

Firms set to vote on BID plan

A GROUP of businesses could join together to benefit the local community, if voters tick the 'yes' box.

The first Business Improvement District (BID) in Cumbria could be set up in Windermere and Bowness – raising extra funds for local projects and improvements.

David Wathen, chairman of the Skipton BID, made a presentation to local business owners at a meeting at the Burnside Hotel in Bowness on Thursday night.

The meeting was held as businesses are balloted on whether to launch a BID scheme for the area.

There are 190 other BIDs in the UK.

If the five-year scheme

goes ahead, it will see businesses whose premises have a rateable value – the potential rental value – of £3,000 or more pay one per cent of the value on top of non-domestic rates.

Barry Butler, acting chairman of the meeting, explained that South Lakeland District Council would collect the extra money and hand it all over to the BID to be used on improvements in the Windermere and Bowness area.

Windermere and Bowness BID proposers estimate raising £153,000 per year, which would be 'ring-fenced' for only this reason.

SLDC will charge the BID £6,740 each year to collect the money – in

line with the national average.

At the meeting audience member and Lakes Hospitality Association president, Tony Blaney encouraged the business owners to think of what they could achieve with the £100 or so they would contribute over a year and then what they could achieve together, with £153,000 in a year.

But Jim Walker, from Lake District Estates questioned Mr Butler and Mr Wathen as to whether the collaboration would fill in services which should be provided by the district and county councils.

Mr Wathen explained that the councils would have to provide all the

services they would if the BID was not there, but the group could opt to pay for increased services, such as additional street cleaning, if it was suggested by a member and approved by the BID board of directors.

The 800 businesses in the LA23 postcode area will have the opportunity to vote on the scheme before 5pm on January 31.

For a BID to go ahead the Chamber must achieve a 'yes' vote of 50 per cent of those who voted together with 50 per cent of the rateable value of those who voted having to be achieved.

The outcome of the ballot will be announced on February 1.