

# Lockdown One Year On: Thanet Virtual High Street returns to the real world

"Thanet Virtual High Street will definitely continue but it's time for virtual and reality to work hand in hand."

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By **Katie Boyden**

Businesses of all kinds have been impacted by the effects of the coronavirus lockdown.

Many so-called non essential businesses were either forced to shut up shop altogether, or at points were only able to open at limited capacity, slashing their potential revenue.

Even the essential businesses which were able to remain open had to deal with mask mandates, modifying their businesses to become Covid-19 compliant, and the stress of food shortages as panic buying took hold in March and April of last year.

Thanet Virtual High Street is the brainchild of Karen Brinkman, a charity worker who was furloughed during the lockdown.

Mrs Brinkman, from Westbrook near Margate, Kent, saw the impact closure was having on small businesses and set out to allow people to **support local traders from their living rooms**.

One year on from the beginning of lockdown and their Facebook group has more than 4,600 members - but with hope on the horizon that businesses will soon be able to reopen their doors again, Mrs Brinkman is bringing the virtual high street firmly into reality.

She explained: "On March 23, 2020 the country went into lockdown and by July the Thanet Virtual High Street had been created to help support small local businesses.

"But now we are looking at ways of helping to move these businesses back from virtual to reality.

"Thanet Virtual High Street has been a lifeline for many during lockdown but now is the time to start to help them bounce back and provide some safe opportunities for them to meet their virtual customers face to face."

The group hopes to host two events next month, held at the brand new venue Under 1 Roof, a soft play centre and events venue off Pysons Road in Ramsgate.



First up is Thanet's first wedding fair, set to be held on April 17, followed by a two day spring fair on April 24-25.

Mrs Brinkman said: "There are so many couples desperate to speak to wedding suppliers so we've arranged a fair to enable them to discuss their special day.

"This and the spring fair will be full of fabulous businesses that have been part of the virtual high street but can now actually meet some of the people who ordered from them during lockdown and lots of new customers also.

"Both events are being staged at Under 1 Roof, an amazing venue that itself only opened just before lockdown.

"It will be lovely to breath life into this new venture and allow locals to see its fantastic facilities.

"Thanet Virtual High Street will definitely continue but it's time for virtual and reality to work hand in hand."

For more information visit the **Thanet Virtual High Street Facebook group**.