

Reviving British town centres and high streets

UK Business Improvement Districts, introduced as a direct result of LSE research, have been instrumental in reviving town centres and high streets

What was the problem?

Traditional high street shops were finding it increasingly difficult to compete with out-of-town malls and other privatised spaces where shoppers could park free of charge and enjoy better facilities. Many town centres were blighted by empty, boarded-up shops as independent traders went out of business. A strategy was needed to breathe life back into the high street.

What did we do?

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) were already enjoying success in New York. They are geographically defined areas in which businesses pay an additional tax to fund services such as street cleaning, security and marketing and improvements such as urban landscape enhancements.

LSE researchers, led by Professor Tony Travers, examined the operation and impact of BIDs in New York and published a 1996 report funded by the City of London. Their research included fieldwork in New York undertaken by Travers (and Jeroen Weimar, of global consultancy KPMG), which involved interviews with BID presidents, board members, academics and critics. Analysis of academic literature on BIDs in other US and Canadian cities also informed the report, as well as research undertaken by Travers in the UK on local government and public finance.

What happened?

The report was endorsed by the Association of London Government, which represented London borough councils. Its president, Lord Jenkin of

dozens of localities across the country, BIDs are delivering valued services such as street cleaning, marketing, security and urban

Roding, introduced a Bill in the House of Lords to legislate for introduction of BIDs into the UK. The LSE research was cited by Lord Jenkin in his second reading speech. When the Bill was unsuccessful, the Conservative Government commissioned further research into the issue.

BIDs were finally introduced by Tony Blair in the Local Government Act of 2003, along very similar lines to those recommended in the LSE report.

Travers was involved in seminars and presentations to organisations such as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London First (a business representative group) and Central London

Travers has spoken at hearings in Parliament and at business conferences about the development of BIDs in Britain and their impact on the private sector. He has also continued to take part in academic and public events, and has been cited in mainstream media about