to realise its full potential as an award-winning, vibrant and desirable destination, setting the example that other cities want to follow.