

Business

Improvements tax idea to go to vote

► Traders to decide whether to pass 1% levy

By HELEN PERKINS

LAKELAND traders will soon be asked to vote on controversial plans to introduce a business tax for town improvement projects.

Windermere and Bowness firms will have to stump up extra cash on top of their normal business rates if the levy is approved by half the local trading community.

The fee, one per cent of each business's rateable value, equates to a minimum of £30 a year for small companies, while large businesses will be forced to pay thousands if plans get the go-ahead.

Windermere and Bowness Chamber of Trade has written to the Secretary of State, outlining their hopes to harness local profits to fund new ideas and make the area a 'Business Improvement District (BID)'.

With central government agreement, the town will hold a ballot with each business between the Low Wood Hotel, north of Windermere, and the Beech Hill Hotel, in the south, asked to vote for or against the idea.

Chamber of Trade secretary Adrian Faulkner said if the tax was approved paying traders would decide where funds were spent.

"Not everyone will like this plan, some will think it's a needless excess but I would urge them to try it for the first five years," he said.

Ideas for Bowness and

Windermere include a free local business directory, Christmas lights, a seasonal market and a winter ice rink on the Glebe.

The tax has been supported by Cumbria Tourism, North West supermarket Booths, Westmorland and Lonsdale MP Tim Farron

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and the Lakes Hospitality Association.

However, owner of Windermere's Beechwood Bed and Breakfast, Owen Parker, was concerned that smaller businesses like his would struggle to afford any extra expense.

"The rates we pay are well

up now, they are ridiculous," he said. "We're in a difficult economic situation and I wouldn't accept an additional bill. I think few other people will be willing to pay more money too."

Paul Frain, who owns Windermere store Helen's Chocolates and is vice chairman of the BID steering group, said he wished to allay traders fears, ahead of a public consultation about funding plans, set to start next month.

"The last thing we need is an extra tax but if you think of it as an investment in the area it makes sense."

The owner of Brambles Tea Room, Amanda Davis, added: "Anything that's going to help people coming into the village is a bonus. I don't think many traders would even notice a one per cent rise in their rates."