

## JANUARY INSIGHTS by CHRIS TURNER

This is the first Insight of 2024 and as ever much is happening at both a local and national level. It is now 20 years since the original 2003 Local Government Act, and the 2004 BID Regulations and we currently have 340 BIDs across the British Isles. BIDs are currently investing £152 million a year into our business communities and have 136,484 business hereditaments. This is no mean feat, and at the beginning of a New Year it is worth celebrating.

We congratulate Falmouth BID on their successful **ballot** at the end of last year, and there are six ballots coming up next month.

The government has now released its **guidance notes** for their **Long-Term Plan for Britain's Towns**, a further part of the government's levelling up programme that has so far invested more than £13 billion to support projects. They believe the plan will complement existing work and invest a further £1.1 billion in 55 towns, many of which either have BIDs or are near to existing BIDs. The important dates are very tight indeed, bearing in mind how little levelling up funding has yet been allocated. Between 18 December 2023 and 1 April 2024 local authorities receive £50,000 of capacity funding, and a data pack for their town, they must appoint a chair and Town Boards must start planning and initiating community engagement. By 1 April 2024 all Town Boards must be established. On 1 April, DLUHC will release the next £200,000 of capacity funding to support the development of the Long-Term Plan. The Boards submit their Long-Term Plans (comprising their 10-year vision and 3-year investment plan) from 1 April and before 1 August. The Plan will set out how funding will be allocated and spent, with the local authority as the body ultimately accountable for funding. This is so like a BID, but for 10 years and with government funding! It will be intriguing to see how they develop.

**New Research from the Bennet** Institute in Cambridge suggests that people living in “places that don't matter” have seen quality jobs disappear, public services eroded, and

their economic prospects rapidly diminish. The research suggests that to address these ongoing failures and weaken the appeal of populist narratives, Western countries must revitalize small towns and rural communities and ensure universal access to essential public services. But this must be part of a broader national effort that unites citizens from all segments of society around the common cause of enhancing collective well-being. The **report** documents deep disparities in access to essential amenities such as buses, broadband, hospitals, and higher education across English local authorities and explore how to revive small towns and rural areas in the United Kingdom by investing in universal basic infrastructure. The report also identifies infrastructure and services – both public and privately owned – that are vital for enabling residents to commute to work or medical appointments, provide education for their children, maintain good health, and enjoy a decent quality of life. This is an important narrative for BIDs and their Placemaking and business improvement agendas and is worth a read.

Data from **MRI** on the **Christmas out-turns** suggests that the final week before Christmas saw footfall rise across all retail destinations from the week before by +11.2% largely driven by a rise three times higher in retail parks (+17.2%) and shopping centres (+16.4%) compared to high streets (+5.8%). Activity peaked on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday by an average of +18.2% across all destination types. This diminished as we approached the weekend with footfall declining by an average of -4.1% on Saturday and Sunday from the week before. However, this Christmas boost was slightly lower than those which retailers experienced in the same week last year, which isn't surprising given the financial pressures facing many consumers today and the cost-of-living crisis which has remained at the forefront for much of this year. This is particularly noticeable in footfall falling below the annual level marginally in retail parks and shopping centres. It's likely that, given these economic pressures, many people will have spread the cost by starting their shopping earlier and booking their Christmas delivery slots for food to avoid the last-minute dash to the shops. Many will also have chosen to shop in the weekend prior (16th and 17th December) to avoid the rush in the weekend immediately before Christmas Day.

A truly wonderful piece of research by **Graham Sout** on **Woolworths** is absolutely worth a **read**. Graham asks why fifteen years after all its stores closed, it's easy to question why we're still going on about Woolworths. It's certainly the case that Woolworths is an important and remarkable part of the UK's retail history, despite no longer being with us. And, even now, it's often named as the retailer people would most like to bring back from the dead. Graham believes that when Woolworths closed, we didn't just lose a store – we lost a source of comfort, and of familiarity across generations, that helped to underpin our sense of place and belonging. Woolworths opened its first British store, in Liverpool's Church Street, on 5 November 1909. The retailer went on to be a fixture of UK high streets for nearly a century. Across that period – allowing for all its openings, closures and relocations over the years – there are over 1,400 UK sites that at one time housed a Woolworths branch. Graham has so far visited and photographed 894 of them! Our ongoing research allows us to not only report on what the 807 former Woolworths sites are now, but also to understand the change that has taken place as intervening occupants have opened and closed. By looking at the former Woolworths estate in this way, we gain a unique snapshot of commercial property activity across the UK, and a window on how the country's retail landscape has changed over the past 15 years.

**Cities Outlook**, the annual health check of the economic performance of urban Britain offers a deep dive into the latest economic data on how UK cities are performing against a range of indicators including innovation, housing, skills, employment and productivity. In a general election year where growth will be central to the debate, Cities Outlook 2024 has a special focus on the economic performance of cities since 2010. It contrasts this performance to the 1998-2010 period, assessing how cities would have fared had pre-2010 trends continued and what this means for the party that forms the next government. The report makes clear that while almost all places are better off than they were in 2010, if pre-2010 trends had continued, the UK economy would be £88 billion (4.6 per cent) larger. Meanwhile Britain's north-south divide has continued to widen, with the Greater South East's share of UK jobs, output and income increasing still further. In 2010, 38.9 per cent of

all jobs were in the Greater South East. By 2022 this had risen to 40.9 per cent. They suggest that, Post-election, Government should pursue place-based policies that learn from the best policies of the last 14 years and develop them.

As ever the British BIDs training and development courses continue, picking up many of these strategic national issues. The **Certificate in BID Management** and the **Diploma in BID Leadership** are both starting soon but still open for enrolments. Our other eight main development courses include: *Complying with the Business Plan Criteria, Planning and Managing a BID ballot, Top Tips for Delivering Good Governance, BIDs and Place-shaping, Managing a BID Efficiently, An Introduction to BIDs, Digital Marketing for BIDs, Responsibilities & best practices for BID Directors*; the details are [here](#). The courses run regularly throughout the year on Zoom and if you want to speak to Shayni her number is 0845 112 0118.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Professor Christopher Turner, Head of Research, British BIDs**