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change

TAKE BACK
THE HIGH
STREET

Getting started with Community Improvement Districts

Kate Swade and Julian Dobson

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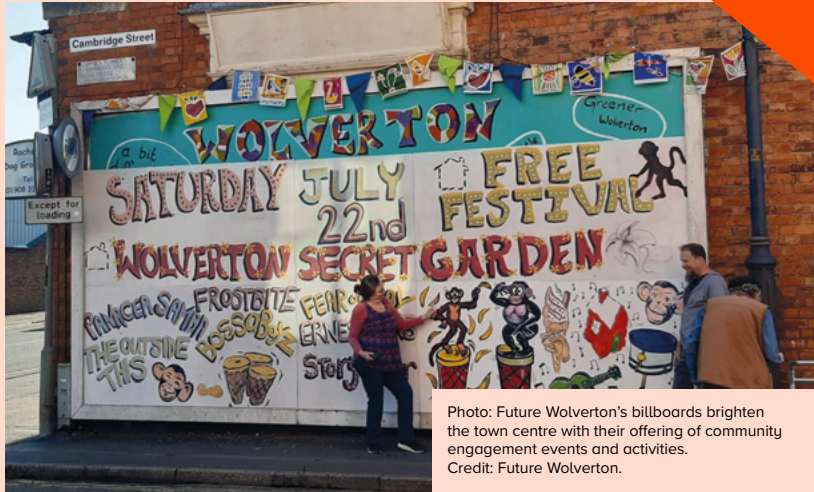


Photo: Future Wolverton's billboards brighten the town centre with their offering of community engagement events and activities. Credit: Future Wolverton.

Guidance for community businesses, local authorities, organisations and groups who want to put communities in the lead of regenerating their Town Centres.

CID stands for “Community Improvement District”. A CID is **a community leadership and development approach to regenerating high streets or town centres.**

The term CID is an umbrella for different ways in which communities can take leadership of high street regeneration. A CID approach convenes different stakeholders, galvanises local action, and creates visions for the future of a town centre

or high street. CIDs can take many forms: there is no one “right” model.

This guidance aims to help you put into practice the learning from [Power to Change's Community Improvement District Pilot Programme, which ran from 2022-23](#). Although this was a time limited programme with a small number of pilots, there is rich learning, imagination, and inspiration from communities working on high streets up and down the country.

Firstly, the CID approach is one that needs imagination and creative thinking. So, imagine with us for a moment.

Imagine if local people had a meaningful way of influencing what happens in their town centres – from planting, to [street art](#), to the use of [empty shops](#) and the way bike and car parking is arranged.

Imagine if we could all meet our needs as people on our local high streets, from [places to meet our neighbours](#), to [seeing live music](#), to picking up our [groceries](#), or [meeting friends for food](#).

Imagine if there were ways community businesses with great ideas could [easily access property](#).

Imagine if high street regeneration was led by local community organisations, not dominated by commercial interests which draw profits away from the town, into the pockets of distant shareholders.

Imagine the groundswell of creativity and potential. This isn't science fiction. Communities across the country are taking a leading role in their high streets and town centres. CIDs are one way to do this – where might your imagination take you?

It's all about local context

Because every high street, and every community, is different, CIDs will take different forms and have different approaches in every place. There are lots of ways of regenerating high streets. Where a community wants to lead an inclusive process of regeneration where the benefits flow to local people, a CID might be a good idea.

Every high street has a mix of issues that touch 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 issues create different situations – and power dynamics – in each place.

There is no one model of what a CID is. Any lasting change on the high street needs a long-term, inclusive, locally led approach. This approach could look like a high street-focused project led by an existing organisation, an extension to the operation of a Business Improvement District (BID), or a partnership that comes together to convene new voices on the high street.



Photo: Future Wolverton are providing small local businesses the opportunity and space to test their new ideas. Credit: Future Wolverton.

There are four stages of community-led high street regeneration

A CID could start with, and lead, any of these:

1 – Setting the vision: holding conversations with local people to generate ideas and a shared vision for their place



Photo: In Kilburn local people have been employed and trained as 'community activators' by Camden Council, to engage local people in conversations about how they want Kilburn to be. Credit: One Kilburn.

2 – Activating the space: bringing new activities and life into under-used spaces and promoting events and gatherings.



Photo: Wolverton hosted a performance by a Samba Band on the main square as part of its 'Community Conversation' event. Credit: Future Wolverton.

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



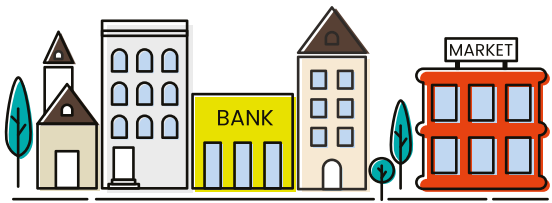
Photo: Stretford CID leaders set up a School uniform 'free shop' in Stretford Mall to support families struggling to afford this substantial cost every year. Credit: Stretford Public Hall.

4 – Taking ownership of property: longer term plans to bring assets into community ownership and create sustainable revenue streams through leasing or trading in community-owned premises.



Photo: Community anchor organisation 'Back on the Map' in Hendon, Sunderland, discovered the absentee landlord of a block of five vacant shops on the street and are negotiating its purchase for community use. Credit: Back on the Map.

The type of organisation needed to lead a CID will depend on the activities being undertaken. Engagement and vision setting can be led by local activists or entrepreneurs, while property ownership and development will need a more established organisation with sound governance and access to specialist skills.



A COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

APPROACH

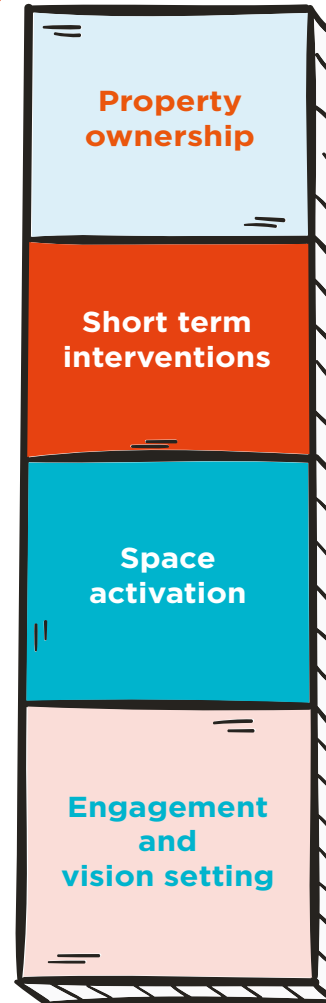
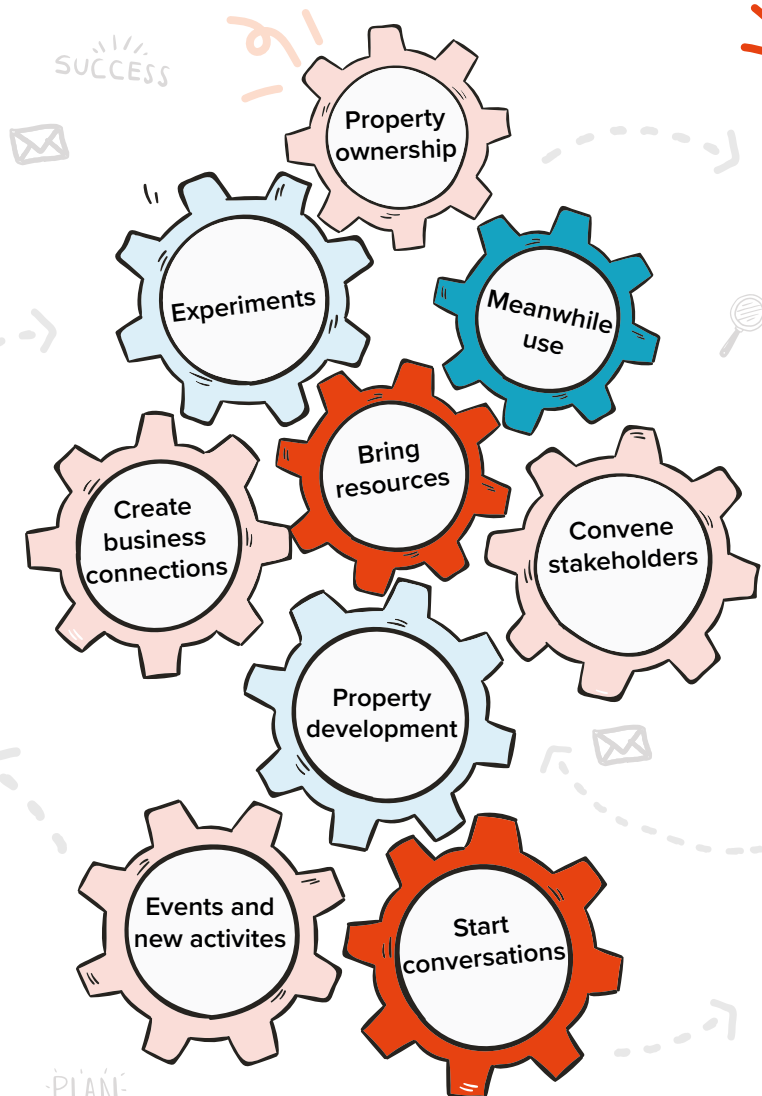
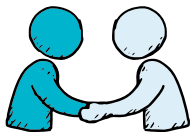
PLAN

I am a...

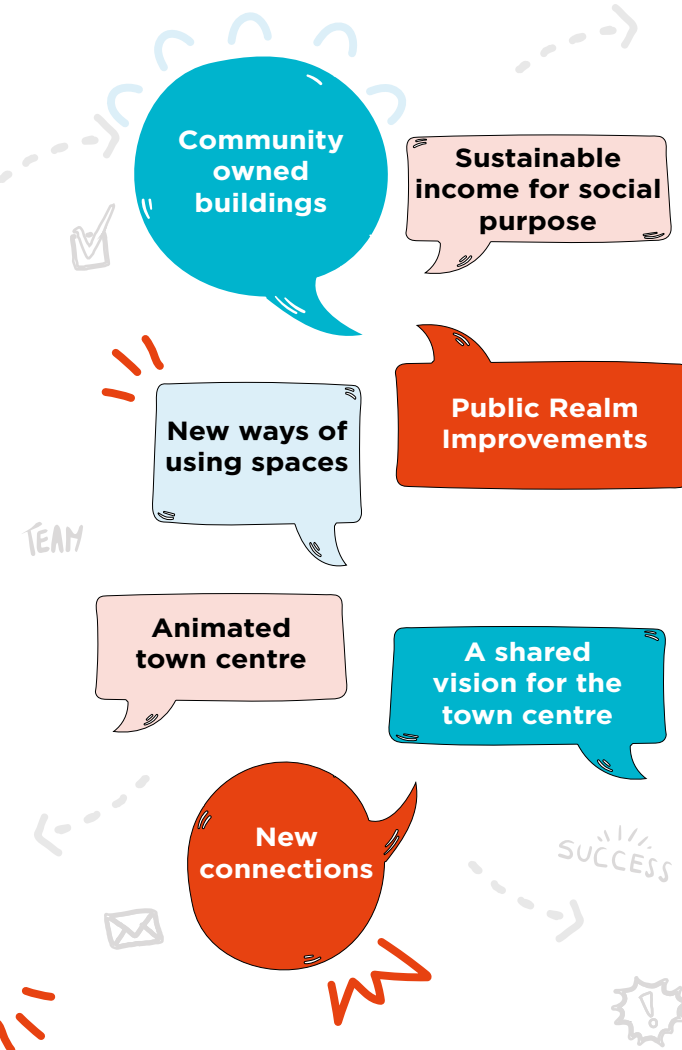
What can i do?

What could happen?

The long term benefits



PLAN



How do we start thinking about CIDs?

Where you start will depend on who you are and the context you're in. With partners, you need to identify and agree (i) what is the challenge to be addressed, or the purpose of the process, (ii) who will be involved in addressing it (iii) how it can be addressed through a mix of short, medium and long term activities.

	Issue	Opportunities	Challenges
WHY?	<p>Purpose:</p> <p>Getting really clear on why you think a CID is a good idea will help people understand whether they want to get involved.</p>	<p>It might be that coming up with a collaborative vision is the first step. This could be as simple as making time to have lots of open conversations with people.</p>	<p>This is all very context-dependent, and there's no one size fits all template to follow.</p> <p>However there are rich examples both at the end of this guide and in other examples of community led regeneration.</p>
WHO?	<p>Who's in the lead?</p> <p>It will help to identify a convener with existing networks and credibility to bring partners together.</p>	<p>This lead convening organisation could take many forms, each with their own advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Local authorities can bring resources and convening power ▶ Community organisations (or residents' or traders' associations) can bring ideas, energy, and grassroots connections ▶ An existing Business Improvement District can bring resources, an existing structure and business connections ▶ An individual entrepreneur can bring drive, ideas and energy 	<p>Each of these types of lead organisation can also bring challenges, however:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Local authorities can be bureaucratic and have heavy administrative loads – they also have many other priorities to balance ▶ Community organisations may lack the convening power to bring all the necessary partners to the table ▶ A BID may lack community connections, and find it hard to work with community partners ▶ An individual entrepreneur might struggle with coalition building and accountability

	Issue	Opportunities	Challenges
WHO?	<p>What are the power dynamics?</p> <p>Whoever the convener is, they will be in a position of power.</p>	<p>This can be an opportunity to re-shape local power dynamics and put community voices and experiences at the centre.</p>	<p>Reshaping power dynamics is hard! Working cleverly with power is a real skill, and external facilitation might be helpful.</p>
WHO?	<p>What skills do you have?</p> <p>CIDs need to develop a set of key skills to work with diverse stakeholders, including listening, convening, boundary spanning and collaborative planning and budgeting.</p>	<p>CIDs are a community leadership and development approach to regenerating town centres: they provide a great way of learning new skills, and creating a wider group of people with the right mix of skills to take local leadership.</p>	<p>It might be necessary to get community organising, peer research, or facilitation training, and/or to be willing to team up with other networks and groups with complementary skills to your own. Sometimes this – especially when it means being open to very different perspectives – can be challenging.</p>
WHO?	<p>Who's not in the room?</p> <p>Sometimes who's not in the room is just as important as who is. No process will start out with all the "right" people.</p>	<p>Creating inclusive processes where all voices have a chance to be heard will offer real richness to your CID.</p> <p>It might be helpful to identify potential "champions" in powerful organisations, to help you understand and navigate better the blockers and challenges that they might perceive in getting involved.</p>	<p>You should identify how participation will benefit the communities you want to include rather than being tokenistic. This will require some of the skills above!</p> <p>If powerful players like local authorities or developers are not engaging in the process, this can really hold things back.</p>

	Issue	Opportunities	Challenges
HOW?	<p>How will you fund the work?</p> <p>Building relationships and trust takes time. A CID process will be hard to deliver without some dedicated time and resources.</p>	<p>Options for funding CID projects include seeking external grant funding for community organising or high street regeneration. Local authorities or local charitable foundations may be able to support. The lead organisation and partners may be able to provide funding in cash or in kind. If there is a local Business Improvement District, it may be able to contribute resources.</p>	<p>Funding for this kind of work may well be difficult to access. Without a dedicated “CID” funding programme you might need to bring resources from different places together.</p>
HOW?	<p>How will you communicate?</p> <p>Getting the tone and “brand” of the CID approach right will really help bring people along with you.</p>	<p>There’s an opportunity to make sure the brand reflects the place.</p> <p>For example branding the CID work as “One Kilburn” or “Villette Road, the Heart of Hendon” – titles which are locally relevant and engaging, worked well for two of the pilots.</p>	<p>There’s a risk that spending too long searching for the “right” brand could delay action, and it might be hard to get everyone to agree. However being clear on the purpose of the project will be helpful with this.</p>

	Issue	Opportunities	Challenges
HOW?	<p>How do you want to work?</p> <p>How open do you want the process to be?</p>	<p>It can add real richness and depth to involve a wide range of partners, and if you want to do this, you’ll need to allow time to build trust and connections.</p> <p>Whatever governance model is adopted, it needs to be as inclusive and equal as possible. Funders might want to see that key partners such as local authorities or developers, are committed to the CID process.</p>	<p>It can be tempting to consider the governance of the CID too quickly, before the process has begun. Coming to governance too soon can be off putting for some partners and can make it more challenging to get things done.</p> <p>Equally, working in a very open way is challenging and will raise all the issues of power dynamics and inclusion covered above.</p>
HOW?	<p>What do you already have?</p> <p>If you’re thinking about a CID approach, you probably already have connections, relationships and ideas.</p>	<p>Mapping out the local stakeholders you have connections with, the relationships you have and the projects or actions you’ve already done can be a great basis to start from.</p> <p>From here you can plan where to go next.</p>	<p>It can be hard to find the time to do this reflection. It also might reveal that you don’t have connections in all the areas you need, or that you haven’t always been as inclusive as you like, which can be challenging to realise.</p>

Key principles to bear in mind as you start a CID approach:

- ▶ Be imaginative. Community-led approaches can be more agile and more creative than many others: think big!
- ▶ This is about leadership, and about developing leadership in local people
- ▶ Doing something – an activity, an event or a conversation, can generate trust and galvanise further action
- ▶ Who isn't at the table is sometimes as important as who is – both in terms of less heard voices and powerful ones
- ▶ Change moves at the pace of trust, and building trust can take time
- ▶ Governance should come after engagement and visioning – form follows function

Read on to get inspired and find out more about some of the CID pilot projects.

Future Wolverton



Photo: Future Wolverton refurbished and opened a shop on Wolverton's main square which accommodates small businesses and community activities. Credit: Power to Change.

Future Wolverton (<https://futurewolverton.org/>) is a community benefit society with a mission to establish Wolverton as a thriving and sustainable town within the city of Milton Keynes. As one of the pilot CID projects, it built on a track record of community development and engagement to hold new conversations about the future of the town centre. The fact that change is coming anyway, due to the demolition and development of the local shopping centre – the Agora – is acting as a galvaniser for these conversations. A key activity has been repurposing two shops on the main square; a charity shop at risk of closure now doubles as a

community information base, and a second previously vacant shop now accommodates small businesses and community activities which are too small to take on a space of their own. 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.

One Kilburn



Photo: A new Library of Things has been established in Kilburn aiming to help people save money, borrow useful tools and equipment, and help the environment by not buying new. Credit: Bekki Calver.

One Kilburn (<https://onekilburn.commonplace.is/>) is convened by the London Boroughs of Camden and Brent. Kilburn High Road is the boundary between the two local authorities, and has historically been overlooked. One Kilburn is a forum for local community organisations to come together to share ideas and aspirations and work together to make change on the ground. Local residents have been recruited and trained as 'Community Activators' to enhance engagement. Through walkabouts, public meetings and street-level actions One Kilburn has brought different groups together. Organised walks have taken place 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.

The leadership styles of key council staff have allowed the forum to develop in a fluid, community-led way, while still making use of the councils' convening power. The CID is working with Camden's library service to turn the local 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 items they might not otherwise be able to afford such as DIY tools, sewing machines and sound systems.

The Heart of Hendon



Photo: Villetle Road – the Heart of Hendon has undergone a transformation with striking local branding. Credit: Back on the Map

Back on the Map (<https://backonthemap.org/>) is a well-established community anchor organisation, and registered charity committed to improving the quality of life of people in Hendon and the East End of Sunderland. The catalyst for action was a highly visible branding of Villetle Road, the neighbourhood high street, as the Heart of Hendon. A cluster of high-profile events and initiatives demonstrated that Back on the Map 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 Villetle Road are being upgraded to cultivate a sense of care about the area.

Small-scale interventions reinforced the view that people cared about the street: Back on the Map arranged for the first Christmas tree on Villetle 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 were 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 a number of traders on Villetle Road to install card payment systems for the first time.

Connected Town Ipswich

Ipswich Central Business Improvement District (BID) operates in Ipswich town centre and waterfront, with a remit to make the area more vibrant, more welcoming and more fulfilling. The CID pilot process had a clear focus 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. The BID is planning a large-scale consultation with local residents to refresh the

idea of a connected town, which was mooted in 2021. 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.

Stretford

The Stretford CID is convened by Stretford Public Hall, an established community business that has been supported by Power to Change to take over a key community asset. The CID's focus is the remodelling of the local shopping mall, built in 1969, by Bruntwood, a large development company. 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. Some early community engagement activities included a pop-up school uniform shop at the end of the 2022 summer holidays which was a great success.

Redevelopment of the shopping mall has been slower than expected. The CID's current activity is focused on the creation of the 'Stretford Town Centre Forum' to take ideas forward and establish a governance structure.

Further Reading

Further case studies and useful contacts are included at this link.

If you're reading this as a printed document, you can visit www.powertochange.org.uk/getting-started-with-community-improvement-districts



Photo: Local artist Tim Layden paints take-over billboard to inspire and spark community action in Wolverton. Credit: Future Wolverton.

Power to Change

The Clarence Centre
6 St George's Circus
London SE1 6FE

020 3857 7270

info@powertochange.org.uk

powertochange.org.uk

 [@peoplesbiz](https://twitter.com/peoplesbiz)

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