

MAY INSIGHTS by CHRIS TURNER

Focus for many will inevitably shift to the 4th of July General Election. With the announcement bound to impact BID's thinking and planning, particularly those close to a ballot.

One other topic of interest in many BIDs is the development of **ULEZ**, with **Clean Air** zones now in Bath, Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Greater Manchester (under review), Portsmouth, Sheffield, Newcastle and Gateshead, and of course the ULEZ in London. For those involved in the conversations **on low emission zones** there is some interesting research [here](#), looking at the health impact resulting from the introduction of low-emission zones in three Belgian cities. A major health insurance fund stresses that they must protect their members' health, and as air pollution is a major health risk, they want to contribute evidence to the debate. Health insurance data for their 2.3 million members allows them to produce high-quality studies on health risks from air pollution, and the data are interesting.

The **Built Environment Select Committee** inquiry into high streets has now completed its evidence collection. It was set up to seek answers to a range of questions: UK high streets continue to face unprecedented challenges, and as they are directly related to the local economy and community, it is vital to our towns and cities that government understands how best to support them. Lucy Montague, from Manchester Metropolitan University's School of Architecture has been appointed a Special Advisor to help the committee to navigate through the inquiry. She recently completed a superb study of high streets with co-authors David Rudlin and Vicky Payne, published by RIBA, [High Street: How our town](#)

[centres can bounce back from the retail crisis](#). They found that the current problem isn't really a crisis on the high street per se, but a crisis in big retail. They suggest that the retail development model is broken and unviable right now. Major legacy retailers have been subjected to asset stripping, leaving them financially vulnerable and leading to the downfall of many big high street names in recent years. The impact of this has been made more acute by the advice given to local councils, who were encouraged to make big moves to prioritise the presence of major retailers on their high street. The demise of those big retailers has left many high streets without the anchor stores they had become dependent on. Estimates suggest we now have about 40 per cent too much retail space in the UK. Their data showed there is already a big shift away from retail-dominated high streets and towards experience-based high streets. The message is optimistic: adaptable town centres can once more become the diverse, characterful, independent places that existed before they were homogenised by big retail. The big growth areas are hospitality, food and beverage, catering to people's desire to spend money on doing things like going on holiday or having a meal or beauty treatment. What we're seeing is the birth of the post-retail high street.

This story is reinforced by two useful new data driven pieces that have come out from Savills. [Spotlight: Shopping Centre and High Street – Q1 2024](#). Despite easing inflationary pressure positively impacting the direction of consumer confidence, spending growth remains varied by sector whilst anticipation of a recovery is leading to a hiatus in investment activity. [Pure play e-commerce](#) retailers, which focus exclusively on online channels for sales, are [recognising the value of having a physical presence](#). While online retail still constitutes a significant portion of overall retail sales, with the Office for

National Statistics stating at the end of last year that online sales are up by almost a fifth (16.2%) when compared to their pre-pandemic level in February 2020, over the last year we have seen these volumes plateau, with online shopping today accounting for just over a quarter (25.7%) of total retail sales (compared to its pandemic peak of 37.8%). In response, we are seeing brands that have previously been purely e-commerce based adopting an omnichannel approach with brick-and-mortar presence to future-proof their existing online model, a trend that has really come about since the pandemic. Consumers are increasingly seeking more tangible shopping experiences – at least for certain goods – and fortunately the physical retail environment is more favourable now than it has ever been, with fixed occupational costs down.

This rethinking of the high street is reinforced by the plans for **Heineken** to spend £39m on **reopening** over 60 UK pubs and sprucing up “tired” locals in suburban areas in an effort to attract more consumers working from home. The firm, which has 2,400 pubs through its Star pubs and bars arm, plans to reopen 62 long-term-closed venues this year and upgrade 612 outlets, with 94 of these earmarked for makeovers of about £200,000. Heineken said it would concentrate its major refurbishments on suburban pubs, turning them into “premium locals” to take advantage of the shift away from office working since the Covid crisis, as well targeting people looking to save money on travel by drinking near to home. The latest investment will create an estimated 1,075 new jobs and broaden each pub’s use and comes amid signs of rising consumer confidence as inflation and the cost-of-living crisis ease.

Whilst it is not for British BIDs to engage in political activity, it’s clearly important that we start to analyse what new administrations might bring in the next year. We've already

talked about the Conservative economic plans, as evidenced in the recent [Spring Budget](#). The [Labour plans for the high street](#) are now available [here](#). They have five key strands to their proposals: they will tackle anti-social behaviour and shoplifting, they will roll out banking hubs, they will replace business rates, they will stamp out late payments, and they will revamp empty shops, pubs and community spaces.

It is always valuable to look at case studies of success. [Stockton-on-Tees](#) BC Chief Executive Mike Greene says local government often sees health and social care as ‘a millstone, not an opportunity’. He is turning that on its head, creating a health and social care-led regeneration programme to harness the potential of the multi-billion-pound sector. As part of its economic plans, Stockton has concentrated hard on building up its town centre and cutting back on retail space. Part of the plan was to create a more vibrant community. The brave decision to buy and scrap the Castlegate shopping centre is one many councils would not have taken lightly, but Stockton worked with the community to get them on board. Rather than viewing care and health as a problem to be solved, in Stockton it is being used as an opportunity to create jobs and training, regenerate the town and increase the health and wellbeing of local people, boosting the life expectancy of those who need it, focusing on early intervention and prevention.

The [High Streets \(Designation, Review and Improvement Plan\) Bill](#), a private members bill, had its third reading in the House of Commons. The bill argues that local authorities should be guided towards better co-ordination in ensuring that they understand the dynamics of local high streets, and should work in concert with local communities, property owners and high street businesses to preserve and enhance those treasured places in a way that serves and grows our local economies. Apparently, the Minister

explicitly promised money on the table for drawing up reviews of up to three high street areas per local authority. The money, for up to three designated high street improvement plans, will be on top of that from the various grant-makers with pots of national money to which any designated high street might appeal to realise improvements and, (in particular) to preserve the important heritage and iconic character of many of our high streets. If successful, **the Bill would require each Local Planning Authority (LPA) to designate at least one 'High Street' (and a maximum of three), with an 'Improvement Plan'** to be prepared for each one. LPAs would need to consider the High Street Improvement Plan when exercising its planning functions. There would be periodic reviews of the condition of those high streets and – more proactively - five yearly reviews. Some excellent analysis is [here](#).

Crime and Safety always looms large in BIDs, and here is the latest update from our colleagues at the [National Business Crime Centre](#), which represents UK Police forces working in partnership with the business community to tackle crimes against businesses. Their focus is on preventing violence and tackling crime whilst developing and sharing good practice between police forces and private sector industries. They have developed a **Safe Spaces scheme** under the banner of [Operation Portum](#), which was launched at the end of last year and already has the support of 10 of the largest national retailers, along with 11 BIDs, providing over 13,000 safe spaces in retail locations. The NBCC recognise the important role that Business Improvement Districts play in towns and high streets and are therefore encouraging us all to join the scheme. NBCC know that many BIDs are keen to set up such a scheme but are unsure of where to start. They are also working to extend the scheme into the private security sector and have received overwhelming support with

commitments from several national security providers. The NBCC believe the Operation Portum principles are simple to adopt, easy to follow and support the vulnerable individual but also importantly protect the person and organisation offering the support. If you are happy to be part of the scheme and be an ambassador for **Operation Portum** please email the NBCC at contact@nbcc.police.uk confirming your support and the approx. number of premises you cover. Please also share your logo and we will add it to our website to show you are a supporter of the scheme.

As ever, [The British BIDs Academy](#) is the platform for the training and development of BID staff in the UK. The [Certificate in BID Management](#) has become an essential part in the personal development of BID practitioners, covering technical aspects such as legislation, regulations, marketing, brand management, contractual obligations, operational skills and employment law. **Class 2 begins on Tuesday 18th June 2024**. For more details on any of the courses listed above, please email contact@britishbids.info.

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

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