



## Background

Southport BID was established in 2014 and works with over 950 businesses to promote the vitality of Southport as a retail and leisure destination. Focused on the commercial heart of the town, the BID works mainly with businesses in the retail, hospitality, leisure, and accommodation sectors. The BID works collaboratively with Sefton Council, the Southport Tourism Business Network who manage Visit Southport and other stakeholders and public agencies.

## Southport BID's approach to place branding

The BID's approach to place making and branding was motivated by recognising the need to grow the visitor economy and offering a distinctive retail experience that is an alternative to its nearest core city, Liverpool.

As a business representative organisation the BID views its role as "... improving the trading and physical environment, developing aspiration and how the town is perceived. Since the 2008 recession BIDs have become more important as stewards of their area, to maintain the environment, to bring in funding, and push for additional services so that places continue to have relevance and position."

Southport's heritage is an integral part of the refreshed place brand being developed by the BID, Sefton Council, and the Southport Tourism Business Network. A key consideration has been the balance between giving the town a sense of identity and place that will attract new businesses without projecting too sedate an image; it is important that the town is celebrated as a lively and attractive place for residents of all ages.

## Southport's use of heritage in place branding

The BID considers maintaining the "built heritage and environment at a vital and attractive level..." as essential to Southport's identity and is pushing the role of the public realm in developing Southport's future. Work with Sefton Council ensures core public realm such as street lamps are maintained and replaced and the town centre is kept clean.

Lord Street, the main shopping thoroughfare at the heart of Southport and an elegant tree lined Victorian boulevard with listed buildings, canopied walkways, shopping arcade and gardens was placed on the Heritage at Risk register in 2015. The BID and Sefton Council are working together to bring in new investment to conserve and improve heritage buildings and features of the town. This joint work has already led to improved maintenance by Lord Street property

owners and a Heritage Lottery Fund application is in progress for Lord Street, the Promenade and connecting streets.

The BID funded a contemporary lighting scheme for the trees, re-establishing a 1950s Southport tradition of tree lights. In a separate scheme, the BID is working with various national brands including Wilko, Marks & Spencer, and Boots on a Healthy High Street programme, an initiative led by Business in the Community that engages larger businesses in projects to revitalise high streets, create employment and improve footfall.

Southport is known for large-scale events; the Flower Show, Air Show, and British Musical Fireworks Competition. However, these are held on the fringes of the town centre and the BID has increased the events programmes and supports complementary activities in the retail core that create greater opportunities for wider business engagement and benefits.

## Benefits of heritage and place branding activities

Place branding supports the growth of the town's businesses and the promotion of the town further afield. The main impact is increased footfall and visitor spend (which are both measured). The impact of events is assessed through visitor surveys and business data. The BID also recognises that it is "...important to sell the town back to residents so that they and their families are encouraged to make more use of the centre and sell its virtues to a wider audience."

## Challenges of using heritage in place branding

The wealth of heritage and the challenges facing local retail businesses led the BID to support Lord Street being placed on the Heritage at Risk register. As a result a Heritage at Risk officer was appointed and the BID is working with Sefton Council's conservation team on funding initiatives.



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