



31 October 2026

Statement from Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield BID

Following Gracechurch Shopping Centre's LinkedIn post and letter delivered to hundreds of local businesses opposing the renewal of Sutton Coldfield BID, we have issued a statement setting out the facts and highlighting what the BID has delivered for our town centre over the past 15 years.

As a not-for-profit, business-led and business-funded organisation, we are proud of the difference we have made.

We organise the majority of the town centre's events, including the Food and Jazz Festivals, Christmas markets, car shows, monthly farmers' markets, live music and family activities. We also champion local businesses through marketing, networking, business events and promotional guides.

Beyond events, we invest in a cleaner, safer and more attractive town centre through planting, graffiti and fly-tipping removal, evening security patrols, street bunting, public art and new litter bins. We also successfully campaigned for the replacement of the town centre's CCTV system.

The proposed BID levy for the next five years is 1.8% of a property's rateable value, an increase of 0.27 percentage points on the previous term. This is in line with neighbouring BIDs, with Solihull charging 1.75% and the Jewellery Quarter 2%.

- **44% of businesses** will pay less than £300 a year (under £6 a week).
- **41% of businesses** will pay less than £1,000 a year (approximately £19 a week).
- **Just nine businesses** will pay between £3,000 and £5,000 annually.
- The proposed £7,500 annual levy cap applies to individual properties, and **only one property** in the BID area will reach this maximum. It is neither Gracechurch Shopping Centre nor any of its tenants.
- **Gracechurch Shopping Centre's** total annual contribution across its multiple properties, including office, vacant units and car park, will be £8,538, reducing as vacant units become occupied.

At a time when town centres face enormous challenges, removing an established organisation that brings businesses together, attracts visitors, improves the environment and advocates for positive change would, in our view, be an extraordinary backward step for Sutton Coldfield.

Sutton Coldfield needs more collaboration, not less. More investment, not less. A stronger collective business voice, not the loss of one.

We are proud to have served Sutton Coldfield for 15 years, and we remain determined to continue doing so.

Please read our full statement for the facts, our response to the points raised and why we believe the BID's renewal matters to Sutton Coldfield.

Statement from Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield BID

Following the publication of a statement by Gracechurch Shopping Centre on LinkedIn and their hand-delivery of letters to hundreds of businesses across Sutton Coldfield town centre this week, we feel compelled to respond.

We are deeply disappointed by Gracechurch Shopping Centre's decision to actively campaign against the renewal of Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield BID, a not-for-profit organisation that has worked tirelessly for the benefit of our town centre for the past 15 years.

What makes this particularly disappointing is that Gracechurch Shopping Centre has been involved and supportive of the BID for much of that time, with Gracechurch shopping centre managers serving as BID company Directors and Chairmen, albeit under previous centre ownership.

It is also extraordinary that, despite distributing correspondence to hundreds of businesses and making its position public on LinkedIn, Gracechurch did not provide the BID itself with a copy of its letter. We became aware of the correspondence through others. For an organisation raising concerns about transparency, accountability and partnership working, we find this approach particularly difficult to understand.

Fifteen years of investment, commitment and delivery

Sutton Coldfield BID was established 15 years ago, before the creation of Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council, with a simple but powerful principle: businesses working together, contributing collectively and investing in the future of their town centre.

At the heart of every Business Improvement District (BID) is the principle that businesses achieve more by working together than in isolation. A BID is a non-political, business-led and business-funded organisation, built on collaboration, shared ambition and local leadership. It gives businesses a collective voice and a direct role in shaping the future of their town centre.

By pooling resources through a collective levy, businesses can deliver improvements, initiatives and promotional activity that would be difficult to achieve individually. This investment adds value to, rather than replaces, the statutory responsibilities of local authorities, creating a more vibrant, welcoming and successful town centre for businesses, residents and visitors alike.

For 15 years, Sutton Coldfield BID has championed these principles, representing the collective interests of local businesses and supporting the town centre's commercial success.

Today, the BID raises approximately £240,000 annually. With that relatively modest budget, our not-for-profit organisation delivers and supports an extensive programme of town centre activity, including:

- The majority of town centre events and festivals, including car shows, Christmas activities, food festivals, seasonal attractions and monthly markets.
- Extensive town centre marketing, business promotion and campaigns encouraging people to shop, eat and spend locally.
- Environmental improvements, including planting, new litter bins, street bunting, public art and enhancements to the town centre's appearance.
- Graffiti removal, fly-tipping removal and other practical measures to improve the trading environment.
- Evening security patrols, sponsorship of local events and organisations.

- Business networking events, business speaking events and opportunities for local businesses to connect and collaborate.
- Advocacy on behalf of businesses on issues affecting the safety, attractiveness and long-term success of our town centre.

We are particularly proud of our recent campaign for the replacement of CCTV across Sutton Coldfield town centre. For years, there has been no operational public CCTV in the town centre and we have pressed and lobbied for improvements to this vital infrastructure, recognising the importance of public safety and business confidence. We are delighted that the replacement of the CCTV system has now finally been agreed. This is precisely why having a collective business voice matters.

Public investment and collective responsibility

Gracechurch Shopping Centre states that it has a significant stake in the future of Sutton Coldfield. We agree, and we wholeheartedly welcome the planned regeneration of Gracechurch Shopping Centre and the Red Rose Centre.

The BID is not a commercial property owner. It does not exist to generate profits for shareholders or to advance the interests of any single business. It exists to reinvest funds into Sutton Coldfield. Into its environment. Into its events, its marketing, its safety and its future.

We find it deeply concerning that an organisation seeking to play such a significant role in the regeneration of Sutton Coldfield would choose to oppose an established collective business organisation rather than work constructively alongside it.

The value delivered to Gracechurch Shopping Centre

Gracechurch Shopping Centre describes itself as one of the BID's major contributors. We have reviewed the proposed annual BID contribution for its vacant units and the assets it is currently responsible for, and their BID contribution would be £8,538 per annum. Their tenants would also be contributing, in the same way as they do Business Rates.

Our analysis shows that the BID's expenditure on events and activities exceeds Gracechurch Shopping Centre's proposed annual contribution. This does not include the wider value of town centre marketing, visitor attraction campaigns and promotional support for Gracechurch's own tenants.

Last year, when Gracechurch informed us that it would not be providing its traditional Santa's Grotto, the BID stepped in to organise and fund this. We also delivered a Pumpkin Patch, Valentine's Globe, winter Snow Globe, children's character meet and greets, brass band and numerous other attractions in Gracechurch Shopping Centre. Our annual food festivals, car shows, family events and Christmas Market also attracted substantial footfall to the town centre.

Setting the record straight on finances

Gracechurch correctly states that the proposed BID levy would rise from 1.53% to 1.8% of a property's rateable value. To put this into context, this is an increase of just 0.27 percentage points, with the proposed rate remaining below the Jewellery Quarter BID's 2% and broadly in line with Solihull BID's 1.75%.

Gracechurch also highlights the proposed increase in the maximum annual levy cap from £4,170 to £7,500. However, that maximum is not a charge applied to every business. The single largest levy-paying business in Sutton Coldfield, which is not Gracechurch Shopping Centre nor one of their tenants, would contribute £7,500 annually. Nine individual businesses would contribute between £3,000 - £5,000 per annum and 44% of businesses would be

contributing less than £300 per year to the BID. 41% of businesses would be contributing less than £1,000 per year.

The proposed levy arrangements are clearly outlined in the BID Business Plan 2027–2031, which is available on our website. Printed copies were also sent by Royal Mail to all BID members last week.

Gracechurch also raises concerns about transparency and the level of detail available in the BID's financial reporting. As they are aware, each year, financial information covering previous expenditure and forthcoming spending plans accompanies the BID levy billing process administered by Birmingham City Council and is sent to all businesses.

Furthermore, whilst our accounts are available on Companies House, we also offered Gracechurch Shopping Centre access to our fully audited accounts for additional scrutiny. We have yet to receive a response to that offer. We welcome transparency and accountability. We also believe those raising concerns should be willing to engage with the information and opportunities for scrutiny already offered.

A BID representing every sector

Earlier this year, Gracechurch Shopping Centre asked us to consider removing offices and the college from the BID arrangements upon renewal. We declined.

For 15 years, our BID has operated on the principle that all eligible businesses, across all sectors, contribute collectively to the town centre's success. We do not believe it would be right to exclude entire sectors simply because one private company would prefer a different approach.

Nevertheless, we offered a constructive alternative: a dedicated retail sub-committee, which Gracechurch Shopping Centre could chair, to provide focused representation and influence over retail-related priorities with their own ring-fenced budget. Gracechurch did not agree to this proposal.

We remain committed to a BID that represents the whole town centre, not one that is structured around the preferences of its largest or most influential businesses.

Markets, festivals and responsible use of funds

Gracechurch's correspondence highlights that the BID receives no payment from the private operator responsible for our annual Christmas markets and food festivals. However, it fails to acknowledge that the BID does not pay the operator to deliver these events either.

Our operator covers all associated costs, including gazebos, tables, generators, lighting, hostile vehicle mitigation measures, security, event staffing, street trading licences and insurance. Gracechurch tenants have also benefitted from free pitches at these events.

The BID supports these events by organising and funding entertainment, turning a market into an event and further helping to attract visitors, increase dwell time and encourage spending in local businesses.

This partnership enables the BID to bring popular events into Sutton Coldfield without incurring the substantial costs of event delivery, while directing levy-payers' funds towards activities that enhance the visitor experience and benefit the wider town centre.

Our monthly Farmers and Craft Market was launched four years ago specifically to increase Sunday footfall for town centre businesses. Managed entirely in-house by the BID, it

generates approximately £10,000 annually, helping to fund our wider programme of activities. We reinvest in face painting, live music and entertainment at each market to attract visitors, enhance their experience and encourage longer stays in the town centre.

In addition, this year we successfully secured £21,000 in funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to deliver further town centre improvements.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate the BID's commitment to maximising external funding, generating income and delivering added value, while making responsible and effective use of levy-payers' money.

The future of Sutton Coldfield belongs to its businesses

There are now 340 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) across the UK, including 13 in Birmingham alone. BIDs are a well-established and widely recognised model for bringing businesses together to enhance their trading environments, strengthen local economies and improve town and city centres. Having operated in the UK for over 22 years, BIDs have evolved from traditional town centre management approaches, providing a more collaborative, business-led and sustainable way to deliver local improvements.

Experienced and major shopping centre management organisations, including Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL) and Savills, have extensive experience of working in partnership with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and are strong supporters of the BID model. Across the UK, shopping centres and BIDs work collaboratively to enhance town centres, attract visitors, support businesses and strengthen local economies. Shopping centres and BIDs should therefore be regarded as natural partners, working towards shared objectives, rather than as opposing interests.

It is therefore profoundly disappointing that Gracechurch Shopping Centre has chosen to campaign against an organisation with which it has had such a longstanding relationship.

We cannot help but question what Sutton Coldfield would gain from losing its independent, collective business voice.

Who would take responsibility for coordinating and funding our extensive programme of events, as well as the many community events we sponsor and support at local businesses and the fire station?

Who would be responsible for town centre marketing? We have invested significant time and effort in building a strong and engaged social media audience, now at 30,000 followers across our Facebook and Instagram pages. Our consistent and proactive approach to promoting the town centre has been widely recognised and praised by businesses and stakeholders, helping to raise its profile, attract visitors and support the local economy.

Who would continue the environmental improvements, planting in neglected areas, graffiti and fly tipping removal from private land, public art, evening security patrols, seasonal displays and business engagement?

Who would advocate collectively for issues such as CCTV, safety, accessibility and the wider trading environment?

And, perhaps most importantly, who would ensure that the voices of hundreds of individual businesses continue to be heard, rather than the priorities of a small number of powerful interests?

We welcome new Board Members, scrutiny, constructive challenge and suggestions for improvement. Our new Business Plan for 2027–2031 has been shaped by feedback from local businesses and sets out our commitment to building on our achievements, strengthening existing initiatives and introducing improvements that respond to the needs and priorities of the business community.

But we will not accept 15 years of dedicated work being dismissed without challenge, particularly when the shopping centre making those criticisms has itself been involved in the BID for much of that time.

We will stand by our record

We are immensely proud of what Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield BID has achieved.

Proud of the events we have delivered.

Proud of the businesses we have promoted.

Proud of the improvements we have made.

Proud of the partnerships we have built.

And proud of the collective voice we have provided to Sutton Coldfield businesses for 15 years.

We will hold our heads high.

We will proceed to the renewal ballot next month with confidence in our record, our purpose and our commitment to the town centre.

We will not be deterred from representing local businesses simply because a commercial property owner has chosen to oppose us publicly.

Ultimately, the future of Sutton Coldfield BID should be decided by eligible businesses through the democratic ballot process, not by the influence of any single private organisation.

Every eligible business deserves to make its own informed decision, based on the facts and on what it believes is best for the future of Sutton Coldfield.

We sincerely hope that businesses will recognise the value of maintaining an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to championing their interests.

At a time when town centres face enormous challenges, removing an established organisation that brings businesses together, attracts visitors, improves the environment and advocates for positive change would, in our view, be an extraordinary backward step for Sutton Coldfield.

Sutton Coldfield needs more collaboration, not less. More investment, not less. A stronger collective business voice, not the loss of one.

We are proud to have championed Sutton Coldfield and its businesses for the past 15 years, and we remain committed to building on that work. **Please vote YES in the BID ballot, taking place from 7 November to 4 December 2026.**

Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield BID

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