



Walk this way: New West End Company's diagonal crossings at Oxford Circus have eased pedestrian congestion

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

As London business improvement districts come up for renewal, can they convince cash-strapped occupiers to keep backing them?

Mark Shepherd reports

When business improvement districts (BIDs) were first created in 2005 and 2006, their ambitions seemed to stretch little further than clearing the streets of litter or debris from drunken revelries.

These days, however, occupiers expect something more for the 1%-2% of the rateable value of their properties they pay towards the BIDs that operate in their area. If they do not feel they are getting value for money, they can vote for change.

Of the capital's 20 formal BIDs, five are up for renewal next year, among them Team London Bridge and the Waterloo Quarter Business Alliance (see map and table, overleaf). Five more follow in 2012 and a further five between 2013 and 2014. Just like MPs

in the general election, all of them have to convince their constituents they should be kept on for another five-year term.

Some have made a visible, measurable difference. For example, New West End Company, which is up for renewal in 2013, has revolutionised Oxford Circus with the introduction of a diagonal crossing. For others, there are less publicly obvious achievements.

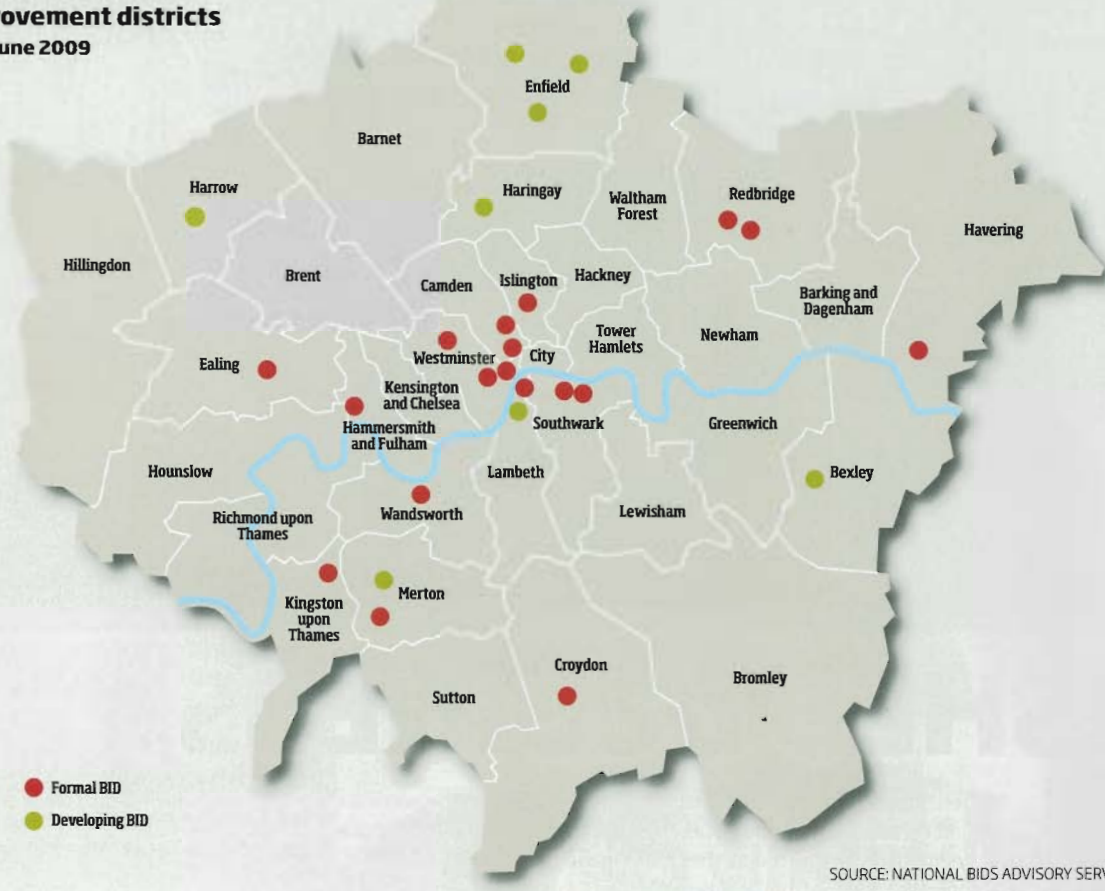
"These are tough times and all occupiers want to make sure their money is going as far as it can, and for the BIDs it will be no exception," says Helen Santer, director of operations at Waterloo Quarter.

"We have to make it clear what we are doing for them and that we are value for money. That is what we will >>

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London's business improvement districts as at June 2009



SOURCE: NATIONAL BIDS ADVISORY SERVICE

« have to do over the next year until we go to ballot in February.”

Waterloo charges its 320 occupier members the equivalent of 2% of the rateable value of their properties and reaps £500,000 a year.

“We are at the top end of London BIDs in terms of our charges,” admits Santer. “But we think the occupiers get a lot out of us, whether it’s street cleaning, graffiti removal, or recycling services.

“That is the case we are making in our early consultations with them.”

Year	BID
2011	Camden Town Unlimited Ealing Broadway BID Hainault Business Partnership Hammersmith London Team London Bridge Waterloo Quarter Business Alliance
2012	Angel BID Argall Avenue BID Croydon BID E11 BID (Waltham Forest) London Riverside BID (Havering)
2013	Garratt Business Park BID (Wandsworth) New West End Company (Westminster) Paddington BID (Westminster)
2014	Ilford BID (Redbridge) Kimpton Industrial Estate Renewed 2010: InHolborn, Better Bankside (Southwark) Renewed 2009: Kingston First Formed 2009: Willow Lane (Merton)

SOURCE: NATIONAL BIDS ADVISORY SERVICE

The National BIDs Advisory Service shows that the Waterloo BID received a 74% approval from occupiers when its first vote was carried out in March 2006 from a turnout of 50%. Despite those strong figures, there is no complacency.

“A lot of things have changed for our members since 2006, in terms of the economy and how their businesses might be fairing,” says Santer. “We will make sure that we get our message across to them.”

Team talk

Donald Campbell, a spokesman for Team London Bridge, which will ballot its members in October next year believes London’s BIDs will be able to demonstrate their value.

“So far, all the BIDs in London that have come up for renewal have got that renewal, so the early signs look very good,” he says.

“We have been consulting with our occupiers and the early feedback from them has also been generally positive, but it is important that all BIDS ensure they remain relevant.”

In its first ballot in November 2005, Team London Bridge received a 71% positive vote with a turnout of 50%.

Team London Bridge has 270 occupier members, which contribute an annual total of £750,000. It imposed a £50,000 cap on each individual occupier last year, when it realised some faced huge increases in their BID levy because of the

2010 rating list. In some cases, occupiers suffered 100% rises in their business rate liability.

“We had to act quickly on that,” says Campbell. “The rating list increases had threatened to put occupiers off.”

Among the occupiers within the Team London Bridge BID is PricewaterhouseCoopers, which is fitting out offices at More London and aims to be fully operational there by May 2011.

Paul Harrington, real estate director at PWC, says expectations of BIDs will continue to increase as the renewals roll around every five years.

“We now have BIDS all over the city and occupiers have become used to them over the years, so inevitably they may expect to see more,” says Harrington. “I don’t think BIDs will have a problem in meeting those expectations because they have all been well received so far.

“The crucial factor for them is that the occupiers keep supporting them and feel that they are getting something out of it.”

Both Waterloo and London Bridge will hope to follow the example of London BIDs that have already made it past the second hurdle.

Better Bankside in Southwark earned a second term following a vote in February in which 86% of the respondents voted in favour of retaining it from a turnout of 52%, while InHolborn remained in place having secured an 86% positive mandate on a turnout of 46%. ■