TAKE BACK
THE HIGH
STREET

Community Improvement Districts pilot programme: Final report

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July 2023

About Power to Change

Power to Change is the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.

We know community business works to create thriving places when local people take ownership of spaces that matter and deliver services that communities need. Our 2021-25 strategy sets out how, using strategic funding, trusted partnerships, rigorous research, policy insight, and a strong network of remarkable community businesses we will back the sector, creating the ideas, evidence, and exemplars that make the case for others to back them too. Ultimately, we will amplify the efforts of community businesses and put them at the heart of a fair economy.

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About CRESR

CRESR (the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research) is one of the largest multidisciplinary policy research centres in the UK and a flagship research centre within Sheffield Hallam University. Our aim is to understand the impact of social and economic disadvantage on places and people, and assess critically the policies and interventions targeted at these issues.

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Launched in 2012, Shared Assets is a Community Interest Company and a 'think and do tank', working to create a socially just future through practical projects that build new relationships between people and the land.

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About the Greater London Authority (GLA)

The Mayor of London is responsible for making London a better place for everyone who visits, lives or works in the city. The Mayor provides citywide leadership, setting an overall vision for London and creating plans and policies to achieve it. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mayor and London Councils established a Recovery Programme including nine 'Recovery Missions'. The Regeneration Team oversees the High Streets for All Recovery Mission which aims to build place-based partnerships and strategies to underpin future success. A key ambition of the mission was to work closely with London's diverse communities.

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Executive summary

Photo: Kilburn Library of Things opening, May 2023.

The pilot Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) programme in England took place between May 2022 and June 2023 across seven locations. Two high streets in London (Wood Green and Kilburn High Road) received £20,000 grants from Power to Change and £20,000 from the Mayor of London. A further five locations outside London (Hendon in Sunderland; Ipswich; Skelmersdale; Stretford in Greater Manchester; and Wolverton in Milton Keynes) each received £20,000 from Power to Change. The Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University and Shared Assets CIC acted as learning partners for the programme.

The CIDs initiated a wide range of engagement activities to involve local residents and partners in high street regeneration plans, and much of this will continue, overseen by local people and organisations.

The key findings and recommendations from our work as learning partners are summarised below, followed by a broader recommendation for national policy on high street regeneration.

Overall findings and recommendations

What is a Community Improvement District, and do we need them to regenerate high streets?

The key learning from our work with the pilot projects is that a Community Improvement District is an approach, not a model. We define it as a community leadership and development approach to regenerating high streets or town centres. High street regeneration can happen without community leadership, and community leadership can happen without a programme to support Community Improvement Districts. But highlighting that CIDs are a community-led approach to high street regeneration captures the who, how and where of a particular way of supporting local high streets. Our work suggests the approach should be supported and the CID terminology neatly summarises it and is therefore useful (though individual projects may want to use more locally specific and engaging titles for their work).

While the programme did not identify an ideal model, governance structure and funding source for CIDs, it showed an enthusiasm and need for engaging local communities in high street regeneration. This is important because it points towards a latent capacity within communities to engage with challenges in their high streets and town centres that previous initiatives and interventions have not succeeded in addressing.

Above all, it shows that there is a public care and concern over these spaces, which could be mobilised with the right level of support and encouragement.

Existing approaches (for example, those led by local authorities or Business Improvement Districts) seldom view local publics as equal partners in high street regeneration. A CID may not be a necessary condition for high street regeneration, but evidence from the pilot programme suggests that, properly resourced, it has the potential to generate conditions that are sufficient for high street regeneration. A CID creates a focus of attention that previous programmes have not done.

Taking the pilots as a cohort, it was evident that several factors contributed to their success or frustrations in building local partnerships. An individual who already had credibility as a local leader was a key factor, but that credibility was dependent on the track record and networks of the organisations they headed. This suggests that there needs to be a careful balance between initiative and inclusivity; the convenor's agency and authority rests in their ability to listen to, mobilise and activate diverse groups in a location around issues of common concern.

**Key recommendations to funders
and policymakers**

Recommendation 1
Building on the learning from the pilots,
policymakers and funders should agree
a clear statement of what a CID is (a
community leadership and development
approach to regenerating high streets
and town centres) and provide support
accordingly, while maintaining flexibility
in how any particular CID is delivered.
Policymakers should devise a national
programme to develop and expand the
work of CIDs, in addition to existing support
for high streets and town centres.

Recommendation 2
Policymakers should enable a pre-
programme stage of development support
to clarify what a CID should do in a
particular locality before inviting bids.
Funding should provide mentoring as well
as cash for organisations to spend. Advice
and financial support could be provided at
different levels:

1 Initial work to identify needs for support,
including training, and to complete basic
feasibility studies for regeneration plans

2 Develop plans and mentor pilots to build
partnerships and appropriate networks

3 Support pilots into action

Recommendation 3
Funders need to provide different levels
of support to align with different stages of
maturity as CIDs progress, and policymakers
should design programmes and policies
accordingly. We have identified four stages
of community-led high street regeneration,
and a CID could be initiated at and lead
any of these stages to ensure work is led
by, and accountable to, local communities.
These stages echo work done by other
high street initiatives, but within CIDs they
would have a specific focus on community
leadership.

▶ **Engagement and vision setting:**
conversations with local people to
generate ideas and a shared vision
for their place

▶ **Place activation:** bringing new activities
and life into under-used spaces and
promoting events and gatherings

▶ **Short term interventions:** bringing empty
or underused buildings back into use,
creating and animating public spaces, and
improving frontages and the public realm.
These could be small scale temporary
interventions or experiments designed to
create space for different economic and
social activities

▶ **Property ownership, development and
revenue generation:** longer term plans
to bring assets into community ownership
and create sustainable revenue streams
through leasing or trading in community-
owned premises

Recommendation 4
Change moves at the pace of trust. Therefore funders and policymakers need to ensure the amount of funding is sufficient to generate sustained engagement, while the duration of funding needs to recognise the slow work of building trust and addressing equality, diversity and inclusion challenges (especially when project leads have other responsibilities).

Recommendation 5
Policymakers should ensure support for prospective CIDs is geared towards long-term sustainability plans, which may take several years to develop and enact.

Recommendation 6
As CIDs develop, governments (UK and devolved) should maintain a publicly available resource bank of ideas that have worked well in different places and with different communities.

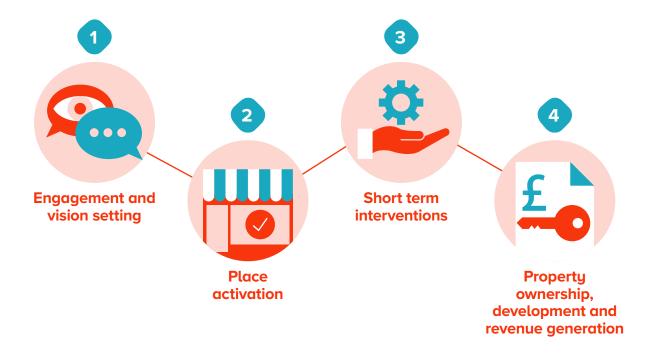## A recommendation for high street regeneration policy

As recommended above, we have identified four stages of community-led high street regeneration, and a CID could be initiated at and lead any of these stages to provide a focus on community leadership. This should be enabled through a national programme devised by government and funded through central or local government, supported by other sources such as philanthropic funding as opportunities arise. These stages are: (i) engagement and vision setting; (ii) place activation; (iii) short term interventions; (iv) property ownership, development and revenue generation.

These stages need to be resourced by:

▶ community leaders or activators who can facilitate conversations, welcome less-heard and marginalised groups and create inclusive visions

▶ organisations with local credibility and sufficient infrastructure (capabilities and networks) to deliver events and activities

▶ organisations with legal status (or the backing of an incorporated partner) to cover insurance and overheads and enter into contracts

▶ organisations with sound, transparent governance and a mature approach to risk management as well as access to specialist skills (surveying, property management, business planning etc.)

Four stages of community-led high street regeneration

**Engagement and
vision setting**

**Place
activation**

**Short term
interventions**

**Property
ownership,
development and
revenue generation**

At each stage resources should be made available commensurate with the CID's maturity, ambition, infrastructure and capabilities. To achieve this, a national programme is required in which communities wishing to pursue a CID (or equivalent) should receive sufficient resources to cover:

▶ A project manager or coordinator, funded to at least 0.5 FTE over a minimum of three years

▶ Grants to cover the cost of community-based peer researchers or community activators/organisers for initial groundwork

▶ Facilitation and expert advice tailored to the needs of the community

▶ Access to expert advice and funding for publicity, branding and community engagement

▶ Access to a capital fund to acquire, repair and repurpose property, along the lines suggested in Power to Change's call for a High Street Buyout Fund

It is important that expert advisers should be available throughout the programme to triage applications for support and assist new organisations in the initial stages of formation, as well as providing access to relevant knowledge and data on local property ownership and economic activity. We have not put figures on the funds required because they will vary significantly from place to place, as will local partners' ability to offer financial support. However, they need to be sufficient to cover dedicated project management and activities until such a time as a CID can source sustainable funding.

1.0
Introduction

The pilot programme for Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) in England was part of a multi-year campaign by Power to Change to promote the role and potential of community businesses in traditional high street locations. It coincided with, and built on, a national policy focus in England over recent years that has generated initiatives such as the Future High Streets Fund (2018); the Towns Fund (2019); and the Levelling Up Fund (2021) and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (expected to become law shortly).

Recent initiatives have demonstrated the continued salience of high streets as a political touchpoint; for example, in March 2023 Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove announced a High Street Accelerator programme in which ten pilot areas will be encouraged to create long-term visions and partnerships to tackle persistent vacancies. Meanwhile, Power to Change has continued to contribute to the debate, focusing attention most recently on the 100 'High Street Warning Lights' — towns in England with the highest growth in their persistent vacancy rates. Its report, Community-powered High Streets,[1] built on previous work with three key recommendations:

▶ A national community-led high streets programme that consolidates learning from existing high street interventions and supports local partnerships and shared visions for high street transformation

▶ Government support for alternative ownership models on the high street, such as community businesses or community development companies

▶ Consideration of an empty property premium on business rates for long-term vacant properties to encourage property owners to find new uses for vacant assets, while also generating income to support high street regeneration

As highlighted in our interim report, this focus arises from a backdrop of persistent challenges, accentuated through the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-21. Online retailing, while below the peaks experienced during Covid-19, has settled at more than a quarter of the total retail market[2], and traditional formats such as department stores are rapidly becoming obsolete. The Centre for Retail Research estimates that in the last four years, 60,700 stores have closed and well over half a million jobs have gone from the retail sector[3]. The recent Power to Change report shows that while there are local variations, the sight of shuttered shops is now typical of British towns and cities, amplifying a sense that local quality of life is in decline.

The notion of Community Improvement Districts, mooted by Power to Change in a discussion paper by Ben Stephenson published in 2020[4], builds on the recognition that lasting regeneration requires the involvement of a wider set of stakeholders from the voluntary and community sectors, including community business, and needs to deliver real benefits for residents as well as businesses.

The Stephenson report noted that while Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) had been a successful model for involving business communities in local economic development,

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… there is no parallel system for residents to participate, other than via indirect means with their local councillor or planning system. This leaves those who have ideas about how to shape their places without a strong voice.

As noted in our interim report, published in summary form by Power to Change in March 2023, the paper defined CIDs as 'bodies which provide opportunities for community stakeholders to participate in operational and strategic decision-making for their neighbourhoods'.

Such organisations would be:

▶ Non-political, democratic and inclusive

▶ Concerned with the economic, social and environmental development of neighbourhoods

▶ Open to residents, businesses and other stakeholders

▶ Designed to complement other local mechanisms where they exist

▶ Non-profit distributing bodies

Seven pilot CIDs were each supported with £20,000 in funding from Power to Change. Two, in Wood Green and Kilburn in London, received matched funding from the Mayor of London. The pilots outside London were in Ipswich; Hendon in Sunderland; Skelmersdale; Stretford in Greater Manchester; and Wolverton in Milton Keynes.

1.1 The seven pilot CIDs

The seven pilot CIDs covered a wide range of local situations, partnerships, and activities. The table below highlights this range in terms of longevity and structure, and is followed by short summaries of each CID.

Table 1: Structure and focus of CID pilots

Place	Type of organisation	Longevity	Area of focus
Hendon, Sunderland	Community anchor	20 years	Neighbourhood high street
Ipswich	BID	15 years	Town centre
Kilburn, NW London	Local authority led (Camden & Brent)	New	Neighbourhood high street
Skelmersdale, Lancashire	Community benefit society (not established)	New	Town centre/shopping centre
Stretford, Greater Manchester	Community business + local partnership	7 years	Shopping centre redevelopment
Wolverton, Milton Keynes	Community benefit society + local partnership	10 years	Shopping centre redevelopment
Wood Green, N London	BID	4 years	Town centre, focus TBC

Hendon, Sunderland

Photo: Back on the Map staff asked local people what they wanted for Villette Road, Hendon

Back on the Map is a well-established community anchor organisation with a 20-year track record, dating back to the New Deal for Communities scheme of the early 2000s. The focus of the CID is Villette Road, a neighbourhood high street that has become run-down and is characterised by a block of properties where the ground floor shops are all closed, although the upper floors are used for residential tenancies. Action has focused on creating a new branding and marketing strategy for the street, bringing together traders and residents, highlighting local heritage, and working with property owners to bring long term vacant units back into use.

The local authority is supportive and has provided planters to brighten up the shopping area. Back on the Map also installed a Christmas tree in December 2022, which one elderly resident said was the first time there had been one since he was a child. The CID has piloted the use of household support vouchers to support local traders as well as residents. There are active plans to buy the vacant block to address the problem of empty shops, as well as a building at the end of Villette Road which will be repurposed as a youth enterprise hub. The CID will continue as a place-focused subsidiary of Back on the Map (but with trader representation) and use its parent organisation's charitable structure for accountability.

Ipswich

The Ipswich CID is led by an existing Business Improvement District which has been going for 15 years. The CID sprung out of an awareness that a wider vision for town centre regeneration was required with the involvement of a broad range of local people, including those whose voices are not usually heard in decision making such as young people. There is existing momentum for town centre renewal, including a successful bid by the local authority for £2.3 million of Towns Fund money for digital infrastructure, and a celebration of the heritage of Cardinal Wolsey to mark his 550th anniversary in 2023. A Connected Town Task Force has been established under the auspices of the BID. The CID will be an evolving subsidiary of the BID with wider stakeholder representation, rather than a separate structure. The CID's work has focused on consultation and engagement, reaching out to young people and staging a series of engagement events to gather views of what the town centre needs to thrive in future as well as how best to tackle immediate issues around cleanliness and safety. This work will be continued through an Urban Room – a temporarily repurposed town centre building – where local people can engage with the CID's activities.

Skelmersdale

The project focused on the area around the Concourse, a 1970s shopping mall which dominates the central area of Skelmersdale. Built as a new town in the 1970s, Skelmersdale does not have a traditional high street and there is no evening economy to speak of. The initial idea, mooted by Bickerstaffe Community Services, a local voluntary organisation, was to form a new community benefit society to take a stake (via a community share issue) in retail businesses that would otherwise be lost to the community.

Subsequent discussions linked this proposal to a proposed community energy scheme that could generate additional revenue. However, discussions about proposed legal structures and the nature of support required from facilitators were inconclusive and in early 2023 Skelmersdale withdrew from the programme following discussions with Power to Change.

Kilburn

Photo: Library of Things opening at
Kilburn Library

Kilburn High Road is also the boundary between the London Boroughs of Camden and Brent (and includes the northernmost point of Westminster). Despite being designated a major town centre with excellent public transport connections and many independent businesses, it's a place of many challenges.

There is a lot of voluntary and community sector activity, including an active neighbourhood forum, but no coordinated BID or other coordinated business network. Camden and Brent councils have used their convening power to bring together local organisations and residents which has led to the creation of a new collaborative community partnership called One Kilburn.

The approach so far has been very open, with Camden Council providing most of the management and impetus. Engagement work has been enhanced by the recruitment of local residents as

'Community Activators' and has also included organised walks around the area (including one with the mayor and the leader of Camden Council), a 'town hall' event to imagine the future of Kilburn, and a 'toilet hackathon' to address the lack of public toilets.

One Kilburn aims to create a way for the councils to work more openly with local people, bringing residents closer to several planned projects - such as the potential refurbishment of Kilburn Library, meanwhile use opportunities and the design of new mural on Brondesbury Bridge. One Kilburn is working with Camden's library service to turn the library into a community hub and has partnered with the social enterprise, Library of Things, to introduce a kiosk where local residents can rent out household items which they might not otherwise be able to afford such as DIY tools, sewing machines and sound systems.

Stretford

The Stretford CID project is convened by Friends of Stretford Public Hall, an established community business that has been supported by Power to Change to take over a key community asset, Stretford Public Hall. The CID's focus is the redevelopment of the town centre and local shopping mall, built in 1969.

The mall was bought in 2019 through a joint venture between Bruntwood Works, a large Manchester-based development company, and Trafford Council. The hope is that the CID will become a standalone organisation with representatives from both Bruntwood and Trafford Council alongside local businesses and the wider community. It will operate in a similar fashion to a Business Improvement District but with a broader membership base and remit and a focus on health and wellbeing as well as retail.

As well as creating a vehicle for local people to have more of a say in town centre regeneration, the CID has been exploring the possibility of a community land bank or community land trust that could hold development sites while proposals for community ownership are developed.

While there were some early community engagement activities including a pop-up school uniform shop at the end of the 2022 summer holidays, activity was limited last year due to a combination of financial constraints and the impact of a local parliamentary by-election. In the meantime redevelopment of the shopping mall has been slower than expected. Current activity is focused on the creation of the 'Stretford Town Centre Forum' to take ideas forward and establish a governance structure. Stretford Public Hall has agreed to convene this on a voluntary basis for the time being.

Wood Green

Wood Green High Road is in the London Borough of Haringey, in north London. The CID project here was originally tied to the 'Eat Wood Green' project, which will see an urban farm developed on a multi-storey car park, but these have now been decoupled. The CID project is being led by the BID, Future Wood Green, in partnership with the council.

The current conception is that the CID will be a part of the BID board. However, progress stalled while the BID's attention focused on a re-ballot of members in January 2023, which gave the BID a mandate to continue. There has been limited engagement with the wider community while the key partners clarify the aims and purpose of the CID.

Wolverton

Photo: Future Wolverton's 'takeover' billboard. Art by Tim Layden.

Wolverton is a traditional market town that became part of the New Town of Milton Keynes when it was designated by central government in 1967. Future Wolverton, a community benefit society which has been established for over ten years, previously led the adoption of a pioneering town centre focused Neighbourhood Plan and a 'Portas' Town Team, and is leading the CID pilot. Its focus is on revitalising the town centre alongside the redevelopment of a 1970s shopping centre, The Agora, which has now been demolished.

The Agora will be replaced by a £40 million mixed-use development including 115 new homes, restoring the town's historic street pattern. A town centre regeneration working group provides local input into the regeneration plans, and it is proposed that this be revitalised with new members as a continuing CID. A public consultation event in spring 2023 attracted strong public support, with participation from new residents who had not previously been involved in town centre regeneration. One success was the re-modelling of a charity shop as a community information base for the CID and 'a charity shop for the 21st century'. Future Wolverton is in active discussions with Milton Keynes City Council about follow-on support after the CID's pilot phase.

1.2 The role of the learning partner and our work to date

The Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University and Shared Assets were commissioned by Power to Change as learning partners for the programme. We undertook this work through regular one-to-one conversations with project leads and a series of 'learning stocktakes' exploring issues that emerged for the seven pilots. These events were mainly held online, but included a face-to-face workshop in Sheffield in November 2022. In March and April 2023 we followed these up with more formal semi-structured interviews to capture the learning from the programme. We interviewed 18 individuals, including all the project leads and a selection of key partners, as well as reviewing relevant documentation produced through the programme.

The aim of this work was primarily to complement the programme management functions of Power to Change and the pilots' designated facilitators. Rather than evaluating the programme or acting as trainers, the learning partner's role was to draw out the key learning from the programme as it developed, offering spaces where pilots could reflect on their activities, the challenges faced and what was learned as they responded.

So while this report does not purport to be an evaluation of the programme, it does reflect the experiences of the participants and seeks to gather together key learning to inform recommendations for policymakers and practitioners, looking at what has worked in what contexts.

Our interim report, published in summary form by Power to Change in March 2023[5], emphasised that the pilot projects were in a state of transition. Nevertheless, it highlighted several emerging themes which we briefly recap below. Our headline findings were that:

▶ CIDs are an approach rather than an entity – there is no one-size-fits-all model

▶ They take a governance, communicative and convening role

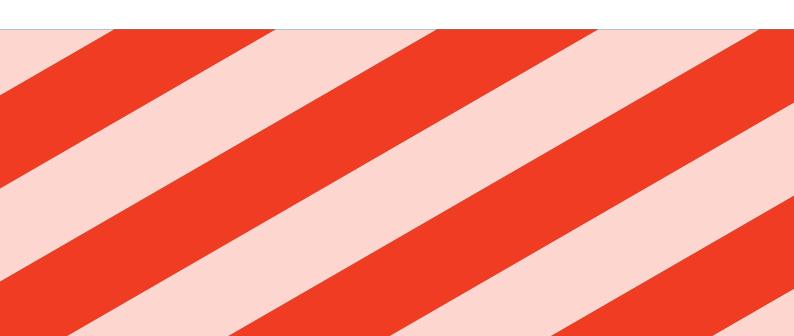▶ CIDs act as nodes in networks of town centre stakeholders

We highlighted three emerging functions of CIDs:

▶ **Convening** — Most of the pilot CIDs are adopting leadership roles within their localities, bringing together new groups of partners and initiating conversations and activities which otherwise are unlikely to have happened.

▶ **Amplifying resident and less-heard voices** — CIDs are bringing new voices to the table and extending ways to achieve involvement and accountability.

▶ **Galvanising local action** — Although still at an early stage, pilot CIDs have begun to achieve practical changes, such as the temporary shops in Wolverton and Stretford and the high street Christmas tree and striking local branding in Hendon. Identifying quick wins seems to be an important driver of progress, and visible activities and engagement led by CIDs gain more traction and buy-in from communities and stakeholder organisations than the idea alone.

We found three types of CID emerging from the pilots:

▶ The first, and most promising, is where existing organisations convene and lead initiatives to revitalise town centres, using the CID label to signal a particular focus and set of stakeholders.

▶ The second is an extended Business Improvement District with community participation, using existing powers to raise resources and engage partners.

▶ The third is a standalone community-led partnership in which local businesses and users of high street premises are key members of the partnership.

In this final report we build on those interim findings and offer a more detailed picture of the opportunity for CIDs and the role they have the potential to play. These findings come with the caveat that the pilot scheme involved only seven localities, two of which were not able to develop their proposals to a meaningful extent within the time allowed for the programme. A longer-term study would be needed to show how far the potential of CIDs may be realised over time. However, from what we currently know, we do consider that in the right circumstances CIDs could play a meaningful role in the regeneration of many high streets and town centres and our views on how this could be done are set out in our recommendations.

In this report we consider five central questions, and the report is structured to reflect these. They are:

1 What changes have happened as a result of the CID programme? We are concerned here not with attributing causal effects to the CID programme, but with identifying how the pilots have contributed to processes of local change

2 What has the process of becoming a CID (including structure and governance) brought to each place?

3 How has participation in the CID generated additional value?

4 How have CIDs made progress and overcome challenges?

5 How has the programme helped CIDs prepare for the future?

The report ends with a summary of key findings and recommendations that relate to each finding.

2.0
What we have learned about changes resulting from the CID programme?

From our engagement with the pilots over the last year, through regular catch-ups, learning stocktakes and formal interviews, we would define a CID as a community leadership and development approach to regenerating high streets or town centres.

We begin with this definition because the question, 'what is a CID?' has taxed pilots and their partners throughout the programme. In a sense this was inevitable in the context of reality-testing a concept that had previously been mooted in theoretical form. However, it is notable that these debates continued until the end of the programme and that in the majority of cases the term 'Community Improvement District' was not used in any engagement activities with the public. Instead, pilots adopted more locally specific project names to describe their activities.

At the beginning of our analysis of the evidence generated over the course of the programme we asked what was distinctive about the focus of the CID process in each location. Our summary across the seven pilots was as follows:

▶ **Hendon:** Focus on a local high street as a signifier of neighbourhood vitality

▶ **Ipswich:** Focus on widening engagement and involvement in existing regeneration processes

▶ **Kilburn:** Focus on a place that had been neglected through existing governance structures

▶ **Skelmersdale:** Focus on creating a new model of community ownership

▶ **Stretford:** Focus on convening conversations around a local town centre and an aspiration to develop community spaces

▶ **Wolverton:** Focus on convening conversations around a town centre and renewing community engagement in a redevelopment process

▶ **Wood Green:** Focus on bringing residents into an existing business-led approach and increasing inclusivity

It was noteworthy that only one of the pilots, Skelmersdale, focused on the model rather than the process and the place. This was the pilot where least progress was made and Skelmersdale eventually withdrew from the programme in early 2023.

2.1 New activities

Across most of the pilots, it was possible to identify new activities that would not have happened without the stimulus of the CID pilot programme. These ranged from community engagement and consultation events to the repurposing of empty shops, and from branding and communications campaigns to conversations with new partner organisations. In most cases it was evident that the activities were just one step in a much longer process that often began before the CID programme and was expected to continue after it. In some cases these actions, and the conversations that ensued from them, created an impetus for progress that had previously lain dormant or not existed.

In Hendon, the catalyst for action was a highly visible branding of Villette Road, the neighbourhood high street, as the Heart of Hendon. A cluster of high-profile events and initiatives demonstrated that Back on the Map, the community anchor organisation leading the pilot, was serious about the change it wanted to make. Previously neglected buildings were brought into use (using Back on the Map's own funds) to prevent deterioration and bring in new traders. Public realm improvements were installed, including planters and new bins, funded by the local authority. Green spaces at either end of Villette Road are being upgraded to underline a sense of care about the locality. Small-scale interventions reinforced the view that people cared about the street: Back on the Map arranged for the first Christmas tree on Villette Road in almost a century, as well as family activities for the Easter holidays. There were also initiatives to support the local economy:

Back on the Map was allocated £9,000 from Sunderland City Council's household support scheme to be spent in the local butcher, baker and convenience store rather than in supermarkets outside the neighbourhood. Money from the CID pilot paid for the butcher and baker to install PDQ systems enabling them to take card payments for the first time

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I think it's created an opportunity to focus on that local priority because prior to that we knew that was a concern for local people but we didn't have any means or any programme to build around it.

In Ipswich there was a clear focus throughout on opening up the existing Business Improvement District to the wider community, to get community input into a 'Connected Town' vision for the town centre and bring less-heard groups — especially young people — into the decision-making process. The involvement of young people is a new initiative within the BID and it is unlikely that this would have been pursued to the same degree without the impetus of the CID programme. The pilot is planning a large-scale consultation with local residents to refresh the idea of a connected town, which was mooted in 2021, prior to Power to Change's involvement. The vision is based around the idea of fifteen-minute neighbourhoods, the hope being that Ipswich may be able to offer residents all the services they need within a short journey on foot or by public transport. The consultation will inform longer term activity by the Connected Town Task Force and a wider stakeholder group to supplement the work of existing BID members.

Kilburn's activities also centred on public

engagement, especially through walkabouts and public meetings. One of the most successful of these was a 'toilet hackathon' in which local residents considered how to address the shortage of public toilets, which was excluding many from the shops and activities on Kilburn High Road and nearby green spaces. 'Community activators' were recruited to engage with local people and identify issues of concern and individuals who were keen to get involved. Camden Council allocated time for its own staff to work more intensively with local people and test ideas. A dedicated website provided a space to share and celebrate local activity and opportunities. It is hoped the learning from Kilburn will support community involvement in a government-funded 'levelling up' initiative in nearby Kentish Town.

Skelmersdale engaged in relatively little activity or community engagement. There were various reasons for this. The initial idea – to facilitate community ownership of struggling local businesses – was ambitious and was strongly advocated by one local social entrepreneur, but without the network of connections and support that benefited other pilots. The dependence on one individual proved problematic when the project lead was unwell and not able to develop the proposal for a while. By the end of the pilot programme the sense among local stakeholders was that while the idea had merit, more needed to be done to gain support within the community and among key partners (see section 1.1).

However, as one interviewee highlighted, the need remained:

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It's stalled really. Yesterday I found out the local butcher who's been going for 90 years has closed because of the cost of living crisis and that's one we could have helped. There is still a need. We're still in the incubation stage of the idea.

In Stretford the pace of activity was slow, but this was attributed in part to delays in the expected redevelopment of the town centre: the developer, Bruntwood, had been expected to start work on site during the course of the pilot and this would have prompted conversations within the community about how the new spaces could be best used. As it was, there was limited development activity and so the CID pilot had fewer opportunities to engage with the public. One of these happened in the early stages of the programme, when a vacant store was taken over as an affordable school uniform shop; more recently, Stretford Public Hall, which is leading the CID pilot, held a successful 'repair and re-use' event which was well supported by local partners.

In Wolverton the CID pilot activity built on a long history of planning around town centre regeneration, involving around eight discrete phases of activity over two decades. Wolverton was a neighbourhood planning frontrunner and has taken advantage of other regeneration policies in the past to advance its plans for greater community involvement in the development of the town centre, with a particular focus on replacing the unpopular Agora shopping centre.

The CID pilot coincided with the final demolition of the Agora and so created opportunities for new discussions about what local residents wanted in their town. Through public engagement activities, including a weekend-long 'Wolverton Conversation', new people were engaged, including young people and people who had recently moved to the town. However, some tensions remain between different interest groups, as one stakeholder highlighted:

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A lot of older people see it as a declining railway town, and there's a much more youthful diverse population who see it as a bohemian neighbourhood.

Wood Green in north London was another area where there was relatively little activity, although at the time of writing there were plans for an initial meeting with community groups. Delays were partly due to the need to secure a new mandate for Wood Green Business Improvement District, which is leading the scheme, in January 2023. The pilot has been given additional time to deliver its funded activities and its first priority is to bring local groups together to map and understand what is taking place in the locality.

Overall, it was evident that the predominant activity of the pilots was engagement with partners and communities. Pilots used a wide range of approaches, with a mixture of results, but there were points where conversations and negotiations created an impetus for action. The right leadership at the right time provided the confidence and motivation to move forward. Leadership in this sense is collective and not just individual; where change has been

evident, it is because the parties involved have moved forward together, even if an individual is perceived as driving that process.

2.2 New partnerships or forums

In most of the pilots, new or revived partnerships resulted from the programme. Key to this was a process of building trust, more often than not through repeated, under-the-radar conversations and brokering. This informal work created a basis for more formal arrangements, such as the high street forum now established in Hendon. However, we found a need for clarity on what was expected from new partnerships: some pilots struggled to articulate this.

In Hendon, a traders' and stakeholders' forum has been set up to take forward the revitalisation of Villette Road. Members are asked to sign up to a 'charter' that summarises their common vision and commitment to the neighbourhood. The CID pilot has resulted in greater commitment to the area by Sunderland City Council, the police and Gentoo Housing, the main local social landlord, which is now taking more assertive action to tackle drug dealing associated with some of its properties. Durham Wildlife Trust is helping to change local perceptions of Villette Road by creating a 'pollinator corridor' using planters outside shops, linking green spaces at either end of the street and establishing a new community growing space. However, interviewees recognised that partner organisations are battling their own challenges of limited time and resources;

for example, the neighbourhood police officer is retiring and there are currently no plans to replace them. That said, interviewees have noticed a surge in community activity as a result of the Villette Road initiative:

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My impression is there's a real community spirit to Villette Road. There's great camaraderie between the people and the Back on the Map staff.

In Ipswich, the existing town centre taskforce has successfully recruited several new members, including young people (the president of the local student union is now a member) and faith groups. Interviewees stressed the need to see this as part of a wider process of engagement rather than tokenistic 'representation' on a board:

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… having the Students' Union president on the task force from a youth point of view has kept that energy of, we need to engage youth, it's really important and [it] has led to us being able to go out and speak to a number of groups, particularly within the college, around their views of their town and their place which has been quite powerful.

While Kilburn did not have the benefit of an existing community-based anchor organisation or a long history of engagement around the town centre, participants noted that the CID pilot created a 'neutral ground for everyone to meet' without being dominated by particular interests. The process of community activation has also encouraged local groups to create new links; the Kiln Theatre, for example, noted that it was now linking up with more community groups.

Skelmersdale struggled to create a meaningful local partnership, although ideas were discussed with a number of potential collaborators. At the time the programme ended the project lead was considering linking up with local sports organisations with a focus on health and wellbeing, although these ideas had moved some distance from the original hopes of town centre revitalisation.

Stretford was able to develop new contacts with business owners, including a local café whose owner was interested in moving from a traditional commercial model to become a community interest company. While these connections are at an early stage, the CID pilot hopes to build a 'mutual aid' approach where commercial and community businesses can support each other in the locality.

Wolverton, as mentioned above, could build on a long history of previous engagement. The CID pilot provided an opportunity to reboot the existing town centre regeneration group, taking on the role of a CID but not necessarily using the term as its banner. That process of rebooting is also starting to reveal shifts in attitudes, from a standpoint of opposition to a new development to being able to engage with it and consider the opportunities it may offer the town.

Wood Green's efforts to build local partnerships were frustrated to some extent, first because it was not possible to proceed with initial plans for a food growing project, and then because time and energy was absorbed in re-balloting BID members to secure a renewed mandate for the Business Improvement District.

However, now that the ballot has been successful, the BID hopes to begin a process of building partnerships with local institutions and voluntary and community organisations.

Taking the pilots as a cohort, it was evident that several factors contributed to their success or frustrations in building local partnerships. An individual who already had credibility as a local leader was a key factor, but that credibility was dependent on the track record and networks of the organisations they headed. The confidence to seize the initiative needed to be backed by a confidence among partners that an idea could be turned into reality. This suggests that there needs to be a careful balance between initiative and inclusivity; the convenor's agency and authority rests in their ability to listen to, mobilise and activate diverse groups in a location around issues of common concern.

2.3 What would have happened without the CID funding?

The money available to the CID pilots was significant, but not substantial: £20,000 for each from Power to Change, with equivalent funding from the Mayor of London for Kilburn and Wood Green. This was sufficient to pay for some capacity within funded organisations (for example, Back on the Map recruited a marketing and communications worker) or to support events and community engagement (Camden and Brent councils used the Kilburn funding to recruit local community activators).

Power to Change also paid two organisations, Locality and The Means, to provide facilitator support to each project, and funded Sheffield Hallam University and Shared Assets as learning partners. Pilots had to make judgements on the best use of these resources, since they would not support extensive capital works or acquisition of assets.

Overall, the funding enabled pilots to focus on particular locations and on processes of engagement within those locations. Back on the Map was clear that its board would not have put resources into Villette Road without Power to Change's support, but the experience of the CID pilot helped to convince the charity's board that it could achieve many of its core objectives by revitalising this street.

"
So the whole next five-year strategy is built around the high street regeneration and using that as a kind of hook to create opportunities for young people in employment and enterprise... Because of the work through the CID and the additional community engagement and conversations we're having, and through the traders and stakeholders forum, we were able to identify that the high street could create that multiplier effect of economic regeneration that we've been trying to do for a long time... but in a different way and potentially in a quicker way.

Interviewees highlighted the value of the funding and of Power to Change's reputational capital (see also section 3.2) in enabling strategic conversations to take place that would not otherwise have happened. The money did not create legitimacy in itself, but the fact that Power to Change had selected the pilots for funding was seen as potentially game-changing. In Kilburn interviewees pointed out that nobody would have addressed the issue of public toilets, which was a concern to local people but not on either Brent or Camden councils' radar. Ipswich reported that CID pilot status gave a 'stronger voice' to consultation efforts, as well as freeing up time to build relationships with potential partners.

While it is difficult to evidence counterfactuals – it is not possible to know what conversations would have taken place in any event – interviewees were clear that the pilot programme had helped to create some strategic capacity and break local deadlocks:

"

We didn't do the CID because we wanted £20,000, we did the CID because we had a very specific reason for doing it and we needed to move the conversation on and I think it has successfully begun to move the conversation on, acknowledging that these things take a lot of time and that people's robust positions that they held for ten years take time to move. I feel like we're just at the beginning of something, not at the end of it, this has opened things up a bit, allowed a bit of breathing space and time for consideration and let the people back in again to a place that has excluded them for many years.

However, it should be noted that this did not always happen. Skelmersdale, Wood Green, and to some extent Stretford did not make the progress they had hoped for. In both Skelmersdale and Wood Green there was a focus on trying to identify the best organisational form, structure and remit before working to build partnerships. In all the pilots it is possible that more would have been achieved with a less constrained timescale; one pilot lead suggested three to five years would be an optimum time. However, where longstanding organisations can mobilise existing networks of relationships (as in Hendon, Ipswich and Wolverton) there is evidence that some progress is possible within tight timescales.

3.0
What have we learned about the process of becoming a CID?

3.1 Governance structures and plans

The Stephenson report set the tone for a focus on Community Improvement Districts as a new form of governance for high streets and town centres, bringing diverse partners to the table in an equal, democratic and sustainable relationship. As funders of the pilot programme, Power to Change were keen to ensure pilots considered governance models and as a condition of their funding they were required to report back on their proposed legal form or partnership structure by April 2023. This created an incentive to move rapidly from engagement processes to formalising the CID. However, as highlighted in our interim report, most pilots did not consider a new legal entity to be necessary or desirable.

Recognising this, Power to Change relaxed the requirement for detailed plans, instead asking CIDs to consider their goals, partnership or stakeholder engagement arrangements, and how they would ensure accountability as their work develops.

By May 2023, five of the seven pilots had supplied their governance proposals to Power to Change. Wood Green had been given extra time for its work but was likely to use the existing BID as the driver of future activity; and Skelmersdale had withdrawn from the programme. Table 2 below summarises the position for each pilot at different stages in the programme.

Table 2: Community Improvement District governance arrangements

CID location	Existing governance arrangements	Plans in September 2022	Plans in May 2023
Hendon	Back on the Map Ltd, a community-led neighbourhood anchor organisation (Company limited by guarantee and registered charity)	A long-term vision of CID as an independently constituted organisation	The CID will be delivered by Back on the Map. A recent governance review has established new resident roles, including a traders' representative on its charity board. A voluntary Trader and Stakeholder Forum will inform and develop the vision for Villette Road.
Ipswich	Existing Business Improvement District	Considering possibility of Connected Town Task Force as independent entity	Connected Town Task Force and Vision Board will remain under the umbrella of the BID and accountability will be to BID levy payers.
Kilburn	Initial engagement led by Camden Council; statutory responsibilities shared with Brent and Westminster	Possibility of new community based organisation	Legal accountability remains with Camden Council. In the long term it is hoped that One Kilburn can be developed as a community-based entity with grant-making powers.
Skelmersdale	Pilot led by local social entrepreneur	Plans to form a community benefit society financed through a community share offer	No progress on governance model; withdrawn from pilot programme.
Stretford	Led by Stretford Public Hall, a local community business (a charitable community benefit society)	Stretford Community Collective is an unincorporated organisation with written terms of reference. In the long term, the collective intends to explore suitable legal structures	A CID working group led by Friends of Stretford Public Hall is bringing together local authority, business and voluntary and community sector members. The aim is to develop this over time with the hope of eventually facilitating community-led development of land and assets, but this is a long term aim and no formal structure has yet been agreed.
Wolverton	Future Wolverton Community Benefit Society	No plans for new structures but existing Agora Regeneration Working Group provides a forum for stakeholders	The Agora Regeneration Working Group will continue to oversee future work on the CID but new terms of reference and membership have been proposed.
Wood Green	Existing Business Improvement District	A constituted organisation or community partnership/steering group which would take a seat at the board of the BID	Activity delayed by BID ballot but the hope is still to have community representation on the BID board.

As the table shows, for the most part the CID pilots focused on process rather than structure. This should not be seen as a failing in the programme; as the pilots have discussed and implemented their plans with their community and institutional partners, it has become apparent that the process of developing community leadership needs to be given time and that the precise role and function of each CID will flow from that. While this presents challenges in terms of articulating exactly what a CID is, it provides an opportunity to engage with communities who have previously been marginalised in decision-making about their town centres and high streets.

Where existing structures were available, most pilots felt it made sense to work through those rather than introduce new levels of bureaucracy. Some interviewees commented on the advantages of channelling activity through organisations that already had clear powers and responsibilities, such as local authorities or BIDs:

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[The] outcome at the moment is that we've got more organised communities that are able to speak with a single voice, or a shared voice, it's much easier for councils to engage with them as a result of that. So if we hadn't had the council involved then some of that outcome would be more difficult to achieve. I think having the council so strongly involved, the community people have got a lot more trust in the council now and a lot more trust in the process cause they've seen how committed we are.

❝

If you get a board or a group of people that form say a CID… that have an interest, have experience in places, that are aligned with a BID or the local authority, it creates a very different beast and it can be much more powerful.

Using and adapting existing structures circumvents the 'what is a CID?' question, but may present challenges if existing organisations don't have the power or capacity to take the actions their members want. One interviewee highlighted the dilemma of reconciling the 'what' of community-led regeneration with the 'how' of powers and resources:

❝

We've got a clear sense of what we're trying to do I think in terms of what the CID would do, what the function would be and what the objectives would be, the what I suppose, it's the how I think that we're finding harder. So the form of the CID, to what extent it actually has power I suppose and to what extent it would affect planning or those kind of things, I think we're grappling with a bit.

In the meantime, pilots have found that sub-groups and forums have enabled people to gather around issues of mutual interest without getting bogged down in legal detail. Most acknowledged, though, that in the longer term a more formal structure might be necessary, but highlighted that this needed to be the result of a process of engagement rather than a precursor to it.

Leadership in this sense has more to do with accountability and empowering than control and direction:

" **Although we [the council] are "leading" the work, I am very clear that I want to be led by the community – and so my leadership style is very enabling/facilitative – so there's something about leadership style as well.**

Interviewees in Ipswich noted that having senior individuals participating from partner organisations helped to create a sense that this was not simply a talking shop and that discussions would lead to action. But this had to be balanced with inclusivity and creating opportunities for genuine engagement and influence. One young person recruited onto the Connected Town Task Force spoke positively about the experience of taking part:

" **...while slightly daunting because [it was] my first committee that [is] external to where I work and with people that are highly professional, highly experienced, I haven't felt like I couldn't contribute and that my contribution wasn't valued... It generally feels positive and progressive as well.**

However, it needs to be recognised that the voices of those who are less confident or marginalised through disadvantage, ethnicity or other characteristics also need to be heard and specific support may be needed to enable this to happen.

3.2 The support provided by Power to Change

3.2.1 New and expanded activities

As indicated in section 1, the support provided by the CID programme allowed organisations to undertake new activities or expand existing priorities in new ways. This was due both to the additional resource that paid for new people or activities, but also – and perhaps more importantly – because being part of a programme generated a 'seal of approval' (as one participant described it) that legitimised activities where it might have been difficult to obtain approval in the past. The sense of being part of a national pilot drew attention to the locality and its needs, and created a feeling of expectation among communities and local partners.

In Hendon's case, for example, it enabled Back on the Map staff to work with their board to identify a new focus for an existing community anchor organisation, recognising the local high street as integral to their wider work of social inclusion:

> **"**
>
> **I think they [traders] were aware if we're going to do this regeneration, a high street is a big part of that, if your high street doesn't look good, there's no care and love and attention onto it and it's run down then it makes you feel you don't live in a great place. It's not anything new, it's just who's going to actually tackle that if not us? I think that's one of the conversations we had to start being honest with the board about and also around the youth stuff, how do we tie that lack of youth opportunity that residents are concerned about into our core work because if we don't do it, again who is going to come into the area and deal with some of these really difficult problems?**

For Wolverton, what mattered was the profile that the grant and Power to Change's involvement generated:

> **"**
>
> **The fact that it's been within a pilot project has been very helpful for me, just to give it a bit more status and priority and people to take a bit more note of it has been really useful, we have done something to move the conversation on.**

3.2.2 Timeframe for the project

Most participants felt the time allowed for the programme was too short to put meaningful long-term changes in place. By the end of the programme some pilots were only just establishing the networks and relationships needed to move forward; others had done so but needed to secure further support to continue this work. However, some interviewees accepted that the constrained timescale encouraged them to move faster than might otherwise have happened:

> **"**
>
> **If it had been two years, [the work] might not have fast-forwarded as much in the first few months. Traders were aware they might not have been there after two years.**

Interviewees commented that it would have been difficult to achieve much within a one-year timeframe without existing organisations, networks and relationships. As the experience of Skelmersdale shows, it is challenging to create lasting change from a standing start within a year. This raises questions about how best to identify when an organisation or idea is grant-ready, and what kind of support might be most helpful at an initial stage to test the feasibility of an idea. At the same time there is a risk that groups may be excluded if only 'grant-ready' organisations receive support, so it is important that early-stage development support is also available where needed.

Photo: In Hendon, traders joined a gift card scheme for the city - which brought an additional £9,000 of trade to the street

In order to build lasting relationships and a platform for future action, participants suggested two to three years might be more appropriate than one. A three-year project, one suggested, would have time to become more embedded within the local community. Others suggested even longer:

" **My personal opinion is the timescale for us was way too short, something as big a subject as a Community Improvement District should have really been given a few years to be developed, not just as a pilot for a 12-month period. Realistically in 12 months you're just going to get the very basics out of something.**

" **I might be wrong but I think it takes like three years to set up a BID, you don't just go in one day and go look, have a BID, it takes a few years and that's where you've got existing organisations, you know their address, you know where they are exactly. I think we need a lot longer, it's all about trust with businesses because they're so struggling post-Covid, a lot of small businesses, there's a lot of turnover of businesses, there's not a lot of empty shops but there's a lot of turnover.**

Given that CIDs are focused on giving local communities more say in decision-making around their high streets and town centres, it is important to allow enough time to build relationships that permit fuller community involvement. One pilot lead suggested the timescale was driven more by the funder's need to produce an output than by an assessment of the time needed to work with communities; this indicates the need for a clear rationale for the duration of a programme.

3.2.3 Amount of grant

There was broad agreement that the £20,000 on offer was not sufficient to achieve significant change within the course of a year. Once overheads were taken into account, it could not cover the costs of a full-time employee or a regular programme of events. In calling for proposals, Power to Change said applicants 'should have sufficient capacity to establish a CID including the willingness to commit your own time and resources to the pilot alongside the support of Power to Change'. Some pilots used their allocations imaginatively and effectively supplemented the resources from Power to Change with their own funds. In Hendon, the grant paid for marketing and branding activity that would not otherwise have taken place; in Wolverton it paid for creative public consultation events; and in Kilburn, matched by funds from the Mayor of London, it paid for the recruitment of community activators who were able to reach out to local people without the potential drawback of being identified with the local authority and its official processes.

A larger grant, however, could have paid for more dedicated time to build relationships and programmes of activity. One project lead reflected:

> **If I'd been able to get a person in to get on with the operational stuff we'd have made more progress and we'd probably have been able to do enough stuff.**

However, pilots acknowledged that the full value of the grant consisted not simply in the funds handed over but in the resources of time and stakeholder interest that they could unlock:

> **We thought the money, in terms of what it will cost in [our] time, it's negligible really… however it's not always just about the cash, it's about the funder relationship, it's also about the relationship with the partners, the status of the programme, because it is a small pilot, it brings interest and attention to the area which often is what is needed more than the 20 grand.**

3.2.4 Clarity of the CID concept

While the CID programme was designed to allow pilots to explore and test the idea of a CID in various ways, the embryonic nature of the concept created additional hurdles to overcome. Some pilots continually returned to the question of what a CID actually is and in what ways it might be different from other forms of local governance, and conversations with local partners could get bogged down in abstractions rather than action.

However, as one participant in the April learning stocktake commented, the relative vagueness of the concept also allowed more open processes of engagement to take place in some cases.

For some, the lack of clarity within the CID concept and its experimental nature frustrated progress. One commented:

> **I think in hindsight it would have been better to have more than just a few bullet points of an outline of what the programme was, that you could give to people like cabinet members to say this is the pilot, the pilot's role is to do x, y and z, it doesn't affect the financial, it doesn't affect this, doesn't affect that, that would have broken down quite a lot of the discussions and the delay if you like…**

In Stretford, the notion of the CID as a convener of local stakeholders was stymied by the lack of any power to convene: the pilot was dependent on the local authority as the key player in the locality and a property developer, and there were different understandings of what was expected from each partner. The pilot was effectively marginalised because more significant decisions for the locality were being taken elsewhere – 'if it [the funding] had gone to the council it might've been different'. Interestingly, in the one pilot where funding did go to the local authority, the council concerned (Camden) was very aware of the risks of imposing its own decisions on the local community and allowed project staff, rather than senior executives and elected members, to lead the process.

3.2.5 Accountability and management

Power to Change set three milestones for progress reporting in order to ensure accountability within the programme. Grants were dependent on reaching these milestones. They were:

▶ By Christmas 2022, submit a costed development plan explaining the CID's goals, projected timescales and likely costs

▶ By April 2023, submit details of proposed governance or partnership structure – this requirement was relaxed and replaced with a questionnaire on governance plans

▶ Submit a forward plan for the CID before the close of the programme

There were mixed views on Power to Change's approach to project management and accountability. Power to Change felt that the milestones provided sufficient freedom for the pilots to plan appropriately for local circumstances while retaining necessary accountability. Some pilots wanted more leeway and less monitoring; others, by contrast, felt Power to Change could have been more hands-on in explaining exactly what was required. In Skelmersdale, there was tension from the outset between Power to Change's focus on the high street and the project lead's desire to create a vehicle for wider local regeneration, and these differences were never resolved. One local interviewee's reflection was that 'I think on the whole we'd be better just trying to do it ourselves without the constraints that Power to Change put on'; however, it remains to be seen how much progress can be made.

The pilot lead reflected that perhaps the bid had been skewed towards work in the town centre in order to qualify for the grant; this does point to a wider issue in that in a climate of constrained resources, the existence of a grant programme may have unintended consequences in shaping local activity.

Others commented on the tension between Power to Change's project management and the fluidity required for community-led activity, arguing that a logic model should not be imposed from the outset:

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From my perspective it was all a bit constrained, we want you to do X, we think if we give you this to do you'll X and Y and Z and you'll end up with an outcome of A. When you start working with communities you have no idea what you're going to end up with, if you're lucky you'll end up with something great. What I've learnt in the last 20 years is you have to have a vague idea of what you want to do and there was that vague idea, but you've got to allow for chaos and a bit of anarchy on the way and I don't think this process allowed for that.

There was also some resentment at the need to meet milestones set by Power to Change in order to receive tranches of funding, although it was acknowledged that accountability was required and goals needed to be set. The main concern was the impact on the financial stability of small organisations:

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I think having money in tranches and having to prove that you've done one thing to get the money is very bad, from our perspective that's a disaster, it brings cashflow problems for a very small organisation.

3.2.6 Facilitation, peer learning and networking

As well as providing a cash grant, Power to Change also funded the work of facilitators from Locality (outside London) and The Means (within London) to support each pilot. Pilots in London were offered 15 days of support, while those outside London were each offered 12. The facilitators were to 'guide CIDs through the process of becoming established', acting as critical friends, troubleshooters and relationship brokers and drawing on wide experience of community development (in the case of Locality) and working with BIDs (in the case of The Means). Power to Change also funded Sheffield Hallam University and Shared Assets to provide 59 days of work as learning partners to the pilots, working with them through regular catch-ups, a series of peer learning events, and formal interviews with pilot leads and local stakeholders to gather and analyse key themes from the programme.

Facilitators offered different types and

levels of support to pilots depending on their requirements. Several pilots benefited from facilitators' brokering skills, arranging meetings with third parties or sense-checking some of the pilots' understandings of the programme and their individual plans. In London, The Means (which supported Kilburn and Wood Green) arranged walkabouts and organised meetings between the two pilots; in Ipswich the facilitator from Locality was able to advise the CID on engaging with young people.

While the role of the facilitators was welcomed, there were occasions where pilots found it difficult to develop constructive relationships with the individual facilitators assigned to them. This may be in part because of a lack of shared understanding about the role, or a sense that the facilitators were too directive. In Skelmersdale, for example, the pilot wanted very specific legal support to develop a governance model and business case which the facilitator did not see as commensurate with their role; in Wolverton the facilitator initially assigned stepped aside some months into the programme and their role was taken on by a more senior colleague. It may be helpful in future programmes to enable pilots to choose from a pool of facilitators, or to agree how the working relationship will operate in advance of a facilitator being assigned.

The pilots generally valued networking and peer learning, although they would have appreciated more opportunities to meet in person. One commented on the 'really inspiring stuff' they learned about from other participants in the programme and from the Hastings Commons, who presented their work at an event in November 2022. Another said:

> **It's been great to be able to talk to others around the country, that's been really useful.**

3.3 Development of relationships and partnerships

3.3.1 Who are the communities in Community Improvement Districts?

The seven pilot projects displayed varying concepts of 'community' and their approaches differed as a result. There has not to date been a clear definition of 'community' within the limited literature on CIDs, and to a large extent it was up to the pilots to decide which communities they were seeking to connect with and include. From their approaches, we can see a spectrum of understandings.

At one end of the scale (Kilburn) we have a public outreach programme via community activators that is designed to contact and draw in marginalised and less-heard communities, working at street level with members of the public and through community-based organisations such as the local neighbourhood forum. This approach values informal connections and conversations and draws on the principles of asset-based community development and community organising, in which the starting point is the qualities, values and energy that local people bring to the table. Wolverton adopted a similar approach, but from a more established basis in which there were already semi-formal structures (the town centre regeneration working group) that had links with formal partners such as the town council and Milton Keynes City Council. Hendon also worked from an established basis where links with key partners in the local authority and voluntary and community sector were already in place. Hendon were innovative in using community development approaches (such as street-level conversations and meetings in local venues) to reach out to local businesses — one stakeholder commented that 'I've never known a voluntary organisation bringing in traders before'.

Stretford already had strong links with local residents, but was less well connected with organisations in the locality that were seen to be powerful decision-makers, including the local authority (Trafford Council) and the town centre developer, Bruntwood. Creating an equal relationship between stakeholders and a joint decision-making forum proved unachievable within the programme's timescale, although conversations continue. Ipswich, as an established BID, came from a more formal starting point and aimed to bring members of the community into the prospective CID, although this took the form of seeking to expand the existing Town Centre Task Force; new participants were thus joining an existing membership group rather than starting from scratch on an equal footing.

Finally, neither Skelmersdale nor Wood Green made significant strides in including or giving a voice to new communities. In Skelmersdale the focus was on developing the CID concept and limited work was done to involve partners; in Wood Green, after an initial link with a community-based project, Eat Wood Green, was abandoned, there was little progress because of the focus on renewing the existing Business Improvement District's mandate.

3.3.2 Which stakeholders have been involved?

Table 3 below indicates the types of key stakeholders involved in each of the pilots. Where no significant interactions have taken place or engagement has been unproductive, cells are left blank.

Table 3: Stakeholder involvement in CID pilots. Limited involvement is indicated by brackets.

Type of stakeholder	General public	Voluntary, community, faith sector	Local businesses	Property developers/ owners	Local authorities	Other (details)
Hendon	x	x	x	(x)	x	Housing group
Ipswich	(x)	x	x			
Kilburn	x	x	x		x	
Skelmersdale		(x)				
Stretford	x	x	x		(x)	
Wolverton	x	x	x	x	(x)	
Wood Green			(x)		(x)	

In several cases the existence of the CID pilot brought new people into the mix. In Hendon, a member of the project team described the catalytic effect the pilot programme had in terms of getting conversations going with local traders:

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I think having the street branded and have somebody care about the street again, it made them come together as a collective with a shared vision rather than just having individual conversations where it was just moaning about things, it turned it around to a more positive conversation.

As well as working with local traders, the pilot has forged new relationships with Durham Wildlife Trust and with Recovery Connections, a charity that is taking over the lease on Back on the Map's community café. This not only brings essential services to the street to tackle substance misuse, but also provides a welcoming space for the wider community.

In Ipswich, participants said the CID enabled conversations to happen with college and university students about what they wanted to see in their town. Young people were surprised to be asked for their views and felt they had not had permission to have their say about their place in the past.

Similarly, in Kilburn the conversations with community members and local businesses enabled people to raise the issue of access to public toilets, a significant concern for local people but one that had not previously been thought a priority by the local authorities responsible for each side of Kilburn High Road.

3.3.3 Processes of engagement

Approaches to engagement were highly dependent on local context, but also on perceptions of local power and influence — both in terms of which groups and organisations were considered priorities for engagement, and in terms of each pilot's view of how and to what extent they wished to disrupt or alter existing power dynamics. Almost all took the view that they wished to be more inclusive and involve groups who were currently sidelined from decision-making, but some (such as Kilburn) stressed the importance of broad, relatively unstructured conversations with local people while others (such as Ipswich) worked on a model of representation, in which an individual participant such as a young person was seen to represent the interests of youth more generally.

For some, such as Stretford, a key issue was to bring powerful interests (the local authority and developer) into conversation with the local community. This proved challenging and there were clear differences of understanding around community engagement: a local authority interviewee praised the development partner for letting some empty units to charities on favourable terms and being prepared to engage with the community where there was a 'viable proposition' for a shop unit.

In Ipswich, there was an existing decision-making body (the 'vision board' of the Connected Town Task Force) and the CID's aim was to bring new voices into this forum to make it more representative of the town as a whole. But there was no suggestion that the CID's role should be to change decision-making processes at a more fundamental level:

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They're all key organisations within Ipswich that are seen to be able to either create the vision, leadership, right through to the practicalities of funding to the physical changes. They are supposed to be a strategic group that works out what the strategy, what the vision of Ipswich is and we all agree. So then there's communication of progress, investment funding and it's essentially the group that almost everything to do with the town centre should go through, particularly with strategic decisions around infrastructure right through to housing, the larger projects that are going to change a place.

Except in Wood Green and Skelmersdale, where limited engagement took place, all the CIDs tried to identify gaps in participation and address them. In some cases, such as Stretford, the missing people were the business interests currently reshaping the town centre; in Hendon they were the local business owners; and in Kilburn and Ipswich they were people from the local community. With the exception of Hendon, there was limited engagement with property owners.

One question that remains for future CIDs is the issue of on whose terms engagement takes place: are CIDs concerned with community leadership and initiative, or simply with creating a seat at the table for community representatives within existing initiatives? As one pilot lead remarked, 'Regeneration is always about managing tensions between different viewpoints – no more now than over the last ten years.'

Pilots are aware that the engagement that has begun through the CID programme must be seen as the start of a longer-term process. As the pilot lead at Wolverton pointed out, the existence of the CID has succeeded in moving conversations on, but it exists in the context of what has gone before and what will happen afterwards:
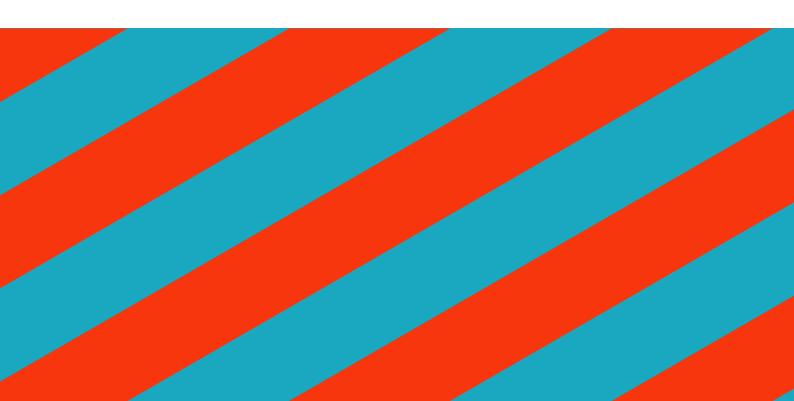
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I think we often think that there's this great big idea that will suddenly appear that wasn't there 20 years ago, that's not how these things work. The same old issues are pertinent for people now but there's some new optimism to it. Rather than it being a conversation about nothing will happen until the Agora has gone, it's now a conversation about the Agora is gone so what are we going to do now, how are we going to maximise this opportunity?

The same participant sounded a note of caution about efforts to involve local young people, but also highlighted the opportunity the current challenges for the town centre present:

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I'm not claiming anything really other than the beginning of a conversation with young people, things have moved on for young people and in young people's lives and they've been through a pandemic and that has motivated some young people to engage with things that they might otherwise not have engaged with, they see the consequence of an empty town and they don't like it very much.

4.0
How has participation in CIDs generated additional value?

Previous sections have covered the new activities that have taken place through the CID programme and the development of relationships and partnerships. This section focuses on what has been achieved through these relationship-building processes, leading to some reflections on whether a bespoke process is required to facilitate genuinely inclusive high street regeneration.

4.1 Involving new participants

By and large the pilots were clear on which groups were not currently engaged in conversations about the future of their places and needed to be involved. Several mentioned young people in particular, while others spoke about achieving better engagement with statutory organisations such as local authorities. In Hendon there was a particular concern to bring in local and independent businesses alongside community and statutory partners; others, such as Wolverton, Stretford and Kilburn, adopted a wide-ranging process of engagement. As highlighted above, some found the lack of clarity around the CID concept something of a barrier: it was difficult to involve new participants where it was not clear what they were being asked to become involved in. This was a particular challenge in Skelmersdale and Wood Green.

There was a general acknowledgement that existing arrangements were not sufficiently inclusive and that while local high streets and town centres were perceived as an important challenge to address, existing mechanisms (whether led by local authorities or developers) were not rising to the scale of the challenge. Where there was a clear sense of an agenda for local action it was easier to bring people around the table, and most pilots focused their communications around specific forms of action rather than on the idea of a CID as a solution to local challenges.

Pilots recognised that there is a continuum between public engagement and involvement in decision-making, and some (e.g. Wolverton and Ipswich) clearly planned for the engagement to lead to inclusion in decision-making processes. In Hendon, stakeholders commented on the fact that Back on the Map staff could be seen having conversations with local people on Villette Road, but this street-level work also translated into the establishment of a more formal forum where traders and stakeholders could input into Back on the Map's plans.

Even where no formal group has been established, there are signs that the conversations that have happened through the CID pilot could form a basis for future action:

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There's definitely appetite for those different sectors, with the public sector, businesses and community sector working together and I feel that will continue. We've built relationships with organisations that we haven't worked with before, we have already held events with organisations that we hadn't done before.

In Wolverton, where there is now a clear expectation that the CID work will continue for at least another year, one stakeholder observed that 'there's now a stronger bond between the town council, business community and the third sector which is mainly religious groups. The main groups who should be bringing things forward are engaging more'.

4.2 Involvement of 'less-heard' groups

While almost all the pilots were clear about wanting to engage with groups across their communities who are currently not closely involved in local planning and decision-making, there were differences in their approaches. Kilburn adopted a broad and inclusive approach, employing community activators to reach out to communities and stakeholders that were previously under-represented within formal structures. However, the starting point was to work with existing organisations that had been identified as potential 'changemakers' such

as Kilburn State of Mind, a local learning and skills charity, as well as cultural organisations such as Kiln Theatre. Despite being led by two local authorities (the London boroughs of Camden and Brent), where possible the local authorities adopted the stance of 'taking a seat at the table rather than chairing the discussion' in order to try and mitigate the effects of existing power dynamics and give others permission to take a lead.

Several pilots talked about the need to hear the voices of young people, and some (such as Wolverton) highlighted the need to engage with specific minoritised communities, such as those of South Asian heritage. However, there was a tendency across the programme for pilots to build from their existing networks, a process that risks reducing their effectiveness in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.

One stakeholder in Ipswich described this process of trying to build from participants' existing connections:

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[...] Yeah, so names were thrown out. Like... who else can we say? Who could we suggest? Well, actually, that would be a really good person... because she's the... head of educational trust that has got primary schools in Ipswich town centre... And there was a very good guy that came along, sort of representing faith, all faith... After the second meeting, you could see there was a wider range of people that were there. Which was a really nice achievement.

In Wood Green, the pilot lead spoke of the need to introduce business perspectives into discussions among community representatives to 'break down myths' about what was happening in the town centre. Such observations raise questions about the degree to which community representatives are seen as leaders and decision-makers rather than as participants in a process that reinforces existing structures and relationships. Wood Green's current plan is that eventually the existing Business Improvement District board will expand, with two community representatives and a youth representative.

In Ipswich, one stakeholder highlighted the need to ensure that involvement of new people did not become tokenistic:

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I would want to know what they are going to do about that and how they can try and tap into different demographics and to ensure that all voices can be heard, so talking different age ranges, different people with different nationalities and ethnicities and genders.

The question of involving less-heard groups and bringing in new voices highlights the need for pilots to be comfortable with a level of difference and disagreement. Without mature and sensitive facilitation there is a danger that participants will not move from entrenched positions.

4.3 Is a bespoke process required for inclusive high street regeneration?

While it is not possible to quantify the value added by the new relationships and connections generated through the CID programme, most pilots have a platform for future activity that either did not previously exist or required refreshing. There is an opportunity to bring fresh and diverse perspectives to a set of challenges — involving specific places, local economies, governance and power structures and wider economic and social changes — that have proved resistant to successive waves of national and local interventions.

The high street presents a specific mix of issues that require the engagement and involvement of groups that do not always interact: local authorities, businesses, property owners, voluntary and community sector organisations, people who use the high street for shopping and leisure, cultural organisations, and more. These give rise to widely differing local situations that are highly place-dependent and in each case have their own set of power dynamics. While this diversity does not lend itself to a specific model of governance, it does require a recognition that change requires a more long-term, inclusive, locally led approach than has typically been the case in the past. Indeed in some areas (Wolverton, Stretford, Wood Green) part of the challenge has been to deal with the legacy of previous development initiatives which may once have been touted as solutions.

In Kilburn the process of deep community engagement was considered foundational to the long-term success of the pilot:

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The process of enabling the community to lead, the people who love Kilburn, the people who've got Kilburn in their hearts, to take Kilburn into the future seems to me to be very valuable because otherwise high street regeneration is done to people and how do you know it's what people really want? There's usually somebody else in there making some money or something, how do you really know if it's meeting the needs of local residents unless local residents are there to guide it? And then they need a bit of support to organise around that, that doesn't just happen with somebody saying we're going to lead this, we are the people, they need support to volunteer and organise. Infrastructure, they need infrastructure.

The CID programme has initiated that process of infrastructure-building (in the case of Kilburn) or enabled organisations to review, adapt and expand infrastructures that already exist (in Hendon and Wolverton, for example).

This has the potential to build the trust that is needed to underpin long-term change, as a participant in Wolverton commented:

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I think the main change is with the local community feeling that people have been waiting for a really long time for the redevelopment of the town centre for anything to happen, and in the waiting for the project to happen what got lost was people's ability to contribute to that process. There's been so much going on with the council and the funding and things that people have no influence over. […] what the CID has enabled us to do is to reopen that conversation about, we've got a town centre that's being radically changed but... that bit of it is only one part of the whole, what is it that we want for the whole. In re-engaging with local people and really starting those conversations we've unearthed people who are new to the town, who have not been involved in the history of it.

However, there is a limit to what can be achieved over the course of a year, even where organisations have added their own resources to the support provided by Power to Change. The CID programme has reinforced the learning from other regeneration programmes (such as Big Local) that community-based change requires time to build relationships, agree agendas and plan long-term action. It is therefore not something to be seen as a quick fix for empty shops on a high street.

Interviewees repeatedly stressed this need to see local change as long-term:

> **It'll take a lot more time and resource than you would ever feel. It's not a five-minute thing, it's quite frustrating, even though you could be talking a good talk to someone who's very up for it, it's actually getting the commitment from the people to actually buy into it.**

> **We've got to get away from this idea that short-term measures, short-term projects are going to fix anything. What fixes things is institutions like us ... long term, sustainable, community-based organisations who can genuinely work with the priorities of the community and be supported to do so, that's what makes a difference.**

In taking such a long-term approach, participants need to engage with local power dynamics and agendas — including an unwillingness to use powers that organisations already have. These situations are not always easy to handle; local authorities, for example, adopt very different approaches to leadership at a hyper-local level. In some cases local authorities were reluctant to get involved or did not see the need to; in Ipswich, for example, the local council was initially resistant because they felt the CID would pose another demand for resources.

Once the council understood that the CID was an opportunity to work with a wider partnership, staff became more interested in getting involved. Stretford, too, struggled to create a sense of shared leadership among different stakeholders:

> **I guess it feels like everyone's looking to us to say this is how we're going to do [it], this is the proposal and this is how it's going to work, rather than it being everybody having an equal stake and level of motivation to decide what form it takes. I don't know if that's just because we're being funded to facilitate and everybody else comes to the meeting thinking this is great but I'm not going to be the one that goes away and works all this stuff out...**

One issue is that CIDs are being mooted at a time when local government resources and capacity have been reduced by more than a decade of funding cuts, coupled with the toll of the Covid-19 crisis. Local authorities are often perceived more in terms of their absence than their involvement:

> **The council have entirely disengaged from the whole thing, they never really engaged ... [there's a] lack of capacity in economic development, no staff with time to dedicate to new ideas.**

To address such issues in the long term may not require a new form of governance, but the evidence from the CID pilots is that it does require long-term community building and engagement, which will not always be possible without external facilitation and support, sustained until local partnerships are fully in place.

There is already some evidence that CIDs are being looked to as an approach that could be adopted elsewhere. In Sunderland, conversations have begun about replicating the Villette Road initiative, but interviewees warned that it could not simply be transposed into another neighbourhood without a community-based organisation to take it forward.

Similarly, Milton Keynes City Council is considering whether the CID approach could be used in Stony Stratford town centre; and the London Borough of Waltham Forest's growth scrutiny committee has recommended that the council set up a CID. While this suggests the need for a different approach to high street regeneration, success is likely to depend on the existence of (and support for) an organisation capable of convening conversations with a wide range of local stakeholders.

5.0
Making progress and overcoming challenges

This section focuses on some of the practical issues experienced in forming and progressing the idea of a Community Improvement District. We consider how ideas were generated, what additional resources could be brought to bear, the key factors enabling progress and how pilots have responded to challenges.

5.1 Sources of ideas

Only one of the pilots, Skelmersdale, sought to introduce a completely new concept – 'Let's Own Our Town', a proposal for a community benefit society that, drawing on funds from community share issues, could take a stake in businesses that might otherwise be lost to the community. Alongside this, and not funded by the CID programme, the pilot sought to develop proposals for a community energy company. Unfortunately neither concept gained traction with local partners and stakeholders and a significant amount of time was spent seeking to fine-tune and finance the idea. Local partners were presented with a proposal rather than involved in co-producing the idea to any significant extent.

Among the other pilots, new activities were either based on existing agendas or arose from discussions within the community. In Kilburn the idea of a 'toilet hackathon' to address the lack of public conveniences was unanticipated, but it came about through a process of engagement with community groups and the public around existing concerns.

Elsewhere there was a long history of existing activity and engagement, or longstanding redevelopment plans (as in Stretford and Wolverton) which created an obvious focus of attention. In Ipswich, town centre regeneration was an existing priority for the BID but the pilot saw the need to broaden the range of participants involved. One new topic, that of safety for young women, was passed to the local authority rather than the CID pilot for action. In Hendon, the action to address the challenges of Villette Road was new but the issues were already on Back on the Map's radar; in the words of one stakeholder, CID status 'ratified what they've been trying to do for a long time'.

In Wood Green, the partnership has not yet developed to the point of taking forward specific ideas for the town centre. The BID's initial proposal to work with Eat Wood Green, a community growing project, was not taken forward by the CID pilot but instead is being developed by community-based organisations in partnership with Haringey Council.

5.2 What factors enabled CIDs to make progress?

Through our work we identified seven factors that were important in helping the pilots to progress their ambitions, although the significance of these varied across the programme.

▶ **Place focus:** The focus on particular locations concentrated attention and galvanised action. This was particularly evident in Hendon and Kilburn, where specific streets that presented local challenges were the focus of attention, and in Wolverton and (to a lesser extent) Stretford, where shopping centre redevelopments created an opportunity to consider how community interests could be factored into the new-look town centre. While the work in Ipswich was more spatially diffuse, covering the entirety of the town centre, the existence of an established Business Improvement District helped to maintain the geographical focus as it already operated within a clear boundary. In Skelmersdale and Wood Green, the physical focus of action was not clearly identified during the course of the pilot and these two pilots faced greater struggles in communicating their ideas.

▶ **Credibility and track record:** Where an existing organisation has a local presence and established networks and has generated relationships of trust, it is easier to take action quickly. This was particularly evident in Hendon, and in Ipswich where the BID could mobilise its existing networks to garner support for increased community involvement. In Stretford and Wolverton there were existing organisations with a track record and local credibility, but both faced the challenge of local partners that for different reasons were hesitant to engage with the CID pilots (see section 5.4). Interviewees attached particular significance to pilots' 'people skills' and local connections.

▶ **Presence on the street:** A visible local presence helped to galvanise support and maintain public interest in the CID pilot. In Hendon, interviewees commented that the presence of Back on the Map staff on Villette Road helped to reassure traders and the public that their concerns about crime and safety were being taken seriously. In Kilburn, despite having to start from a low base of existing activity, the decision to work through local community activators and to use 'walkabouts' on Kilburn High Road helped to create a sense that local issues were being addressed; this was supported by strong online communications through the One Kilburn website. Wolverton and Stretford created a local buzz by re-using empty shops, and both Wolverton and Ipswich staged community engagement events.

With the exception of Wood Green and Skelmersdale, all the pilots made public engagement a priority throughout the programme. Pilots commented on the need to maintain that local presence, as one interviewee in Hendon pointed out:

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To have a dedicated street ranger maintaining the lovely greenery that we've put in, maintaining the hygiene in terms of litter, graffiti, I think that would be a turning point to people to keep it a place that would always be clean and tidy.

Another commented on the immediate difference that a visible local presence could make:

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We had a week of community action and the street just looks fantastic, people are smiling.

▶ **'The right people in the room':** CID pilots benefited when they were seen to engage with key stakeholders and decision-makers. These were not always the same groups of people (see Table 2 in section 3.1) but it was important that key players in the locality were seen to be talking to each other. Hendon and Ipswich were particularly successful in this respect, using their existing networks and relationships to engage housing, health, local government and educational institutions. One interviewee in Ipswich commented that 'the information is there, the right people are in the room to give accurate information and update and give information across'.

In Kilburn, an interviewee pointed to the convening power of the CID as pivotal in taking action to address the lack of public toilets locally:

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It wasn't until One Kilburn came along that they were able to get multiple stakeholders in the room together, so people who own the toilets like London Underground, TfL [Transport for London], the councils who have access to space, somebody representing the businesses and local community organisations.

▶ **Governance and accountability:** As noted in section 3.1, pilots preferred to work within existing governance structures, expanding and adapting them to support their local focus. Having structures in place, even where they were seen to require updating, provided credibility among local partners and a level of accountability that gave partners and the public confidence that action could take place. This also removed the risk of what could be perceived as 'timewasting' discussions about structures and processes. Where organisations were starting from scratch this was more of a challenge. In Kilburn this was overcome because Camden Council provided legal cover for the activities that took place, while giving staff permission to act in a fluid, non-bureaucratic way to engage with local people. This approach is quite unusual in local government.

▶ **'The right moment':** For some pilots, a particular confluence of circumstances created an opportunity. This was particularly noticeable in Wolverton, where the demolition of the Agora shopping centre focused attention on what the town centre could be like in future and what opportunities there were for local people to shape this. In Stretford, delays to redevelopment meant that what initially appeared as an opportune moment became something of a barrier to action. The closure of, or threat of closure to, local businesses could also be a galvanising factor, as in Hendon. The ability to respond to such opportunities is a key challenge for any programme of high street support in future.

Alongside specific local circumstances, some interviewees noted a general sense that this was the right time to take action on local high streets:

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I think it was partly a moment in time, it was a very opportune moment for this to happen where we were in our town centre regeneration journey. It was also partly about the pandemic and the consequences of that, the value people are now attaching, high streets are having a moment aren't they where people are saying I hope we don't lose them, it's a precious thing that we need to protect and nurture and we need to be more involved in and we can't leave it to the market any longer, communities have got to get involved in this... the potential closure of our only charity shop happening just at the point where the CID pilot came into being gave a moment of opportunity.

5.3 Securing additional funds and resources

For the most part, CIDs struggled to get significant additional funds during the course of the pilot programme, although several found resources to continue the work in some form. This reflects a difficult funding landscape for local regeneration, with limited sources of funding from local government and a highly competitive bidding process for central government programmes such as the Levelling Up Fund. Where additional resources were obtained, they were often from the pilot organisation's internal funds. There were some small but visible gestures of support from partners, such as the new bins for Villette Road provided by Sunderland City Council. Wolverton obtained a grant of £1,000 from the local town council to help with the temporary reuse of a charity shop as a community information base, but had to compete for funding against a backdrop of many different priorities.

At the time of writing, Wolverton was still hoping to obtain a £20,000 grant from Milton Keynes City Council for town centre regeneration; Kilburn was hoping to succeed with an application to the Levelling Up Fund; and Stretford's application for support from Greater Manchester Combined Authority had recently been turned down.

Photo: Artistic banner invites people in Wolverton to share their ideas

A local councillor in Wolverton suggested the CID could be funded from local authority sources such as Section 106 funds (where developers contribute to community projects as a condition of planning permission) or the New Homes Bonus, which gives local authorities funds if they approve new housing developments; but there is heavy competition for these funds and they are awarded at the discretion of the local authority.

In Stretford, the pilot highlighted the importance of local authority support to continue the CID's work:

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I think this is where the council buy-in is an issue because you feel like... ideally we'd be at a point where the council would be saying this is a brilliant idea, we can really see the potential in this, we're going to put in some funding to keep this going and I feel like we're definitely not at that position that the council would say that.

More valuable than the cash support was the time, energy and expertise of partner organisations and the prospect of building this into long-term commitment to the CIDs' visions and plans. In Hendon, Gentoo Housing, the local social landlord, became an important partner. The result was a focus on antisocial behaviour associated with some of their properties that had been seen to have a detrimental effect on the safety and vitality of Villette Road. In Kilburn, interviewees spoke of the support offered by the local NHS Trust, police and Transport for London.

Alongside these organisational partners, several CIDs drew in significant support from volunteers and community members who gave their time and skills free of charge. CIDs did not quantify the level of volunteer support, but it featured strongly in Hendon, Kilburn, Stretford and Wolverton.

Through their work several CIDs were able to produce plans for longer-term funding, and this is covered in section 6 below.

5.4 Addressing and overcoming challenges

As well as identifying enabling factors, our work as learning partner revealed a variety of factors that limited or prevented progress. We detail some of the most significant issues here.

▶ **Communication:** Given the experimental nature of the pilot programme, it is not surprising that pilots sometimes struggled to explain exactly what a CID was and how it sat within existing governance arrangements, as one pilot explained:

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I think having that [explanation], "a CID is a bit like a BID but different in these ways", that's really helped in those conversations with the council. But... that then poses difficulties because there's then, it's as if it's difficult to work out, well it's not going to be funded like a BID so how is it going to be funded, it's a useful comparison but also it feels like it presents barriers.

Most CIDs rapidly moved away from talking about their roles and structures and focused on what they intended to do or the processes of engagement they were convening. Some overcame the challenge of communication through strong local branding – Hendon branded Villette Road as 'the heart of Hendon' and One Kilburn adopted a communications strategy designed to bring together multiple stakeholders around Kilburn as a unique place despite its status as a boundary between three local authorities:

"

For us it's the "guiding principle" of One Kilburn – to make Kilburn a better place – focus on the place and people who love the area and want it to improve. We don't talk about the CID, we talk about One Kilburn.

▶ **Relationship building:** Building networks and relationships is time-consuming and resource-intensive. There is no substitute for having individuals engaging in conversations, which are often repeated in different forms with different people. It is through these conversations that opportunities for action are identified and partners move from a position of interest to engagement. The resources available to the CID pilots helped to kick-start that relationship-building in some cases, or enabled pilots to do more of it than they had been able to do previously.

However, they were not sufficient – either in quantity or duration – to support a sustained programme of community-building and the development of community leadership. One pilot lead commented:

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Time is a real factor - you can't ask people to meet more than every six weeks, then other stuff is happening, it makes it harder to get momentum.

There also needs to be recognition that relationship-building is a process of change, not of shoring up existing models of high street consumption. This can be difficult for some partners to take on board. In Wolverton, where the pilot facilitated temporary community use of the local charity shop, there was resistance to the idea of doing anything different and this resulted in some challenging conversations between community members and the charity.

▶ **Buy-in and entrenched positions:**
Sometimes even repeated engagements over time are not sufficient to build trusting and mutually supportive relationships. Organisations have their own interests and priorities. Local authorities, businesses or property developers may simply see community engagement as a box to be ticked, or a hurdle to be overcome – in Stretford, Bruntwood, developers of the local shopping centre, had limited engagement with the CID despite the pilot's best efforts.

In Wolverton there were strong differences of opinion among local stakeholders about the town centre's needs and how they should best be addressed. Wolverton's approach was to refresh the makeup and remit of the Agora regeneration working group, working to bring new voices into existing conversations rather than challenging entrenched positions head-on.

One pilot lead summed up the challenge of trying to broaden local stakeholders' horizons and consider the opportunities in their local town centre:

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I'm working with a group of people who don't really want to think about all the exciting stuff, they want to argue amongst one another about parking and my natural inclination is therefore to go okay you sit there and argue about parking, I'll go and actually do something interesting over here, and there are governance risks with that.

▶ **Staffing and resources:** The support from Power to Change for the pilot programme was insufficient to support and sustain the pilots' ambitions, although it provided an important spur to action. Where pilots could draw on colleagues' and partners' resources, or (in the case of Kilburn) received support from a local authority, they were able to supplement the help available through the CID programme. But at times the pilots were highly dependent on the capacity of the individual designated as the pilot lead, and personal circumstances or competing work priorities made progress challenging. One interviewee commented on the fact that partners overestimated the support the pilots were getting:

❝
It's quite hard then that we do have a leadership team of four but from the outside looking in people think we're huge, people think we've got ten or 12 hands, we've got two.

▶ **Investment context:** The CID pilot programme was initiated within the context of more than a decade of under-investment. Local authority capacity in economic development and planning has been eroded and those with experience of previous regeneration programmes have left or retired. One local authority interviewee said their local town centre investment team had been reduced from two people to one. Other public services are struggling. In Hendon the police community support officer (PSCO) is retiring and will not be replaced:

> **66**
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> **Our long standing beat manager has retired and he won't be replaced so we've only a single PCSO dedicated to the area and so at a strategic level in the police it isn't a priority for them, they don't have the capacity, don't have the staff.**

But it is not only public investment that is lacking. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis there is also a dearth of investment by private businesses, while many existing independent businesses are struggling to cope with rising costs. In this context there is a need for realism about what can be achieved through funded interventions and the extent to which they can plug the gaps left by businesses and the public sector.

▶ **Continuity:** As highlighted in section 5.2, continuity is a key challenge for the CID pilots and there are no easy solutions. Power to Change has limited resources and does not have the capacity to offer the level of support it provided to community businesses in its early years. We consider pilots' approaches to sustainability in section 6, but it is worth noting here that there was a consensus that a dedicated member of staff at a project manager level or above would be required to support and sustain a CID on a long-term basis and to develop relationships and partnerships.

6.0
Preparing for the future

Table 4 summarises the state of the CID pilots' plans at the time of writing. This provides a snapshot of the situation at the original end date of the programme, but comes with the caveat that most CIDs are continuing to develop their plans for the future and the situation is in a state of flux.

While the table shows that the programme has not identified an ideal model, governance structure and funding source for CIDs, it demonstrates an enthusiasm for the process of engaging local communities in high street regeneration. This is important because it points towards a latent capacity within communities to engage with challenges in their high streets and town centres that previous initiatives and interventions have not succeeded in addressing. Above all, it shows that there is a public care and concern over these spaces, which could be mobilised with the right level of support and encouragement.

Table 4: Summary of CID pilots' future plans

	Is the CID continuing?	In what form will it continue?	Who will be involved?	Short term resourcing	Longer term funding prospects
Hendon	Yes	Traders and stakeholders forum as sub-group of existing charity	Traders and partner organisations alongside Back on the Map	Back on the Map	Applying for support from Community Ownership Fund to take over and let out vacant property; possible support from Rank Foundation
Ipswich	Yes	Expanded BID 'Vision Board'	Additional members from community including young people; wider advisory group	Existing BID resources	BID levy; additional regeneration funds?
Kilburn	Yes	TBC	Local authority will continue to convene	£10k council funding to support local groups to work up ideas	CIL funds from local authority; possible Levelling Up funds
Skelmersdale	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Stretford	Yes	Stretford Town Centre Forum	Local authority, local businesses & community groups	Friends of Stretford Public Hall providing convener role unfunded	TBC
Wolverton	Yes	Expanded town centre regeneration group	Additional members within town centre regeneration group	Possible £20k support from Milton Keynes City Council	TBC
Wood Green	tbc	Likely to be expanded BID	Not known	Extension of Power to Change support	BID levy?

6.1 Building community capacity and engagement

Most of the CID pilots were determined to build on their work with local communities and support them as far as they could in order to help them engage in and influence local decisions in their high streets. However, they recognised that such work is long-term and time-consuming, and requires dedicated resources:

❝

I think a key next step is how we build the capacity of the community to play a sustained role beyond the pilot - we think this could involve regular funding, possibly a post/posts to ensure we're not relying on goodwill and can allow local people to lead.

In Kilburn there is an awareness that this work needs to involve reaching out to groups who are still not involved in the pilot, and local residents are being trained to do this work. In other places events are being held or planned to bring local people together. Stretford held a successful 'good as new' repair and reuse event at Stretford Public Hall, and was able to engage new partners in this work as a result of the outreach they had done through the CID. In Ipswich there are plans to build on the CID's work with young people by holding a youth conference to engage young people more closely in discussions on the future of the town centre.

6.2 Sourcing future funding and long term sustainability

As Table 4 shows, none of the CID pilots had secured long-term funding by the end of the programme, and most were still looking for short-term support to continue their work. It is important to note that there is no untapped source of funds that has been uncovered through the pilot programme. CIDs are competing with a host of community-based regeneration projects for the limited resources on offer from local authorities, government and third sector funders. Funds such as the Levelling Up Fund are at best short-term. Models such as Business Improvement Districts are more sustainable in funding terms, but assume the availability of local businesses or other stakeholders who are willing to pay a levy on top of existing costs such as business rates. Local authority sources such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) are a charge on developers for planning permission and while they are a potential source of money for high street improvements, funding is at the discretion of the council and depends on the amount of local development, and there are many competing priorities. Unless a portion of CIL funds is handed over to CIDs there is limited scope for drawing on them to support high street regeneration.

A further option is to raise income through trading. Hendon plans to apply for support from the Community Ownership Fund to acquire a key block on Villette Road, which could then be refurbished and let out to provide ongoing income for the CID. But this requires an initial capital investment from Back on the Map, which has £256,000

available for capital purchases over the next five years, and is achievable only because property values in Hendon are relatively low with limited competition among potential buyers. One interviewee explained:

> ❝
> **We've had board approval to repurpose our property investments in capital investment funds, we've ringfenced that money to be invested in the high street... Then we're looking at using those funds to bring the most derelict, most problematic properties on the street back into use and have that with enterprise start up and new business engagement.**

In towns such as Wolverton, where property values are significantly higher, it is more difficult to follow this approach. While asset acquisition, refurbishment and ownership could provide a sustainable model to fund CIDs in future, this would require major support to underwrite property purchases or legislation to enable community-based organisations to acquire underused property at a significant discount or via a compulsory purchase mechanism.

> ❝
> **We need access to property that will enable us to get all those people with brilliant ideas onto the high street in order that we can generate an income to sustain this work. It's not rocket science, I'm trying to fund the purchase of an historic building at the moment against all odds and there's not enough resource out there to enable us to do that. [...] There's no money out there to help community businesses any more just to make that fundamental first or second purchase.**

Long term sustainability is not only about funding, though. It depends on sustained community engagement, which in return may require some external facilitation, mentoring and capacity building. One pilot lead suggested three to five years, following a year of development work, would be a realistic estimate for the time needed. A coordinator or project manager would need to be in post for most of that time. A key part of that work is the need to clarify governance and accountability, although this is more likely to involve adapting the remit of an existing organisation rather than setting one up from scratch. One model that could be adopted by new, unincorporated groups wishing to set up a CID is the use of a Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO), as pioneered within the lottery-funded Big Local programme overseen by Local Trust In this model, an existing organisation that is legally constituted and can therefore distribute funds and employ staff acts as a fundholder and accountable body on behalf of an unincorporated resident-led group. The resident-led group takes the decisions, but the LTO enacts them in line with its legal powers and duties. Such an approach works best where a new partnership or group is establishing itself without a prior history of working for community benefit.

Finally, there was some uncertainty among pilots about what support Power to Change might be able to provide beyond the formal end of the programme, particularly in light of its current considerations about its ongoing future direction.[6] At the time of writing Power to Change was considering the options but staff were aware of the benefits of the programme and wished to ensure these continued as far as possible.

7.0
Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 A recommendation for high street regeneration policy

Through our work as learning partner we have suggested that CIDs should be defined as a community leadership and development approach to regenerating high streets and town centres. This process should be enabled at a national level (UK and devolved government), and appropriately funded via central or local government.. Other funders such as philanthropic foundations may have a role to play in supporting such a programme.

We have defined CIDs in this way because it has been clear from the experience of the pilots that what matters most is not the model but the approach and the focus. A CID is an approach through which community members and representatives come together to lead the improvement of their high street or town centre, either by incorporating a bespoke organisation to do so or by working through an existing organisation or governance structure. The principles learned through the CID pilots are applicable more widely to high street regeneration initiatives, but should be at the heart of any work that aims to develop community participation and leadership in town centre contexts.

It is not essential that high street regeneration is led by a CID. A CID is a choice to be made where a process of lasting change led by local communities is desired, rather than a return to the high street models as they worked in the 1990s or early 2000s. There are other valid models, including local

authority led regeneration and BIDs. But where a community wants to lead an inclusive process of regeneration where the benefits flow to the people in that locality, a CID should be considered (though organisations may want to adopt more locally-specific and engaging names for their work).

We have identified four stages of community-led high street regeneration, and a CID could be initiated at and lead any of these stages.

▶ **Engagement and vision setting:** conversations with local people to generate ideas and a shared vision for their place

▶ **Place activation:** bringing new activities and life into under-used spaces and promoting events and gatherings

▶ **Short term interventions:** bringing empty or underused buildings back into use, creating and animating public spaces, and improving frontages and the public realm. These could be small scale temporary interventions or experiments designed to create space for different economic and social activities

▶ **Property ownership, development and revenue generation:** longer term plans to bring assets into community ownership and create sustainable revenue streams through leasing or trading in community-owned premises

These four stages need to be resourced by:

▶ Community leaders or activators who can facilitate conversations, welcome less-heard groups and create inclusive visions

▶ Organisations with local credibility and sufficient infrastructure (capabilities and networks) to deliver events and activities

▶ Organisations with legal status (or the backing of an incorporated partner) to cover insurance and overheads and enter into contracts

▶ Organisations with sound, transparent governance and a mature approach to risk management as well as access to specialist skills (surveying, property management, business planning etc.)

At each stage funders wishing to support this approach should ensure resources are available commensurate with the CID's maturity, ambition, infrastructure and capabilities. To achieve this, a government-led programme is required in which communities wishing to pursue a CID should receive sufficient resources to cover:

▶ A project manager or coordinator, funded to at least 0.5 FTE over a minimum of three years

▶ Grants to cover the cost of community-based peer researchers or community activators/organisers for initial groundwork

▶ Facilitation and expert advice tailored to the needs of the community

▶ Access to expert advice and funding for publicity, branding and community engagement

▶ Access to a capital fund to acquire, repair and repurpose property, along the lines suggested in Power to Change's call for a High Street Buyout Fund

There is a strong argument that such a programme should be run by governments in each nation of the UK in order to create a broad impetus for high street regeneration. But in the long term such work should be part of local authorities' economic development role, and councils should be resourced accordingly. This does not preclude charitable or philanthropic funders from resourcing additional programmes to support community-led high street regeneration. It is important that funders should commission expert advisers to be available throughout the programme to triage applications for support and assist new organisations in the initial stages of formation, as well as providing access to relevant knowledge and data on local property ownership and economic activity.

We have not put figures on the funds required because they will vary significantly from place to place, as will local partners' ability to offer financial support. However, they need to be sufficient to cover dedicated project management and activities until such time as a CID can source sustainable funding.

7.2 Summary findings and recommendations

Our findings and recommendations are set out below. Recommendations are listed in order of primary audience to highlight who, in our view, should do what. The recommendations are addressed specifically to those who might fund and lead CIDs, but the broader principles they contain are more widely applicable to high street regeneration programmes and policies.

Table 5 below summarises our recommendations, sorted by audience. Further detail is provided in the section.

Table 5: Summary of recommendations

Audience	Recommendation
Government and policymakers[7]	Agree a clear statement of what a CID is (a community leadership and development approach to regenerating high streets and town centres) and provide support accordingly
	Support a pre-programme stage of development to clarify what a CID should do in a particular locality before inviting bids
	Ensure that the amount of support is sufficient to generate sustained engagement, while the duration of support needs to recognise the slow work of building trust
	Ensure support for prospective CIDs is geared towards long-term sustainability plans
	Maintain a publicly available resource bank of ideas that have worked well in different places
Funders	Allocate support according to stages of maturity
	Align project milestones with CIDs' development stage
	Be clear on the role of facilitators and partners employed to support the programme
Prospective CIDs	Identify a convenor with existing networks and credibility
	Clearly communicate the purpose of new or revived partnerships to enable stakeholders to decide if a CID is the right approach
	Agree how far to open up decision-making processes and involve new partners in co-creating responses to local challenges
	Identify how participation will benefit the communities CIDs want to include
	Develop key skills to work with diverse stakeholders, including listening, convening and boundary spanning
	Record and quantify in-kind support received from partners and volunteers

7.2.1 Summary of findings

▶ **Engagement and communications:** The main activity undertaken by CIDs was engagement with communities, stakeholders and potential partners – either via the pilots themselves or, in the case of Kilburn, through community activators recruited from among local residents. Branding and communications supported engagement activities in Hendon, Kilburn and Ipswich, but were more challenging elsewhere. There is no predictable pattern that can be used to identify the tipping points where conversations turn into an impetus for action. Visible, street-level activities such as public realm improvements and the re-use of empty shops can inspire confidence and create momentum.

▶ **Partnership building:** Our findings reinforce the basic learning from community development, which is that change moves at the pace of trust. Not all partnerships are formal but clarity is needed on partners' and funders' expectations, and whether the partnership has the power to meet them. Street level work can galvanise action and conversation, but tipping points seem dependent on the partnership taking on a formal status (which can include being under the umbrella of existing governance arrangements). A prospective CID needs to exercise convening power, either through its status (e.g. as a BID or local authority) or through its existing webs of relationships. Despite their differences, CIDs have engaged with a broad set of common stakeholders (local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations including faith and young people's groups, businesses, property owners). CIDs were most successful in bringing new partners on board when their communications focused on the prospects for local improvements and activities, rather than on the concept or structure of a CID. There is an important difference between public engagement (in which people are asked to comment on existing ideas) and participation in decision-making. Both need to be inclusive but the latter demands deeper, longer-term work.

▶ **Involvement of 'less-heard' groups:** Most pilots made particular efforts to include groups whose voices are often absent from decision-making, especially young people. However, they were aware that there was still much work to be done to include people from marginalised or minoritised backgrounds and that inclusion is a long-term process. Recruiting 'activators' from the local community who had existing local connections worked well in Kilburn.

▶ **Governance:** The programme emphasised the need for pilots to develop governance arrangements, but pilots sometimes needed to resolve what the governance was for. While the pilots and Power to Change understandably wanted clarity about governance, more basic questions about leadership and accountability needed to be addressed first in most cases.

▶ **Programme funding:** Overall, the funding from Power to Change and associated support helped pilots to make progress. However, pilots' ability to make the most of this support depended on existing resources: where none could be mobilised little progress was made. Pilots used their funds to convene conversations, shout about their activities and bring new people into the conversation. While the relationship between the level of grant and level of activity is unclear, the Power to Change support validated existing action. However, similar organisations (Brent and Camden councils, for example) can act in very different ways so it is important that funding goes to those who can make best use of it.

▶ **Additional funds and support:** CIDs had limited success in securing additional funds, although the pilots themselves contributed substantially both in cash and in kind. However, it is not possible to say at this stage that the CID programme has leveraged significant additional finance. Success in bringing in additional funds depends on (i) sufficient maturity and credibility of the recipient organisation; (ii) identification of clear spending priorities; (iii) existence of funds that can be leveraged. There is no specific pot of money that can be unlocked through this process that has not previously been identified, and CIDs face the same challenging investment climate as all community-based initiatives. Long-term options such as trading or community share issues require work over a much longer period than was offered though the CID programme.

The value of in-kind support provided through the time and enthusiasm of partners and members of the public should not be underestimated. Many of the pilots were able to add value through the attention and involvement of partner organisations or by bringing in volunteers, along with their local skills and knowledge.

7.2.2 Recommendations for government and policymakers

Building on the learning from the pilots, policymakers and funders should agree a clear statement of what a CID is (a community leadership and development approach to regenerating high streets and town centres) and provide support accordingly, while maintaining flexibility in how any particular CID is delivered. CIDs should be given tailored support, including training and mentoring where needed.

Policymakers and funders should support a pre-programme stage of development to clarify what a CID should do in a particular locality before inviting bids or approving larger grants. Funding should provide mentoring as well as cash for organisations to spend.

We have identified three stages of maturity for prospective CIDs, and advice and financial support could be provided at different levels for each:

1 ▶ Initial work to identify needs for support, including training, and to complete basic feasibility studies for regeneration plans

2 ▶ Develop plans and mentor pilots to build partnerships and appropriate networks

3 ▶ Support pilots into action (established organisations such as Back on the Map could go straight to stage 3).

Policymakers and funders should ensure the amount of support needs to be sufficient to generate sustained engagement, while the duration of support needs to recognise the slow work of building trust and creating time to develop ideas (especially when project leads have other responsibilities). It is important to identify where support will make the most difference and can unlock resources and activity, and how it can be used to make real progress on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Government and funders should ensure support for prospective CIDs is geared towards long-term sustainability plans, which may take several years to formulate and more to enact. If the pilots are to be sustained for the long term they may need support over a number of years until they can cover their own costs.

As CIDs develop, governments (UK and devolved) should maintain a publicly available resource bank of ideas that have worked well in different places and with different communities.

7.2.3 Recommendations for funders

Funders should allocate support according to stages of maturity. Activity can generate engagement: CIDs need to find a starting point such as an event or project and identify appropriate support for different stages of work. We set out four stages of development in section 7.1.

Identifying the right governance model for a particular place requires a level of maturity in a partnership. Funders should therefore align project milestones with the development stage of any prospective CID rather than its legal and governance structure.

Funders should be clear on the role of facilitators and partners employed to support the programme. Pre-programme work with potential bidders can help to establish shared understandings and visions for each locality, prior to the appointment of facilitators or advisers.

7.2.4 Recommendations for prospective CIDs

To maximise the chance of success, prospective CIDs need to identify a convenor with existing networks and credibility. The convenor is a key figure bridging informal and formal networks and structures. It is important to assess risks and understand the dynamics of existing relationships at the start. Legitimacy and accountability are required if partnerships are to take effective action. Facilitators and funders should work with prospective CIDs to support partnership-building, in accordance with the strength and cohesion of existing networks.

Prospective CIDS should clearly communicate the purpose of new or revived partnerships to enable stakeholders to decide if a CID is the right approach for them. There should be explicit recognition of the importance of developing community leadership within partnerships, supporting local people to articulate their needs and engage with stakeholders. Prospective CIDs need to identify and agree, through a process of partnership building, (i) what is the challenge to be addressed (ii) who will be involved in addressing it (iii) how it can be addressed through a mix of short, medium and long term activities.

Prospective CIDs need to identify how far they want to open up decision-making processes and involve new partners in co-creating responses to local challenges, and funders need to support them accordingly. The more inclusive the process, the longer should be allowed for it.

Prospective CIDs need to identify how participation will benefit the communities they want to include rather than merely being tokenistic. Not all prospective CIDs will be skilled in reaching out to include less-heard groups, and some will need dedicated support to do so, including training in techniques such as peer research and community organising.

Prospective CIDs need to develop a set of key skills to work with diverse stakeholders, including listening, convening and boundary spanning. While a range of governance models and structures may be adopted depending on local histories and circumstances, it is essential that these are as inclusive and equal as possible. Key partners (such as local authorities or developers) should not be able to absent themselves from the conversation and it may be advisable to ensure they are committed to the CID process before external support is offered.

Prospective and emerging CIDs should record and quantify the value of in-kind support they receive from partners and volunteers, which may help them secure additional funding. At the same time, consistent support over time may be required to build effective local partnerships capable of generating in-kind contributions.

7.3 The future

Is a bespoke process needed for high street regeneration? The high street presents a specific mix of challenges relating to the local economy and society that require the engagement and involvement of groups that do not always interact: local authorities, businesses, property owners, voluntary and community organisations, people who use the high street for shopping and leisure, cultural organisations, etc. These give rise to widely differing local situations that are highly place-dependent and in each case have their own power dynamics. What is required is not a specific model of governance but a recognition that change requires a more long-term, inclusive, community-focused and community-led approach than has typically been the case in the past. Initiatives need to recognise the complexity and fluidity of the challenge and build more equal partnerships between stakeholders.

Long term funding for the CID pilots was still uncertain at the time of writing, and a range of options were being pursued (section 6.2). CIDs are unlikely to become viable without a sustained programme of long term support, and we set out our recommendations for this in section 7.1. The perceived cost of community leadership should be set against the prospects for high streets without community involvement, however.

Events of recent years have underlined that structural changes are taking place and high streets are not going to return to previous levels of retail occupancy, even without the additional challenges posed by Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis. In such circumstances, local communities can offer a key to sustainable futures. Government support (both through targeted regeneration funds and through local government finance more broadly) could be tailored to enable the reuse of landmark properties for community ownership and use in order to stabilise declining former retail centres and create new hubs to support community wellbeing, and a continued process of partnership building to grow capacity within localities that are currently struggling. CIDs could play an important role in such a process of change.
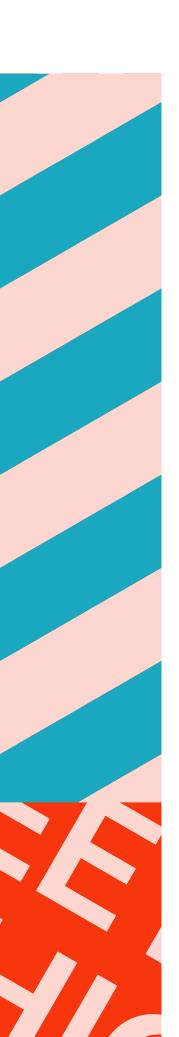
Endnotes

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3   https://www.retailresearch.org/retail-crisis.html

4   Stephenson, B. (2020). Community Improvement Districts: A discussion paper. London: Power to Change

5   See https://www.powertochange.org.uk/research/community-improvement-districts-pilot-what-weve-learnt-
     so-far/

6   For more information, see: https://www.powertochange.org.uk/news/evolving-power-to-change-for-long-
     term/

7   Most of the recommendations for government and policymakers will also be relevant to funders.

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