



**LIVING LERWICK
ANNUAL REPORT
2024/2025**



Living Lerwick Ltd manages the Lerwick town centre Business Improvement District which operates to improve the physical, trading and community conditions in the area. Members voted to renew the BID in August 2021 with a 74% 'Yes' vote.

All business properties in the BID area which are listed with the Scottish Assessors Valuation Role for non domestic rates are automatically members of Living Lerwick under the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 (part 9), except where specific exemptions as detailed in the BID proposal apply.

There are 36 operational BIDs across Scotland encouraging collaborative working practices in the public, private and third sectors. Most are area based, but themed groups such as tourism or food and drink BIDs have been increasing platforms in recent years.

These all focus on supporting and improving conditions for businesses.
This report is a summary of the fourth year of Living Lerwick's third term – year 13 overall for the BID.

BID Directors

In 2024/25 Living Lerwick had nine directors in total. Two stepped down during the year.

Current directors are as follows:

Steve Mathieson, Chair (Visit Scotland)

Edna Irvine, Vice Chair (Smith & Robertson)

David Coe (Ninian)

Stewart Jamieson (Harry's) Resigned 25th June 2025

Ben Mullay (The Camera Centre)

Michael Laurenson (Cee & Jays)

Louise Grains (Jamieson's of Shetland)

Ana Steibar (Refan Perfume Boutique Shetland) Resigned 20th May 2025

Ross Manson (No. 88 Bar and Restaurant)

Shetland Islands Council appointed Liaison Officer, Neil Henderson, also attends meetings in an informal advisory capacity with no voting rights.

Living Lerwick Business Plan

The Living Lerwick Business Plan sets out the areas of work that the project management team work towards. The following priority areas were identified by member businesses prior to the renewal ballot in 2021:

- More footfall to the town centre
- More marketing of town centre businesses and activities
- Increasing access options for the town centre
- Activities to make the town centre more attractive
- Providing business support to town centre businesses

Chairmans Foreword

Lerwick town centre has continued to see strong engagement and support throughout 2024–25, with Living Lerwick working year-round to promote local businesses, encourage footfall, and maintain a vibrant and welcoming town centre for both residents and visitors.

Our promotions and campaigns continue to play an important role in supporting local trade. The popular “Spend at Da Street” initiative once again encouraged people to shop locally, rewarding shoppers while helping keep spending within the local economy and supporting businesses throughout the town centre.

Marketing Lerwick and showcasing what our businesses have to offer remains a major focus for Living Lerwick. Social media continues to be one of our strongest tools for engagement, with several campaigns achieving excellent results over the past year. Seasonal campaigns, community promotions, and town centre initiatives all helped raise the profile of Lerwick and encourage people to support local businesses.

Community-focused content proved especially successful, with family-friendly events, competitions, and festive promotions generating strong engagement across our social media platforms and helping attract both local audiences and visitors alike.

Alongside our digital promotion, Living Lerwick has continued to support and celebrate new businesses opening within the town centre, helping to showcase the variety and uniqueness of Lerwick’s retail, hospitality, and service sectors.

Tourism once again brought valuable additional footfall to the town throughout the summer months, particularly through cruise ship visits, helping support many local businesses. At the same time, we recognise that the continued success of Da Street depends on the loyal support of local customers who choose to shop locally throughout the year.

2026 is an important years for the BID, with a renewal ballot in August where members will have the opportunity to vote for a fourth BID term for Lerwick town centre. In order to continue the valuable work done and the support provision to businesses, I would urge members to use their democratic right and vote YES for a further term.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank our member businesses, partners, volunteers, and the wider community for their continued support. By working together, we continue to ensure Lerwick remains a thriving town centre and an important hub for the whole community for generations to come.

Steve Mathieson
Chair
Tel:01595 743141

BID Management

Living Lerwick project work is managed on behalf of the board of directors by Emma Miller of Réalta Events Management, which is also a member business. Around 25 hours of time per week is spent on BID work between two staff.

In addition to the main business plan headings, there is a significant amount of administrative work carried out to operate the BID. These activities include:

- Attending Lerwick Community Council meetings to represent member businesses.
- Monitor national BID activities, participate in national surveys and liaise regularly with other BID managers to share information, activity ideas and good practice.
- Preparing and monitoring budgets, processing all financial transactions, and preparing for end of year accounts.
- Levy collection monitoring and processing of payments from local authority, including identifying and resolving discrepancies in balances due.
- Checking and reporting to national support agency on levels of unpaid levy locally, and follow up discussion on comparison with other BID areas.
- Preparation of annual report and arrangement of AGM.
- Management and maintenance of two storage locations (for Christmas lights, planters, equipment and archives etc)
- Preparation of funding applications, claims and reports as required.
- Review and feedback on local consultation matters with local authority and other stakeholders.
- Participation in training, discussions and planning to develop a Place Plan for Lerwick town centre. This did not proceed due to advice received that Living Lerwick was not permitted to act as an agency for this purpose.
- Working with SIC Planning to provide information and contribute to the update of the Town Centre Health Check.
- A full check was carried out of non domestic rateable values for BID area properties and a number of discrepancies identified leading to wrong charges or incorrect information in the levy system. Relevant members were informed and details sent to the local authority Finance Service to request resolution of these errors.
- Engagement with a Social Enterprise consultant in regard to business development.
- Engagement with Highland Broadband on fibre installation consultation.
- Meet new local Chief Inspector to establish links.
- Attend meetings and presentations as invited on matters such as Royal Mail staffing and the Islands Plan



More Footfall

- In October 2024 the team encouraged business participation and supported a craft activity week. There was limited uptake from members, but positive engagement from those who took part and the customers who participated in activities offered.
- The annual Halloween Trail had over 200 participants.
- The cheeky elf trail was held over the Christmas holidays and a new Valentine heart hunt was trialled in February.
- The Easter trail was popular with 20 businesses decorating their own Easter chick, with 121 bairns taking part.
- During the summer, 18 businesses took part in the Dinosaur Trail and the Summer Treasure Hunt included 13 businesses.
- Ideas for Valentines activity days were shared with hospitality and retail members, but there was no take up in delivery.
- Spend at Da Street: September 2024 saw 387 entries with four prize winners, followed by a strong increase in October with 583 entries. The November/December bumper draw featured six lucky winners, each receiving £175 worth of gifts and vouchers. From January to August 2025, the campaign generated an impressive 3,756 entries, with eight winners each receiving a £50 voucher to spend at a local business of their choice.

In 2024, 6,408 cards were returned, representing an estimated £1,281,600 in local spend. In 2025, 6,403 cards were returned, equating to approximately £1,280,600 spent within local businesses. Combined, this equates to 12,811 cards returned and a total estimated local spend of £2,562,200 across the two years.



Christmas Parade and Grotto

The annual Christmas Parade, supported by RNLI, Lerwick Port Authority, Up Helly Aa committee and a range of volunteers was held in dry conditions again. Large crowds gathered to see Santa come ashore at Victoria Pier and lead the parade along the street. He was joined this year for the first time by Mrs Claus. Other changes to the parade participants this year included new quad drivers and Lerwick Amateur Swimming Club and Girl Guides.

The Grotto continues to be a popular attraction, led by the ladies from RNLI Lerwick. 400 children visited Santa and a £3500 donation was made to the Lifeboat fund.



Footfall Monitoring

A review was carried out of the HUQ system used to provide footfall monitoring figures through GPS systems. This was linked to a mapped area and used mobile phone data to monitor numbers of people. Figures being provided were assessed, but considered inaccurate due to local knowledge of trends and events. The provider did attempt to deliver additional spend based information though a Mastercard based data collection system and while results were interesting, they were also clearly not locally specific and of no value, so the system was discontinued. After significant research there does not appear to be a cost effective, accurate, outdoor footfall management system that can operate with the limited connectivity available in the town centre.

Other Activity

Living Lerwick was invited to take part in planning discussions for the Norwegian Liberation Convoy planned to mark 75 years since Victory in Europe Day. Several Norwegian vessels arrived in the Harbour and received hundreds of visitors each day. A town centre parade and other civic events were arranged by the local authority.

The Project Team were pleased to be invited to a Shetland Youth Voice Event in June, organised by SIC Youth Services, where there was an opportunity for young people to feed back their thoughts about social spaces in the town centre and express their concerns and priorities for access and services.

Doggy Day Out

Lerwick town centre saw the first Doggy Day Out in August. 63 dogs owners brought their furry friends along to Harrison Square where agility games and treats were available. Local group, Dog Park Shetland, were in attendance to consult dog owners on plans for a possible new dog friendly park and desired facilities.

Special offers provided by shops and cafes on the day included discounts on leads and toys at LHD, Puppacinos at Blyde Welcome and Pupcakes at The Original Cake Fridge.

Doggy photo portraits were taken by Ben Mullay and uploaded to social media for the public to vote for their favourite in three categories. The winning dog owners were awarded with vouchers for local businesses, to treat their pets. Over 5000 votes were received in total.



More Marketing

Website and social media updates continue to be posted on a regular basis, with member businesses promote through shared posts, original content, blog posts and updating of the online Business Directory. Monthly Spend at da Street winners are announced along with the businesses they choose to spend their vouchers in.

The Business Listings on the window map at Ellesmere Stores were updated in September 2024.

A 2024 Christmas Gift Guide was developed with images and price point gift ideas from members. This was shared on the website and through social media. Regular information updates were posted through November and December on late night shopping and festive opening hours for businesses.

The Christmas film in 2024 was produced by Jonathon Bulter and delivered a heartwarming depiction of a granddaughter helping her grandmother to do her Christmas shopping locally after a less than successful attempt to order online. This received an excellent response with over 5000 views on YouTube and 45,500 views on Facebook, including over 1000 likes and 126 shares.

A printed information map was produced, with part financial assistance from Shetland Islands Council. This was a pocket-sized replica of the window map detailing all town centre businesses by location and sector. With no Visitor Information Service in the town centre, these maps were distributed to all member businesses who wanted them and they were used to assist visitors through the summer with accessing goods and services. Feedback on these from members and the public was very favourable.

Member Blogs were produced and published on the website where members agreed to contribute to these. Requests are issued to all new members on first contact, and to existing members on a regular basis, particularly where the project team are made aware of new products, services or initiatives.



During **Scotland Loves Local Week**, photos and interviews with featured businesses were published daily online over 12 days of the campaign with good engagement.



In addition to specific project marketing, other day to day activities included:

- responding to media queries
- requesting input from members to specific interview requests
- adding Lerwick town centre to VisitScotland's website as a destination
- Promotion of Sunday opening times during the summer
- Fathers day promotion, including creation of original video content

Social Media

Our social media pages are active with regular posting and a good following.

Facebook followers increased from 6786 in August 2024 to 7523 in September 2025.

Instagram followers increased from 2077 in August 2024 to 2205 in September 2025.

Facebook continues to be the most popular platform following.



Increased Access

Parking and Housing Development

We carried out a physical count of car park spaces and usage at the Hillhead over two weeks – one where a cruise ship was in port, and one not. The figures were compiled and clearly showed that the area is over capacity at multiple times on a regular basis. There is no capacity to reduce the spaces available without negatively impacting access to the town centre. This information was presented to Shetland Islands Council but received no formal response.

A meeting was offered with the Housing Service as the lead on the project, however this was unable to take place until early September 2025, where it was established that no formal plan is yet established for the area, other than the demolition of existing properties – due to take place in early 2026.

Planned Road Closures

Annual negotiations took place with SIC Roads Service regarding the planned replacement of flagstones, requiring a closure of Commercial Street and limited access for businesses and customers for an extended period during the busy summer months.

With additional complaints from members that this issue is repeated annually with no longer term resolution identified, a meeting was held with local councillors, MSP and the Roads Service to identify compromises which would alleviate the main problems businesses felt were impacting their peak season trade. Additional signage was provided, noisy and messy works were agreed to be completed 'off-site' and on-site works were agreed to be kept to the shortest possible timescale with the road fully opened to pedestrians as soon as practicable.

More Attractive

We were able to continue working with our independent contractor to install and maintain the Christmas lighting scheme this year, with an overhaul of the installation and connection processes. New connections were installed all along commercial Street and connected to SIC street lighting points, with timers added for better coordination of switch on times. Additional lighting was added to the lamppost along the Esplanade.

Due to unplanned and unavoidable circumstances, the contract work for the seasonal decorations had to be put to tender in early 2025. A new commercial contractor was appointed – Ness Engineering. This agency had a larger staff resource and access to additional equipment to assist with the installation of lights and bunting, and other items.

A slight delay in this appointment did mean the summer bunting was later than usual in being installed, but this was done along with distribution of 67 hanging baskets and 51 planters throughout the town centre.



The SIC Harrison Square parklet was also replanted by Living Lerwick, with the work being carried out and plants supplied by Shetland Garden Co who did a wonderful job of creating a garden feel in the seating area.

A schedule of gutter cleaning for properties in the town centre was established with the new contractor. With some narrow spaces, high buildings and attempting to keep disruption to a minimum for businesses and the public during working hours, this can present challenges. All members are regularly reminded to submit a request if their building requires attention. Maintenance was carried out as necessary on benches, planters and other equipment. Incidents of vandalism and unexpected relocations of benches and planters, usually at weekends (!), were managed as required.

Following the announcement of the long term plant provider at Frakkafield to retire in 2026, a tender process was carried out for a new contractor to take on this important task and Da Barn appointed.



Business support

The team delivered 641 individual member contacts through visits, emails calls or messaging – in addition to group email updates for cruise activity, requesting information on opening hours or other details, member update emails and notifications.

The ShopSafe scheme was established and offered to all members to sign up. This is an app based information sharing tool which enables businesses to share real time information in a legal, GDPR compliant, manner. Data Sharing agreements and other privacy policy requirements were established and signage provided to all participating businesses to let their customers know businesses are part of the scheme. So far, 17 businesses have signed up, and the service remains available to any others who wish to take part.



As permitted by the BID proposal prepared in 2021, Living Lerwick Directors have the discretion to accept voluntary applications from businesses outwith the BID area to become members and pay a fee to receive the same benefits. An application process was established to enable this, following an expression of interest from a non-member business.

Cruise updates were issued on a weekly basis with updates issued as required. The updates are a useful way to request additional opening times from retail and hospitality businesses which enables additional promotion to be shared with the public and meet and greet team.





Member newsletters are issued on a seasonal basis, with information about activities, support available locally and nationally and any other useful information. All newsletters provide contact information and an invitation to meet with the project team to discuss ideas or concerns.

The team have also carried out research into the proposed introduction of charges for single use cups and how this might be addressed with a local re-usable cup scheme between all hospitality members. Work on this project continued into 2025/26 liaising with members on how best to work together.

Research has been done into the establishment of a Town Centre Business Awards scheme which has been operated in other BID areas to great success. Initial categories have been identified, and further clarification of the schemes timing and operation will be done with an aim to find sponsorship and launch the scheme at an appropriate time.

Other general issues arising included:

- Canvassing of members and feeding into research on Visitor Levy
- Support with reporting fraudulent transactions and shoplifting
- Support with reporting antisocial behaviour issues and follow up with Police Scotland and SIC to provide further information and support
- Outdoor placement of tables and chairs
- Breach of licence conditions by street trader
- Passing on public customer queries to individual businesses
- Supporting business with request for realignment of pavement while maintaining parking arrangements.
- Supporting member with promotion and announcement of business for sale.
- Providing information and feedback on BID processes and legal framework
- Providing information as far as possible on levy queries and signposting to SIC finance for resolution
- Sharing contact information with property owners from public enquiries regarding rental opportunities

Renewal Ballot

The current Living Lerwick BID term runs to 31st August 2026. As such, a renewal ballot will be required to be held in accordance with BID legislation in summer 2026. Work to begin this process started in summer 2025 with initial consultation with Scotland's Improvement Districts staff on requirements and changes since the last ballot in 2021.

Before spending time and resources on preparing a renewal ballot, a decision was taken to informally canvas members to see if there was an appetite for a fourth BID term. This was done in August, and there was a 70% positive response from the 60 members who responded.

Directors took the decision to prepare a new BID proposal and follow the required legal process on 19th August. This work will begin in January 2026.

Finances and Accounts

The accounting year operates from 1st September to 31st August. Full accounts are available to Living Lerwick members on request and filing accounts are available on the Living Lerwick website.

Living Lerwick is a not-for-profit company and all surplus funds are invested in project expenditure to benefit members. With uncertainty as to how much levy will be collected each year, expenditure is carefully managed to ensure adequate cashflow.

Income	2024/25	2023/24
Business Improvement District Levy Receivable	£68,432	£74,443
Lerwick Community Council Grants Received	£ -	£ 1,000
SIC Grant Income	£ 5,897	£ 5,000
Miscellaneous Income	£ 5,034	£ 5,105
TOTAL	£79,345	£85,548
Expenditure	2024/25	2023/24
More Attractive Project	£29,215	£30,872
More Business Support Project	£ 5,497	£ 4,797
More Footfall Project	£20,371	£18,846
More Marketing Project	£14,613	£14,218
Improved Access Project	£ 1,082	£ -
Administrative Expenses	£36,272	£25,645
TOTAL	£107,050	£94,378
Operating Deficit	-£27,705	-£8,830

All members within the BID area are legally required to pay the BID levy, based on the non domestic rateable value of their property. This income is the main source of funding for the work done by Living Lerwick and collection is managed by Shetland Islands Council.

In 2024/25 there were a total of 150 member businesses and a total of £68,432 levy invoiced. Historic arrears and a write off of nearly £11,000 in bad debt led to the significant increase in end of year deficit. Action was agreed with Shetland Islands Council to actively address this situation and careful management of funds and expenditure ensures the organisation is able to continue to deliver services and support to members for the final year of the current term. An increase in levy fees will be required in future years.