

PRESS RELEASE

City's businesses pull together to fight business rates

- *St Albans is believed to be the first city to launch a group appeal against the business rates*
- *The city's BID (Business Improvement District) is coordinating the effort*
- *Local firm Aitchison Rafferty is driving the appeal for the city*
- *Coronavirus will also have a negative effect on the city's retail businesses*



10 March 2020

In what is believed to be a first for a UK city, businesses in the Hertfordshire cathedral city of St Albans are taking the unprecedented step of joining together to launch a group appeal against business rates which they say are threatening their livelihood.

The city's BID (Business Improvement District) has negotiated preferential pricing for all of St Albans' eligible retail businesses, including pubs, for a group business rate appeal, and has teamed up with the local property consultancy firm Aitchison Rafferty to launch The Save St Albans Businesses Group Business Rate Appeal

The group appeal requires no upfront cash outlay for St Albans retail businesses and heavily discounted preferential fees negotiated by the BID, giving them access to a locally based expert, backed by the national team at Aitchison Rafferty.

Local business owner Sarah Gillow, Co-Chair of the BID says "Our high street needs an urgent business rate holiday to survive Coronavirus, along with root and branch business rate reform to be able to thrive in the future."

"The BID is urging the government to take immediate action to support our businesses, but in the interim, we have to come together as a city to do something to help our retail sector."

BID Co-Chair and SADC Portfolio Holder for Business, Tourism and Culture, Mandy McNeil says, "Our hard-working St Albans independent businesses do not have the time, cash or inhouse resource to handle what is a paper filled, time-consuming appeals process and some businesses are too scared to appeal."

"This initiative provides local businesses the opportunity to have their case handled via a group appeal, which will accelerate the process, all without tying up their valuable time and energy.

"The BID board feels that this will lead to significant savings/rebates for some of our local businesses on their 2017-2021 business rates, which is much needed at this time."

One of the first to sign up to the appeal, local business owner of Infuse Restaurant and BID levy payer Mona Berry says: "I'm signing up to this Group appeal because as a small independent business in the lovely city of St Albans, the current times are very testing. Despite trying hard to make a good name and reputation of the restaurant in the past year, the expenses and overheads are too high and the customer footfall is not consistent. The times are challenging and we need the support of the government to reduce business rates and give tax relief in order for us to survive and carry on the business.

"We are thankful for this initiative from St Albans BID to support our small independent business and reduce the business rates expense. We desperately need this help and support."

Sean Hughes is owner of historic pub The Boot and Chair of Save St Albans Pubs Campaign, which is partnering with the BID on this initiative.

Sean says: "The Boot has signed up and I know of several businesses who will be taking up this opportunity. St Albans pubs pay astronomical business rates for an ever diminishing service and we need the government to bring the rates system into the 21st Century so that we have a fair system for all businesses.

"This is a David and Goliath sort of situation. We are trying to help all our small businesses by encouraging them to sign up to appeal together, as a group and this initiative has the support of our local MP."

The Group Appeal process for retail businesses and pubs will be led by Anthony Waller, an Associate Director in the Aitchison Raffety Business Rates team. Anthony joined Aitchison Raffety from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and has over 12 years' experience in the field of business rates valuation. Whilst at the VOA he led a team of Surveyors with responsibility for valuing properties in Hertfordshire and London, he lives locally and is passionate about supporting the local independent businesses.

Myles O'Brien, Head of Business Rates at Aitchison Raffety, says "We want to ensure local businesses are working on a fair playing field, paying the right amount of business rates to support the local economy, but without handicapping their ability to trade. We want to be part of a vibrant and healthy business community in the City. The opaque and over-complicated Appeal System means businesses struggle to lodge and pursue appeals. The excessive delay in the Appeal System means that businesses are often paying too much for too long. Aitchison Raffety have been supporting local businesses for many years by successfully reducing rating liability and welcome the opportunity to work with local businesses".

- ENDS -

About St Albans

- St Albans is a vibrant and historic market town in Hertfordshire, just 20 mins on the train from London and a short hop off the M1 and M25 motorways, within easy reach of London Luton and Heathrow airports.
- St Albans has the stunning 11th Century St Albans Cathedral at its centre and also boasts Britain's first Saint, Alban himself, the country's oldest pub, Ye Olde Fighting Cocks (in the Guinness book of records), the country's oldest public school (St Albans School) and the only working medieval clock tower in the country.
- St Albans has many excellent attractions to visit, as well as fabulous award-winning independent shopping, restaurants, pubs and coffee houses. With exquisite ancient streets and buildings the city is full of character and very popular with both tourists and locals.
- The city's colourful 2,000 year history is showcased in the St Albans Museum + Gallery, housed in the centre of the city in a Grade II listed Georgian building.
- The history is also evident in the Roman remains and the beautiful medieval architecture throughout the city centre, but also to be found in the lush green parks and countryside.