

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS (BIDs) (SCOTLAND) STEERING GROUP MEETING 6, BATHGATE – 18 APRIL 2007

Present:

David Henderson, Scottish Executive (Chair)
Katherine Armstead, Land Securities
Euan Dobson, Scottish Enterprise
Charlie Shanlin, COSLA / City of Edinburgh Council
Jacquie Reilly, Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM)
Ken Jobling, Scottish Executive
Ian Davison Porter, BIDs Project Director, Scottish Executive
Raymond Convill, Scottish Executive (Secretariat)

Also in attendance:

Alistair Shaw, West Lothian Council
Sam Crawford, Bathgate BID pilot & Bathgate Traders Forum
Pat Kerr, Bathgate BID pilot
Amanda Finlayson, Bathgate BID pilot
David Stein, Chair of Bathgate Traders Forum

1. Welcome and Introductions

Apologies were noted from Ken Bruce, David Davidson, Andy Godfrey, Vicki Bibby, Andy McCann, Fiona Moriarty, Jane Scott, Garry Clark, Lucile Rankin and Susan Cooper.

Sam Crawford welcomed all those present to Bathgate, one of the 6 Scottish BID pilot projects.

2. Minutes of Meeting No 5

The minutes were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

David Henderson explained that the main outcome of the previous meeting had been advice to Ministers following which decisions were taken about the award of additional grant to a number of pilots for 2006-07 and to all the pilots for 2007-08.

3.2 Euan Dobson asked whether this would be the last meeting of the Steering Group, as had been indicated. David Henderson confirmed that he had written to members to propose this. No-one had disagreed. He explained that the Steering Group had been set up originally to advise on the process for selecting pilots and to oversee that process and that its remit had then been extended to advise on funding for the pilots. With decisions on the funding now taken, the Group had therefore completed its remit. However, given the further developments in prospects for the BIDs process in Scotland over the coming period, it was agreed that there would be merit in the members of the group continuing to meet as a network to monitor developments, exchange views and provide advice and expertise. (Further discussion

after the meeting suggested that the first meeting of such a network might be timed for around September 2007.) **Action:** Ian Davison Porter to convene as necessary.

4. BIDs Legislation

Raymond Convill gave a brief update on the progress of the legislation and its main themes. BIDs legislation came into force in Scotland in April 2007. A variety of powers, tasks and duties will fall to the Local Authority, the BID proposer and the BID Body to implement BIDs in Scotland effectively and fairly. A new entity, the BID Body, can now be constituted. The legislation is broadly similar to that in England and is designed to be flexible to cope with different scenarios (such as different BID levies). The novel aspects are the scope to involve property owners and tenants with a long term lease, and the ability of a billing body to collect and enforce the levy on behalf of a local authority. One outstanding issue for the Scottish Executive is to legislate for Joint Arrangements where a BID covers more than one Local Authority area.

Jacqui Reilly explained that interest in involvement of property owners in England remains (and hence interest in the Scottish legislation) and she indicated a concern that test cases could be brought (even after a ballot) by some businesses in a BID area who do not consider themselves liable to pay the levy. She also described the difficulties in England where businesses in different local authority areas had wished to form a BID and said that those difficulties had led to most such BID proposals being abandoned.

A copy of the presentation is attached.

5. BIDs Progress Report

Ian Davison Porter said that Clackmannanshire BIDs pilot was expected to be the first to go to ballot, probably in September 2007. This is later than previously thought but represents a realistic timescale given the significant amount of work that must be completed prior to any ballot to ensure its success. The experience gained from England and discussion among BID pilots at a meeting held at Gogarburn (RBS Headquarters) appears to reinforce this point. Other BID pilots are at different stages and are making measured progress towards ballot, with Inverness being the next to ballot.

The monitoring and evaluation framework for BIDs in Scotland is nearly complete and information is being gathered to gauge the baseline services provided by local authorities. This is already having positive benefits by demonstrating to business what their rates actually buy (such as subsidised transport), often unseen until now. It also appears that some local authorities have been delivering some local services in town and city centres through different departments. This baseline process has shown local authorities both the range of services they deliver and from which departments but also in total what they actually spend on these services at that level.

Several BIDs booklets have now been produced; other areas in Scotland have also contacted the Project Director to seek information about BIDs; and of significance it was noted that HBOS had announced plans to provide financial support to the Edinburgh pilot.

6. Bathgate Presentation

Sam Crawford introduced the presentation and described the role of the Bathgate pilot. It is beginning to make a real difference in the town. He also explained how the shopfront improvement project was developing. Following the £25,000 BIDs programme monies provided by the Executive, West Lothian Council had committed a further £10,000. Now, 65 businesses (most of those in the town centre) have applied to take part in the project and between them they are committing an extra £200,000 of their own money. This is involving most of the eligible businesses and its impact should be sustainable. Some shopfronts have already been improved, with other shops brought back into use and more improvements to follow.

Partnership with the Council has also played a significant role in the project. For example, the Council implementing a streamlined process for all the planning applications which the process has triggered, with a dedicated officer for queries. This has not only speeded up the planning process but also achieved further efficiencies.

An important message from the Bathgate experience was the need to have a leader from amongst the business community who could act as a catalyst. It was noted that regeneration is not something the Council (or anyone else) should impose on businesses but something that both sides needed jointly to work towards. Businesses have to have ownership too.

It was reported that an earlier shopfront initiative in another town which the council had led (but without businesses being partners) had resulted in far less take-up. However, other West Lothian towns are now showing interest in the Bathgate model.

The members of the Steering Group were able to see for themselves the results of this work on a short walkabout in the town centre after the meeting.

7. Close

David Henderson thanked Bathgate for its hospitality on the day and also thanked all of the members of the Steering Group who had contributed their time and expertise over the last 18 months.

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