

PLACES FOR EVERYONE **A MANIFESTO FOR TOWNS AND CITIES**



1. VACANT TO VIBRANT

- Incentivise places to tackle vacancy by establishing and funding local town and city centre property forums.
- A new £25m funding programme for centres with above national average vacancy rate, to focus on bringing empties back into use.

2. LOCAL PRIDE IN BETTER PUBLIC SPACES

- Make BIDs a default consultee on both use of [section 106](#) funding and Strategic [Community Infrastructure Levy](#) spending.
- Commit to future investment levels through the [Shared Prosperity Fund](#) that can be invested in places and public realm, and protect existing urban green spaces through legislation.
- Create clear and consistent processes for businesses wishing to use pavements and road space outside their businesses.
- Commit to a holistic approach to tackling urban waste and litter, including an emphasis on refill and reuse alongside improving recycling rates.

3. INVESTED IN BUZZING PLACE BRANDS

- Establish a new £10k place activation grant, designed to provide revenue funding to establish and amplify local events programmes.
- Every [Local Visitor Economy Partnership](#) (or DMO if appropriate) (England), and regional team within Visit Scotland, Visit Wales and NI Tourism should engage BIDs in their relevant region.

4. GREAT PLACES TO WORK AND GROW

- Encourage a national change of narrative about work in our urban centres, from 'it's time to go back to the office', to celebrating our wonderful towns and cities and the many reasons to work, play and invest in them.
- Explore how tax reliefs linked to office occupation can be created to encourage more businesses to take significant new leases on commercial property in centres.

5. WORLD-LEADERS IN HOSPITALITY

- The BID Foundation backs [UK Hospitality's campaign](#) to reduce the hospitality sector's VAT rate to 12.5%.

6. REFORMED BRICKS AND MORTAR TAX

- A commitment to [review and reform the non-domestic rates system](#) in all nations of the UK, within the next parliament, including the implementation of interim reliefs while a more equitable system is designed to encourage high street businesses.

7. TACKLING THE RETAIL CRIME EPIDEMIC

- Establish 'Safer Retail Teams' in major centres, to focus on this defining challenge and provide a commitment to retail staff, customers and destinations.
- Local Government to prioritise local partnerships, bringing together Police, Retail and Hospitality sectors, BIDs, and other agencies to reduce town and city centre crime by sharing local data and approaches.

8. CENTRES THAT FEEL SAFE

- Double legacy [Safer Streets Funding](#) to ~£60m per year to enable more communities to take a joined up approach to tackling crime in their town and city centres.
- Increase community policing through recruitment of police officers, ensuring that a proportion of those recruited are dedicated to key town and city centre spaces.

9. LIVEABLE AND SUSTAINABLE CENTRES

- Commit £250m to a national opportunity fund that supports urban centres and their businesses on the road to net zero, helping to create a UK with more liveable and resilient places.
- Work with all councils to bring forward more [climate bond offerings](#) to fund the national clean energy and infrastructure transition.
- Towns and city centres should be encouraged to adopt the [Healthy Streets approach](#) to guide development that prioritises human experience, including by adding local health outcomes to funding criteria.

10. VITAL PLACE PARTNERSHIPS

- Commit to increased and longer-term funding settlements for all Councils, providing them greater certainty and a stronger basis for collaboration on the management of their centres.
- Establish a Minister for BIDs and re-establish the BID Loan Fund, to further improve the coordination of BIDs' work across UK centres.
- Commit to a formal Minister-led review of BID legislation and guidance, to deliver on recommendations made by all BID sector bodies in 2023, including the implementation of digital BID ballots and the commitment in legislation or official guidance to minimum service levels for all local and national government parties working in partnership with BIDs.



20
Years of BIDs



PLACES FOR EVERYONE A MANIFESTO FOR TOWNS AND CITIES

FOREWORD



Towns and cities power the UK, as hubs of activity and centres for diverse industries and cultures. At their best, they provide economic opportunities, places to meet and share experiences, high quality public services and amenities, as well as beacons for international tourism.

However, we know from recent data that communities risk falling out of love with their places, whether due to concerns over crime and safety, a lack of pride in the upkeep of the area, or a feeling that it has nothing relevant to offer them.

As national finances continue to be challenged and a number of priorities compete for investment, we recognise the need for local leadership and innovation to deliver the town and city centres that people deserve. This is the defining context for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), at the front line of place management, as they enter their 20th anniversary year. The BID sector has gone from strength to strength, becoming a world-leader, with UK businesses voting to establish over 330 BIDs and investing in excess of £1 billion since their inception, in England in 2004.

Drawing on the knowledge and experience of our members, The BID Foundation has produced 'A Manifesto for Towns and Cities' to provide learnings from two decades of managing some of the nation's most complex and important places, including recommendations to meet the essential challenges in our modern urban centres. These recommendations are not generated from a policy machine, they have emerged directly from BIDs' on-the-ground knowledge, from Sunderland to Exeter, and Coleraine to Cardiff.

This Manifesto has been authored to support discussion, across UK business and politics, of the realities of town and cities' growth over the next decade, and to guide the delivery of that growth. It proposes evidence-based interventions to tackle key place-based issues like footfall, vacancy, crime and anti-social behaviour, business support, public realm, place branding, working in partnership with businesses, and supporting community stakeholders and local government.

Collaboration is at the heart of our recommendations, as people seek curated and experiential offers, events and spaces that bring together diverse populations, the renewal of ageing commercial properties, and the revitalisation of place-based investment, not just in our core cities.

Collaboration is also a defining characteristic of work across two decades since the first UK BID began operating, in Kingston-upon-Thames. As acknowledged in [evidence to inquiries](#) led by both Houses since 2022, 'BIDs have proven to be an effective mechanism to manage centres, (and) benefit from being part of a professional network to evolve their practice and both set and assess standards' (Institute of Place Management). The sector has changed the landscape of local placemaking, and, as this Manifesto demonstrates, we're well set to continue this innovation and play a leadership role in securing the future of UK towns and cities for everyone.

1. FROM VACANT TO VIBRANT HIGH STREETS

14% of properties in UK town and city centres lie vacant. In some centres, over 1 in 5 units are empty. Left without attention, these empty shops can be a blight on otherwise vibrant places, reducing the confidence of investors and the quality of experience for visitors. The impact on local pride of empty stores is important and emblematic of many communities experience of income inequality and industrial failure. But these stores also represent opportunity; to give new and growing businesses the chance to access a bigger audience, and to experiment with new and innovative products and experiences.

Experience from The Vacant Shops Academy suggests places tackle vacancy most quickly and sustainably and improve the mix of uses when agents, landlords, businesses, community groups, councils, and BIDs work together. This partnership can match new entrants and landlords, reduce practical barriers such as lack of information, leverage investment to prepare properties for occupation, and create a market buzz which shows units as opportunity spaces in locations that have a vision and are marketed well.

Although recent exploration of new ‘High Street Rental Auctions’³ was welcome, the long-term answer to town and city centre vacancy lies in revenue investment, local knowledge and partnership working. BIDs can play a vital role in creating the local investment case, feeding in stakeholder knowledge and voicing public demand, as well as helping to convene landlords and agents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Incentivise places to tackle vacancy by establishing and funding local town and city centre property forums;
- A new £25m funding programme to be focused on centres with above national average vacancy rate, or specific vacancy blight such as key assets that were formerly anchors for footfall and the local offer.

This funding could be channelled through local councils but with encouragement to be administered quickly through local organisations such as BIDs and other forum partners, to support a range of activity from shop frontage improvement to marketing and engagement campaigns. Investing circa £25m in a focused pilot could support a significant reduction in vacancy in up to 50 UK centres, with learning then shared nationally to enable better long-term interventions across the UK to tackle and prevent this growing issue.

Photo top
Cotto Kitchen and Wine Bar, Bristol.

Photo bottom
The WECA Love our High Streets Campaign.



CASE STUDY TACKLING VACANCY IN PARTNERSHIP IN BRISTOL

In 2020, Bristol City Council created a scheme for small businesses to access up to £10,000 to deliver works to local properties ahead of their occupation.

Applications linked a business plan to the impact of the works, including to the physical fabric of the property and to the business more generally. The local BID provided recommendations on applications, along with the Council, and the project resulted in 10 new shop openings for an investment of £93,000.

The successful scheme was managed by the BID for a small fee (~£12,000), enabling timely design of processes and engagement with the local market of landlords and potential tenant businesses.



2. LOCAL PRIDE IN BETTER PUBLIC SPACES

A number of studies have found links between levels of pride in place and two key aspects of town and city centres; first, the built environment and quality of the public realm including green space, and secondly, access to arts, culture and other participative activities that bring communities together. [The Bennett Institute](#) summarises the importance of high streets and town centres in this context as 'the most prominent and visible parts of many communities'.

These two themes are typically approached in separate silos by funders and policy makers, however they are linked through the hyper-local delivery of BIDs. In seeking to respond to the local environment and to create a programme of activity that draws people to centres, a majority of BIDs use tactical urbanism to create or improve small public spaces, such as adding pocket parks or refreshing thoroughfares with lighting and street art. Crucially, BIDs also seek to activate these spaces, either through regular events held in the public realm itself, such as festive trails and light festivals, or through coordinated campaigns that encompass multiple local sites and businesses, such as Leeds BID's [Summer of Colour](#) and Brixton BIDs cultural exchange programme '[Brixton X Harlem](#)'.

This type of activity is a direct route to impacting the lived experience of communities and the quality of town and city centres. A combined 52% of people responding to a [2021 PublicFirst poll](#) cited public and green spaces as the top factor determining their level of pride in place. In addition, DCMS's [Community Life Survey](#) shows that people still engage with culture and the arts in our physical spaces and centres (88% vs. 27% online), however engagement with arts and culture still drops to 79% for the most deprived communities.

Encouraging local investment in quality public spaces and place-based cultural experiences will help to ensure that pride in place can grow, and that people feel their town or city centre has something to offer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Raise awareness of and benefit from BIDs' track record and expertise in contributing to public realm and local cultural and social infrastructure by **making BIDs a default consultee on both S106 funding and Strategic CIL spending.**
- Encourage investment in communities' priorities for local pride by **committing to future investment levels through the Shared Prosperity Fund**, in addition to **protecting existing urban green spaces in legislation.**
- **Create clear and consistent processes for businesses wishing to use pavements and road space outside their premises**, to further build on successes post-covid when many took advantage of temporary access and incentives to create thriving al-fresco economies.
- **Commit to a holistic approach to tackling urban waste and litter, including an emphasis on refill and reuse** alongside improving recycling rates, as the first step towards eliminating single use packaging and embedding new extended producer responsibilities.

Photo top and bottom
The success of Liverpool Without Walls was seen across the city, bringing higher hospitality revenues and visitor numbers.



CASE STUDY LIVERPOOL WITHOUT WALLS

[Liverpool Without Walls](#) was a huge success that funded businesses and creatives to both open up public spaces and the hospitality sector to encourage more visitors to the city, as well as creating new place-based festivals and events to connect with audiences and boost the local economy.

The programme awarded grants to foster a renewed café culture and buzz to the city following the Covid pandemic and generated £8.9m for the local economy from its initial £450,000 funding pot.

The idea was run in partnership by Liverpool City Council, Liverpool BID Company and the local chamber of commerce, with the BID bringing crucial business engagement, outreach and place marketing expertise.

Speaking about the second culture-focused round of funding, Liverpool Mayor, Joanne Anderson said "*This fund enables us to once again reach out to the local arts and culture industry and give them the opportunity to use our city as a stunning backdrop for their brilliant, crowd-pleasing ideas.*"



3. INVESTED IN BUZZING PLACE BRANDS

BIDs represent significant hyper local expertise in place branding and marketing, with a reach which is as often as international as it is regional. Their track record of success in driving visitor numbers was recognised in the [De Bois review](#) of destination management in England and, across all four nations, BIDs exist as important stakeholders of the national tourism strategy and equivalent body,

The competition for international and national tourists is greater than ever in the UK, a challenge for our towns and cities in how they drive the variety of footfall and spend that supports the local economy. 2023 saw over [38m international visitors](#) come to the UK, however this figure is still some 2 million below pre-pandemic highs. The [Tourism Sector Deal](#) anticipated visitor numbers to be above 45m by 2025. To meet this target will require all the ingenuity and brand-making know-how of local organisations like city centre BIDs, which have variously supported significant international audiences for events like Eurovision 2023 in Liverpool and the MTV Europe Music Awards in Manchester in April 2024.

On a more regional basis, activating our towns and cities with attractions and events is crucial to their vitality and long-term viability. [Findings from the High Streets Task Force](#) in England suggest that over 60% of places do not show evidence of sufficient place activation and in 17% of locations, the number one priority for a more successful centre was investing in place branding efforts. More broadly, footfall is still falling on average across UK centres, down by 17% in 2022 and in 2023 still [9% below pre-covid levels](#).

BIDs should be supported to both deliver their own expertise and investment, and to have the highest impact on regional, national and international audiences, through a seat at the table in all relevant tourism governance and management bodies. This will ensure that BIDs’ work is best leveraged, and also remove inefficiencies of hundreds of separate BID teams using resource to competitively bid into schemes run by government agencies and devolved bodies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Establish a new £10k place activation grant, designed to provide revenue funding to establish and amplify local events programmes.** The fund would encourage the initial coordination of organisations such as community groups, BIDs, councils, arts organisations and civic groups in a single location, and offer early resource to these partnerships which may not be ready to apply through other routes such as National Lottery funding. As these programmes become established, funding can support specific activity such as establishment of a place website, better quality programming, or roll out of branding in the public realm.
- **Every Local Visitor Economy Partnership (or DMO if appropriate) (England), and regional team within Visit Scotland, Visit Wales and NI Tourism should engage BIDs in their relevant region,** providing nominated individuals with a formal position in an appropriate part of their governance structure (such as regional working groups), and consult with them on relevant growth plans and how they can leverage BID expertise and investment.

CASE STUDY
SALISBURY’S RECOVERY AND GROWTH AS ‘TRADITIONAL ORIGINAL’

In March 2018, Salisbury was the site of a major security incident and public risk to life, with the use of the Novichok nerve agent against a former Russian military officer. The huge media coverage, public safety fall out, and impact to the city’s brand was a major concern for the economy of the city.

In 2019, supported by the Institute of Place Management, the city put in place a strategy of ‘Restructuring’ – both of aspects of the city’s physical environment and of its local governance and management structures. Following this work, Salisbury has had major successes, establishing six working groups or ‘pillars’ to lead development of the city, winning £9m of Future High Street Fund investment for the redevelopment of the train station and the accessibility of Salisbury city centre, and topping a poll of covid ‘bounce back’ cities, as visitors flocked back in greater numbers than anywhere else in the UK in August 2021.

Salisbury have now capitalised on this resilience, launching a new [‘Traditional Original’](#) brand, designed and rolled out by a number of local partners including the City and County Councils and Salisbury BID. The success of the scheme has brought partners together and helped to grow key metrics such as visitor numbers (consistently above regional and national averages), park and ride usage into the city (up by over 40% in December 2023) and visits to nearby attractions such as Stone Henge (up 36%).



CASE STUDY
THE CARDIFF WINE PASSPORT: CHAMPIONING LOCAL HOSPITALITY

The [Cardiff Wine Passport](#) is a unique place-based brand and independent hospitality experience, promoting businesses in the heart of the capital city, which has generated more than £40,000 in direct revenue. Customers can buy a passport online and exchange stamps for glasses of wine at specially curated locally-owned businesses.

The aim of the scheme, funded by [FOR Cardiff’s City Ambition Fund](#) and conceived by local PR consultant Jane Cook, is to encourage exploration – of cuisine, wines and the landscape of local hospitality in Cardiff. It has become a successful programme that generates brand exposure, footfall and associated spend alongside the direct investment into the ‘passport’ scheme itself.

For venues such as Vermut, an independent micro-bar which specialises in sherry and modelled on the small late-night bars found in cities like Madrid, the Cardiff Wine Passport scheme has given people an excuse to pop in for a stamp and give it a try. Jack Holtom, Manager at Vermut, said “*Over the last year or so, we’ve seen a slow and steady increase in customers, and that is thanks in no small part to the Cardiff Wine Passport giving people the confidence to come in and try something a bit different; all they have to do is come in and ask for their stamp – it takes away any of the intimidation or worry about trying something new. The best bit is that we get to watch these new customers fall in love with what we do here, and then they come back to us again and again.*”



4. GREAT PLACES TO WORK AND GROW

Since 2019, the UK has seen a seismic shift in working from home, which has risen from 12% in 2018 and now fluctuates between 25% and 40% of people working from home some of the time ([ONS](#)). This is a defining challenge for towns and cities, and more broadly for how well local areas can capture spend from residents and grow inclusive and participative economies.

Significantly, higher income workers are most likely to stay at home to work for some or all of the week. For town and city centres, it is vital that people are both enticed to visit for work and to dwell in the area for entertainment, hospitality and other multi-functional uses. Not providing this pull has an exponentially negative effect, as dwindling trade risks individual businesses and centres lose their agglomeration effect. Average office occupation only reaches 40% in the UK from Tuesday to Thursday.

While the risk of centres losing their attractiveness is one that affects all high street business, it also significantly affects commercial inward investment into towns and cities, through key assets like new office occupation, new business start-ups, and the opportunity to attract significant industries to relocate within the UK or from overseas. While the UK's [Investment Zone](#) policy does seek to achieve some of these outcomes, its focus is often on specific industry incentives and it doesn't consider, by default, the viability of town and city centres.

Business Improvement Districts have a strong track record of providing attractive additional benefits to employees based in both commercial and mixed-use BID areas. This programmed approach both provides a level of experience above in-house employer provision and networks a variety of local businesses, creating connections and a greater sense of place and community. Since the impact of Covid-19, a number of the largest office and landlord developers in Europe have explored how office workers can access the best on-site and on-location benefits, inquiring with The BID Foundation to understand the benefits of the BID model to do this across multiple buildings in a centre. The UK benefits from a leading BID sector and the opportunity exists to boost BID startup and provision in commercial centres, using them amongst other policy and place marketing levers to boost both investment in town and cities and their office occupation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Encourage a national change of narrative about work in our urban centres, from 'it's time to go back to the office', to celebrating our wonderful towns and cities and the many reasons to work, play and invest there.**
This will need to be a focus delivered through national, regional and local organisations, such as the central government departments for business and trade, place promotion bodies.
- **Explore how tax reliefs linked to office occupation can be created**
to encourage more businesses to take significant new leases on commercial property in centres, playing a significant part in the growth of local footfall and the centre's economy.

Photo top

Colmore Business District celebrate Pride in Birmingham.

Photo bottom

An aerial view of the Colmore District, employing over 35,000 people in the commercial heart of Birmingham.



CASE STUDY COLMORE BUSINESS DISTRICT, BIRMINGHAM

For 15 years, [Colmore Business District](#) has made its central area of Birmingham 'the district to do business', where over 500 organisations employ 35,000+ people. Working in partnership with local employers, they set out to create 'top-class public realm, a fantastic array of food and drink venues and lots to do in both the day and night...giving businesses and their staff lots of ways to engage with one another, to innovate and communicate'.

Examples from their professionals-focused programme include popular wellbeing and craft activities, giving workers a chance to step away from their desk and meet new people; a Breakfast and Networking Club for new professionals, hosted at local hospitality businesses; a summer Community Games; and a 'Walk with Pride' walking group during Birmingham's pride festival.

Over the last five years, the BID has interacted with staff in the district over 20,000 times, as well as leveraging £7.6m of investment in public realm in the district. The BID is an essential part of a vibrant urban community, one which has seen commercial occupancy remain stable as lettings continue to rise following the pandemic.



5. WORLD-LEADERS IN HOSPITALITY

Research from the [Institute of Place Management](#) has evidenced the transition of many towns and cities to become more multi-functional and experiential. In this context, hospitality has become a vital anchor attraction for discerning visitors and residents, who want to see a high quality and variety of food and drink available. Since 2020, hospitality has dominated in terms of net openings of outlets, with takeaways, cafes and coffee shops being the top three categories according to [PwC research](#). Despite being a leader in town and city centre experiential economies, net openings across a range of food and beverage categories in 2023 didn't surpass 500 outlets. This points to the large amount of churn in the sector, with very high food inflation combining with a growing cost of doing business that has remained stubborn even after the calming of energy prices in 2021/22.

If we're to respond to data on consumer preference in our town and city centres, and most importantly to supercharge a UK success story, we must look at the economic conditions for the hospitality sector. Bringing VAT in line with other typical tax rates for the sector in Europe and overseas would help to capture and preserve the latest generation of cultural hotspots and community meeting places that hospitality provides.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The BID Foundation backs UK Hospitality's campaign to reduce the hospitality sector's VAT rate to 12.5%.** Research has shown this would create nearly £5bn extra revenue in the sector over 5 years, and 180,000 jobs, earning back the national investment in the lower tax band.



6. REFORMING BRICKS AND MORTAR TAX

To ensure we have the best town and city centres for future generations, their communities and businesses, requires a fair tax system that works. The current business rates system does not meet this standard, and its challenges have been well covered by a range of political inquiries since 2020; an uneven playing field between online stores and high street stores, an inflexible and unresponsive property valuation process, and a disincentive for new and growing businesses to establish themselves at the heart of local communities.

By the end of 2025, business rates will have been in 5 years of 75%-100% tax relief (to a capped saving per business). This is the definition of a tax that doesn't work, however while no serious political efforts at reform are examined, there remains huge uncertainty for the operators on our high streets and those that are considering investing centres for the long-term. Returning in 2025 to standard, pre-pandemic business rates relief for small businesses would be met by closures on a large scale.

While we advocate a fundamental reform of business rates, to remove the disincentive for bricks and mortar investment, it is important that any changes or replacement to the system can continue to fund place management and development. The Institute of Place Management's research has identified the [25 priorities that lead to vital and vibrant town centres](#) – and many of these are related to the public realm, management and coordination activities that rely on funding from taxation, either at a national level (e.g. business rates) or a local level (e.g. through a Business Improvement District Levy). The BID sector is ready to contribute to policy development to support the goal of reforming rates, with many options existing to safeguard and simplify the raising of BID levy in the absence of a meaningful business rates tax (the linking mechanism between BID levy payers, their properties, and the set level of BID levy charged).

Since 2020, The BID Foundation has co-chaired the High Streets Task Force's [Sector Leaders Group](#) in England, throughout which business rates reform has remained a prominent topic of consensus amongst all membership bodies representing sectors working in towns and cities. Reform is needed now, rather than warm words while the work is kicked further down the road.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **A commitment to review and reform the non-domestic rates system in all nations of the UK, within the next parliament, with the implementation of interim reliefs** to give certainty to businesses while this work proceeds to design a more equitable system that encourages high street business.



7. TACKLING A RETAIL CRIME EPIDEMIC

Reducing the impact of crime and supporting people to feel safe when in their communities is a fundamental societal goal reflected in the policies of all major parties. These issues also have a very specific impact on town and cities, in changing behaviours, making people think twice about their next trip, and impacting both the costs and demand for the businesses operating in our centres.

All of our members report what feels like a new era of shoplifting and increased retail crime – much of it down to serial offenders – which has both changed consumers’ perceptions and confidence, and absorbed significant business operations and place management time in response.

The cost of theft from stores doubled to over [£2 billion in 2022-23](#) (BRC), and although nearly 60,000 incidents were reported in that year, the real number is likely to be far higher as many businesses do not report and build significant losses into their operating model. This is changing the experience of being in our town and city centres for consumers as well as staff, with over 1,000 incidents of violence and abuse estimated to occur in the UK every day.

Over 250 business crime reduction partnerships in the UK engage directly with these issues, providing much needed human resource, security infrastructure such as equipment and data sharing, and a vital liaison with businesses to understand local issues in detail, then working with police to address them more effectively. However, more must be done if we’re to make town and city centres safer, and to ensure that growth in our urban centres isn’t suppressed by crime. A focus on the top offenders in each community can bring down crime rates, with government and police working closely with other local agencies, such as BID street security/warden teams who are invariably first responders to incidents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Establish ‘Safer Retail Teams’ in major centres, to focus on this defining challenge and provide a commitment to retail staff, customers and destinations.** Support these teams with funding, similar to the current ‘Safer Streets Fund’ that enables each to access resources and deliver on reducing shoplifting and violence against shop workers.
- **Local Government to prioritise local partnerships, bringing together Police, Retail and Hospitality sectors, BIDs, and other agencies** to reduce town and city centre crime by sharing of local data and approaches.



8. CENTRES THAT FEEL SAFE

We welcome commitments from all major parties to increase the number of police on our streets and to recommit to neighbourhood policing that ensures people feel secure and happy in our towns and city centres. Current perceptions of the level of crime are extremely poor and present a major barrier to the future success of places and communities, and many councils have made good progress in identifying this as part of local regeneration strategies and taking action.

The most recent public polling in England and Wales shows that [48% of people are concerned about anti-social behaviour and crime](#), the top concern cited in the survey. Addressing this societal trend will take more than extra policing; local services and place management must also be resourced to grapple with the challenge of providing safe and reassuring environments for users, in the daytime and the evening. BIDs have successfully accessed [Safer Streets Funding](#) and deliver vital additional services that do more than just bridge temporary local gaps in policing and security investment, including work with businesses and in the public and digital realm on the safety of women and girls, and with the night time economy on dealing with flash points and hotspots for violence, and drunk and disorderly offences. Councils are increasingly focusing place-based business engagement on encouraging local businesses to work with the police, and to report crime.

More funding is needed to tackle this issue across different local communities, geographies and economies of the UK. This will support the collaborations and culture that deal with crime, providing the best environment for extra police investment to deliver results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Double previous Safer Streets Funding to ~£60m per year** to enable more communities to take a joined up approach to tackling crime in their town and city centres.
- **Increase community policing through recruitment of police officers**, ensuring that a proportion of those recruited are dedicated to key town and city centre spaces which define how many people perceive public safety and law and order more widely.

CASE STUDY BATH SAFE BUS - A SAFE PLACE IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

[Bath BID](#) runs a Business Crime Reduction Partnership and was successful in accessing Safer Streets Funding to create a new [‘safe bus’](#) – a permanent fixture for the night time economy that provides first response to the community and supports the emergency services to reduce 999 calls.

Parked in the Orange Grove area of the centre of Bath, people can walk up to the bus and request support, and it is able to deal with medical and welfare incidents, as well as adding to the visible presence of support services from 10.30pm to 4.30am, every Friday and Saturday.

The Safe Bus is exploring how it may be made available on other busy nights such as Bank Holidays, Fresher’s Week, and big events in the city of Bath. This is driven by its success in supporting 298 incidents in its first 35 weeks, preventing 116 of those calling the emergency services as they could receive care in the bus and then return home. The Safe Bus is led by Bath BID which works closely with emergency services and Bath and North East Somerset Council, and the local universities.

9. LIVEABLE AND SUSTAINABLE CENTRES

Over [95% of councils](#) in the UK have declared a climate emergency and the need to act now is not disputed on either end of the political spectrum. If the UK is to remain under the 1.5-degree limit for temperature increase agreed by the international community in 2016, then our town and city centres will both have to play their part in reducing their impact, and model the behaviours and innovation that we need to be adopted society-wide.

It is not just the ultimate environmental imperative of conserving the planet, we know that air quality is a major issue for visitors to many locations, including in London where, despite improvements, air quality still doesn't meet national legal requirements. Liveability and carbon reduction go hand-in-hand, as we've seen from recent reports that populations have welcomed low traffic neighbourhood schemes in England. However, the legacy of our patchwork of urban infrastructure is an urgent need for overhaul and de-carbonisation. In many centres, the growth of populations alongside modern trends like the increase in deliveries moving around road and transport networks, means more contestation of spaces. Without innovation, quality of life will become squeezed to make room for old, unchallenged business models and technologies.

The public sector estate - which embodies much of the carbon in many major centres - has made steady progress in locations that have been innovative in both funding and delivery. Climate bonds have been hugely popular to fund infrastructure investment, with consumers able to invest in real world impact and steady financial return, rather than anonymised and aggregated global funds. Compared with [EU uptake of these investment types](#), the UK lags well behind, but there is opportunity for green growth to power the renewal of the urban environment.

BIDs already support thousands of businesses around the UK to play their part in the net zero transition, both through vital training and engagement work and increasingly through hyper local interventions to redesign the local environment and place-based operations. Several BIDs have established green logistics centres which consolidate freight and provide final miles delivery through sustainable modes like bike couriers. Subsidised waste and recycling schemes that benefit from the collective power of levy payers also show how effective BIDs can be in enabling behaviour change and removing the barriers to adoption of new practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Commit £250m to a national opportunity fund that supports urban centres and their businesses on the road to net zero**, helping to create a UK with more liveable and resilient places.
- **Work with all councils to bring forward more climate bond offerings** that will fund state and public realm investment in greener infrastructure, reducing the carbon footprint of towns and cities and showing leadership on net zero.
- **Towns and city centres should be encouraged to adopt the Healthy Streets approach** to guide development that prioritises human experience, including by adding local health outcomes to funding criteria.

Photo top

Better Bankside leads a Business Climate Challenge workshop with its local businesses

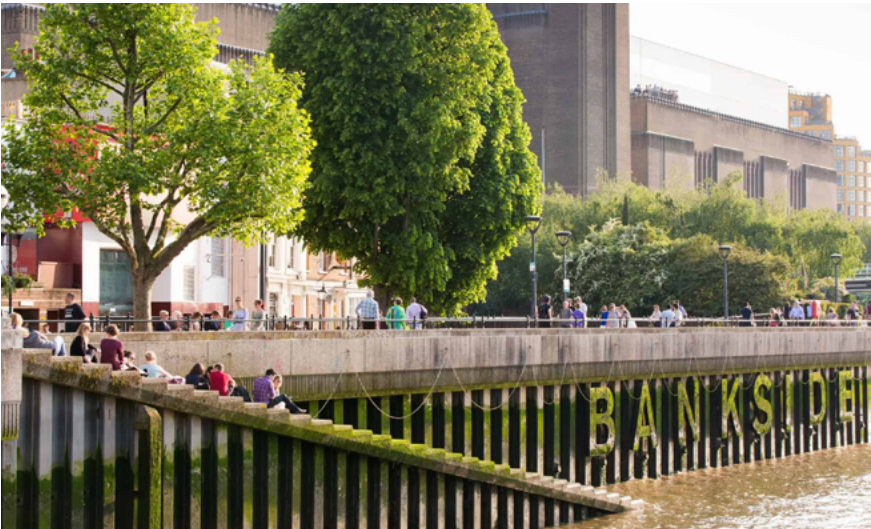


CASE STUDY BETTER BANKSIDE - BUSINESS CLIMATE CHALLENGE

[Better Bankside](#) took part in a pilot of the Business Climate Challenge in 2019 where 19 businesses took part, reducing energy consumption by 16% on average with an associated cost savings of £8,300. The cohort of businesses reduced carbon emissions by 213 tonnes CO₂e collectively which is a huge achievement. The programme was then scaled up to over 200 businesses taking part across London in 2023.

Following these successes, Better Bankside began work in partnership with the Southwark Climate Collective which incorporates other local BIDs and stakeholders, supporting businesses looking to get involved or take a next step in carbon reduction. Better Bankside was awarded £650,000 through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to continue and expand the Business Climate Challenge for SMEs across Southwark – looking at energy, waste, freight and supply chains for businesses.

With free, bespoke and end-to-end support offered to businesses, the BID is supporting 160 SMEs along their sustainability journey throughout 2024.



10. ESTABLISHING VITAL PLACE PARTNERSHIPS

A headline finding from the High Streets Task Force’s work across England since 2019 is that over [40% of locations have no evidence of a place partnership](#); any type of formal or informal group setup to bring stakeholders for the district, town, or city together, and to deliver activity for the benefit of the area. This lack of local resource is a major challenge for the UK more generally, because in places with no partnership, all responsibility for and action on high streets remains solely with local councils that are simultaneously faced with huge demands on resource, both financial and staff time.

As place making success stories around the UK, BIDs not only deliver vital local programmes, but they also provide support to convene local cross sector partnerships and leverage resource and activity greater than their own levy-based budgets. To quote the [Institute of Place Management](#), ‘BIDs have proven to be an effective mechanism to manage centres’ and ‘support is needed to help establish genuinely place-centric partnership(s), particularly where there is no pre-existing place-based capacity such as a BID’.

In delivering over £1bn of funding into towns and cities since 2004, BIDs have been proven to have the partnerships and leadership skills required to support vital and viable high streets. However, as a sector, we must always deliver our work in partnership and more must be done to boost local capacity and professionalise the place sector. There is a dual challenge to both ensure that local councils are funded sufficiently to direct resource towards place management, and to establish more non-council place management structures such as BIDs, to create long term resilience. For example, towns with greater deprivation levels are less likely to have both a BID and a local civic society, which are partnership infrastructure that can address the place-based impacts that deprivation often creates. Referring to IPM again, we must “trust towns and city centres in the UK to work in professional, inclusive, and resourced, multi-sectoral place partnerships, led by inspirational place leaders”.

Where BIDs do exist in this landscape, they often have to work hard to overcome resource barriers in local government and technicalities of existing BID legislation, particularly during key periods of levy billing and collection and BID ballot. The sector has already presented evidence-based suggestions for supporting BIDs even further to deliver local impact, including making ballot easier to administer and voting easier for levy payers, and ensuring greater collaboration with local authorities through official government guidance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Commit to longer-term funding settlements for all Councils**, providing them greater certainty and a stronger basis for collaboration on the management of their centres.
- **Establish a Minister for BIDs and re-establish the BID Loan Fund**, to further improve the coordination of BIDs’ work across UK centres, and to provide more places with funding to explore establishment of a BID.
- **Commit to a formal Minister-led review of BID legislation and guidance, to deliver on recommendations made by all BID sector bodies in 2023**, including the implementation of digital BID ballots and the commitment in legislation or official guidance to minimum service levels for all government parties working in partnership with BIDs.

Photo
BID staff and business
representatives - New
Cathedral Street,
Manchester (City Co)



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the bid
foundation