Research papers 'Dear Prudence': An overview of Tax Increment Financing

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‘Dear Prudence’: An overview of Tax Increment Financing

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Abstract This paper looks at the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as a tool for levering regeneration and renewal within a wider policy framework. The paper introduces TIF in an era of low economic growth, while finance is both straitened and increasingly provided with an emphasis on the ‘local’. The study then gives an overview of key US literature on TIF for regeneration and renewal. Using interviewees working with TIF in the USA and UK, insight is gained for the introduction of TIF into the UK. Key TIF policy considerations and explanation are put forward, given an introduction of TIF into the UK. In addition, there is a question ‘check-list’ of concerns if a TIF project is proposed. It is argued that TIF should in the first instance be reserved for regeneration and renewal, and that if TIF is selected, it can be a powerful tool as long as a prudential approach is taken.

Keywords: *Tax Increment Financing; Investment and Finance; Urban Planning; Property Development*

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INTRODUCTION: TIF IN CONTEXT

In many contexts, urban policy has changed radically as a result of the international credit crisis and economic downturn.[1] The straitened economic circumstances that typify both UK and US experience in ‘the age of austerity’ have seen the most prominent change in urban policy in recent years. Relaxing the burden of direct investment by the state for urban regeneration has been one such response, with a deep cut in public expenditure in the UK. Further reductions in direct state funding in the UK are exemplified by the proposal to introduce Tax Increment Financing (henceforth TIF) as a method of finance that has been used since the 1950s in the USA.[2]

To introduce TIF, it is a mechanism for using anticipated future increases in tax revenues to finance current improvements such as new or improved infrastructure. TIF works on the principle that the supply of new or improved infrastructure usually leads both to new development and to an increase in the value of surrounding property, both of which serve to increase the level of property taxation in the area. Within a designated TIF district, this anticipated increased taxation (the ‘tax increment’) is captured and used to pay back the infrastructure that has been provided for by the front-loaded finance in the form of a bond to the local authority. For example, if an authority could borrow say £1m, in 10–15 years the business rate would increase and pay off the £1m with this capital increase).[3,4]

Many arguments have situated urban policy experiments (such as TIF) within a broader history of neoliberalism, and are no doubt intellectually persuasive.[5–7] Less attention has been devoted to documenting the most recent manifestations of state retrenchment and the financing of urban regeneration and renewal. More broadly, the introduction of Neighbourhood Planning[8] and the Localism Act[9] has begun to set the policy frameworks that financing regeneration and renewal can align. These new policy shifts have brought greater attention and thinking towards a smaller spatial scale of 'the neighbourhood' and devolved governance at 'the local' level. To a wider policy extent, the use of finance for regeneration and renewal at the small-scale fit and local level are now aligned with the current less lucid agendas of The 'Big Society' — in essence a 'do-it-yourself' ethos that expects public goods and services to be provided by the charity or voluntary sector. This paper explores the implications this 'local' approach might have for the finance of urban regeneration and renewal, and in particular via the more localised administration of TIF.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a secondary literature review, in addition to primary interviews with approximately 12 key informants conducted in the UK (between January and June 2011) and in the USA (between July and December 2011). The study took a qualitative format, the rationales for which are well documented.[10,11] Secondary literature study was from relevant academic texts, consultancy documents and policy literature. Access to key practitioner documents as part of the grey literature was particularly useful and unique. Interviews were with elites involved in politics, such as an MP lobbying for the introduction of TIF, lobby group representatives with an interest in property development (such as the British Property Federation (BPF)),[3] think-tank researchers and directors such as those from the Core Cities Group (CCG)[4,12] in the UK, and individuals involved in the UK parliamentary committee All Party Urban Development Group (APUDG).[13] Interviews in the USA involved lead thinkers on TIF from the Urban Land Institute (ULI), University of Illinois at Chicago, DePaul University Chicago, Northwestern University Chicago, and Loyola University Chicago.

The selection of interviewees took the form of a snowball method to enhance the number of potential good quality interviewees[11] — suggestions for further contacts useful to the research were asked for during interview, and hence viewpoints are informative, and in part unavoidably biased towards (but not comprehensively) favouring the TIF initiative. This was apparent in a large proportion of TIF material favouring its introduction being developed by the BPF and CCG, plus members of a US Task Force on TIF. Despite this, all professionals maintained a critical stance, for instance, on ensuring that accountability and transparency were developed further in TIF projects. Critique and considerations for TIF as a funding stream for regeneration and renewal are discussed further in the findings. All interviews conducted by the author were recorded and/or notes made, and transcription was made following interview. Collation and analysis of data was enhanced using NVivo software.

TIF IN THE USA

US literature brief

While some states, such as California and Illinois, have been using TIF for decades, many others have only recently introduced state laws that allow them to use this tool. Of the USA's 50 states, almost all now have enabling legislation that allows TIF. Furthermore, the use TIFs in the USA has grown dramatically since the 1970s. The number of TIFs in operation is difficult to document exactly, as not every state requires their registration. However, it has been noted that the number has expanded exponentially over the past decade. For example, it is noted that Illinois had one TIF district in 1970 and now has over 900.[3]

It should be realised that a universal understanding of TIF in the USA is difficult due to the local circumstances of its use, even before an attempt is made to understand its transfer to other national policy frameworks such as that of the UK. An attempt to compare the city of Calgary (Canada) with the US experience of TIF recognises that TIF is adapted to each local context, and that it is difficult to conduct a direct comparison between cities.[14] However, there are some useful universal considerations that are brought out in this paper. As Weber *et al.*[15] present for the US implementation of TIF, the underlying design is the same even if the state legislation is different in each state. For instance, two main objectives must be met for a TIF to be granted:

1. The municipality must demonstrate that a proposed redevelopment area meets the state's definition of 'blight'; and
2. the state requires the municipality to demonstrate that the area in question would not be redeveloped 'but for' the use of TIF.

These two objectives therefore place TIF as a tool for renewal and regeneration and connect to the view that a priority for the use of TIF in the UK has been argued primarily for regeneration and renewal.[16]

A comprehensive overview of US TIF literature is provided by Weber *et al.*[15] It is concluded that increases in property value because of TIF are inconclusive, and that all costs and benefits (private and public) were not used in the model and may be difficult to capture fully.[15] To be more comprehensive in assessing causality, a full cost-benefit analysis of industrial TIF districts would be needed, and to do this, information on public expenditures in TIF districts as well as longitudinal data about employment and rates of changes in property values would be required.

Despite this being inconclusive, as would be expected with such complexity and plethora of possible variables affecting value, key literature and issues are cited by Weber *et al.*[15] First, there is literature that introduces the premise that TIF increases property values — Bartik[17] explains that if TIF district funds are used to provide amenities that make the area more attractive for investment, demand for land there will increase. It is noted that TIF designation can by mere designation contribute to an increase in property values in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. As evidence, after the City of Chicago approved the Chatham Ridge TIF, the price of property in the district increased thirteen-fold before any land acquisition or infrastructure investment took place.18 A converse effect of reducing land value is also possible if for instance TIF designations add stigma or crowd out private investors.

Difficulties documented by Anderson[19] are that normal inflationary pressures will generate nominal property value growth and allow the municipality to capture revenues from overlapping tax jurisdictions. Some discussion of the complexity involved in revealing outcomes in the presence of TIF, compared with those that would have occurred without TIF, is brought out.[17,20] This is made more evident in a study demonstrating that municipalities with fast-growing property tax bases may adopt TIF to capture incremental revenue.[21] Weber *et al.*[15] outline in their review that studies that use appropriate statistical methodology for measuring the effect of TIF have found mixed results. Man and Rosentraub[21] found that TIF increased median house values in Indiana. By contrast, Dye and Merriman's[2] comparison of municipalities around metropolitan Chicago found that TIF adoption reduced the growth in municipal property values — possibly due to consideration of a zero-sum result (discussed later) where growth in property values within TIF districts was more than offset by reduced growth in the non-TIF portion of the same municipality.

Academic papers exploring TIF in the USA tend to focus on using a theoretical lens[22] or take a more localised, case-study approach that looks at effects within TIF districts[23,24] — although discussion tends to move between these lenses as TIF needs to consider both. Brueckner[22] argues more specifically that localised public improvements are likely to be opposed by property owners outside the affected area, who pay higher property taxes with no offsetting benefits. While more broadly, the TIF stimulus may be more excessive than needed at times, despite allowing a city to generate much-needed public improvements. For Byrne,[23] the use of TIF as a tool for renewal has been adopted, with TIF districts on average being located in areas that are more economically disadvantaged than the municipality as a whole, suggesting a positive relationship between blight and subsequent property value growth. With regards to economies of scale and the use of TIF for larger development projects, the results also show that the spatial size of a TIF district has a positive influence on property value growth.[23] That in part demonstrates why TIFs will predominantly be funded in the first instance for major infrastructure projects, prior to confidence in TIF allowing smaller scale projects that could generate property value uplift. Dardia's[24] study of TIF districts in relation to non-TIF districts for the state of California showed that TIF stimulated growth, although the cases selected were those that were growing to demonstrate the effect, and thus the results of direct 'causality' by TIF were difficult to prove conclusively.[15]

Literature on TIF in the USA also demonstrates some of the universal strengths and weaknesses of TIFs on renewal and regeneration, and they are worth mentioning here to generate universal connectivity to UK considerations further in this paper. As stated, this universal theory is acknowledged despite each TIF project outcomes being largely a determinant of the particular stakeholder partners involved; the systemic issues of the specific site (eg on brownfield land); and the wider non-systemic dynamics that have an effect on the site (eg the level of economic growth). Johnson and Man[25] for instance, argue that TIF development projects, as well as generating finance for renewal, may create economic growth outside the TIF district, in immediately adjacent neighbourhoods. Furthermore, TIFs can provide finance for major redevelopment projects without general fund payments, and allow taxing bodies to share in the development benefit of increased tax revenues over the long run from relative increases in property tax revenue gain. There is also no additional tax burden from TIF, as it is seen as a self-financing mechanism, and it does not need public funds to pay for infrastructure — assuming that the up-front infrastructure payment is paid back with future uplift in property values that can generate a future tax base.[25]

Several key challenges to introducing TIF in the USA are highlighted by Johnson and Man.[25] With TIF being an example of a public–private partnership, 'normal' antagonists to this form of working are seen to emerge, particularly in relation to divergent interests of developers, local authority officials, and neighbourhood groups. Other challenges noted by Johnson[26] are that redeveloped TIF districts will have increased service needs that will have to be financed by non-district residents and businesses through increased taxes — this is particularly relevant for the provision of school funding. Municipal abuses are also possible as the increment may be generated for uses that are unconnected to the project — eg commercial real estate gains rather than blight and renewal being tackled. This raises issues over unelected, and thus publically unaccountable, stakeholders gaining from publicly-financed projects. Furthermore, if there are beneficiaries of TIF outside those areas designated for TIF, there is a situation where a municipality has gained a tax increment base without having put in finance and investment.[26] The creation of a TIF district has been referred to as zero-sum game, where one area of the city wins by attracting development, at the expense of other areas of the city.[14] Broader issues of whether the uplift in value captured would have happened without TIF (the 'but if' test), and quantifying renewal outputs qualitatively, are both contestable and open to exploitation. TIF programmes are also complex and costly, as implementation requires information such as a market study for the project area, real estate valuation data, a financial feasibility analysis, and a redevelopment plan. These are time-consuming, have difficult-to-obtain datasets, and are costly to process.[14]

More recent commentary from the USA since 2006 demonstrates how far TIF has developed, and how it is morphing into a funding tool for different purposes with varying support. Byrne[27] examines the impact of TIF adoption on municipal employment growth rather than the uplift in property values, and hence the potential to consider alternative tax bases. In a paper by Weber *et al*.,[28] sector and land-use foci continue to provide inconclusive evidence that TIF actually universally 'causes' property uplift in the TIF district, or a spill-over effect to neighbouring districts. Despite this issue over causality, the model used for single-family Chicago homes (1993–1999) demonstrates that proximity to mixed-use TIF districts (that contain both commercial and residential parcels) increases the appreciation in value of nearby houses.[28] The recent morphing of TIF, to be used in dealing with non-blight issues, is raised by Briffault,[29] who argues that there is little evidence to attribute 'help' for development to TIF.

TIF IN THE UK FOR REGENERATION AND RENEWAL

The use of TIF in the UK, given US appropriation of the tool over several decades, is now explored, and particular considerations are generated given this experience. UK policy experiments such as TIF have often tried to replicate or refine those already in operation in the USA. Examples of these transfers include: Urban Development Grants,[30] Urban Development Corporations,[31] and Business Improvement Districts[32,33]). Comprehensive adoption of TIF by the UK coalition government has been considered for some time, and it is has been stated that TIF borrowing can 'fund key infrastructure and other capital projects, which will support locally driven economic development and growth'.[34] As part of a structural reform plan released by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) in conjunction with the Treasury[35,36]) in 2011, it was proposed that there would be an implementation of local retention of business rates and TIF by the end of April 2012.

A research paper for the Local Authority Finance Bill 2010-2012 provides evidence of how far the policy has become reality in the UK.[37] TIF's development has been integrated into the wider Local Government Resource Review (LGRR), where two potential options have been highlighted. Option 1 would see local authorities, within the existing prudential borrowing rules, able to borrow against their income within the business rate retention scheme. Option 2 allows a limited number of TIF schemes to be permitted, in which the business rates growth would not be subject to the levy or reset for a defined period of time.[37] An influential think-tank argues that Option 2 should be supported, as ring-fenced TIFs protect the revenue streams of business rates uplift within an area and provide the necessary clarity and certainty.

In doing so, it is believed that the government will face difficult choices on how to ration TIF in a way that keeps national debt at a reasonable level while not preventing worthy projects. At the same time, it is argued that the government must recognise that TIF is not a viable option for every city, and it should provide the necessary tools and guidance for cities to determine whether TIF is right for them as soon as possible so preparations can move ahead.[16] At a devolved scale, the Scottish Parliament passed legislation in December 2010 to approve the use of TIF for six pilot projects. The Scottish Futures Trust has been asked by the Scottish Government to lead on implementation of TIF, and their website includes guidance on TIF proposals.[38]

In making direct comparisons between TIF application in the USA and the UK, significant differences have to be considered, and are regarded as the key TIF policy considerations and explanatory features (Table 1). First, the major differences between the USA and the UK in terms of property taxation should be highlighted. In the USA, a local authority at the municipal or county level most commonly administers property tax. Assessment of the amount of property tax is made on the site and land value, as well as any development (or building) value increase. Moreover, property tax forms the majority of support for local infrastructure such as schools, fire departments, some free medical services, and local government support. The overarching collection and use of property tax in the UK is slightly different, with collection by residential property in the form of a council tax, and commercial property tax collection in the form of business rates at different (or in some cases, exempt) rates. Tax revenue is largely used for local government services such as the police, and other services such as schools as exemplified in the US case.

The success or failure in TIF will depend on the similarities between the urban problems at which TIF has been directed. Most commentators agree that while the nature of urban problems in the UK and USA might stem from similar root causes — de-industrialisation, depopulation, and subsequent social problems — the degree of deprivation in the USA is qualitatively different. The level of nation-state central control is important to determining the success of policy transfer using TIF. Levels of nation-state control differ between the USA and the UK, with the US experience of TIF having less federal control over the purse strings than would be experienced in the case of the central Treasury in the UK. In the USA, it was universally accepted that localised revenue generation at the individual state level (ie not the USA) holds more importance

Table 1: Key TIF policy considerations and explanatory features

TIF policy considerations	Explanatory feature
Tax structures	• US (mostly administered at municipal or county level); the amount of property tax is made on the site and land value, as well as any development (or building) value increase • UK collection by residential property in the form of a council tax, and commercial property tax collection in the form of business rates
Dealing with urban problems	• Urban blight, depopulation, negative land values
Level of nation-state control	• US less federal control • UK interest at national level
High/low financial risk taking	• Setting limits to borrowing • Discouraging LA bankruptcy
Localism interest	• Retaining receipts locally
Market cycle and dynamic position	• Market trajectory at downward or upward point for anticipated returns
Ease of legislation change	• Primary legislation easy to change
Public-private development balance	• Commercial model and social model of interests • Public goods provision
Insider-outsider boundaries	• Managing boundaries of revenue • Competition and avoiding a zero-sum game
Sector and land-use focus	• Significance of light-rail as transport infrastructure • Options to integrate housing rates into the policy in addition to commercial retail tax
Land tax averse	• UK more land tax risk averse • Focus on retail tax rather than land tax
Displacement risk	• Significant social consequences if the displacement risk is high
Front-back load of finance	• Front loading of finance depends on accurate development value methods (eg residual land value methods)
Degree of stakeholder interest	• Universal commitment to the project • Local authorities tended to lead • Depends on the landowners • Joint ventures that would take up TIF

Source: Author

than at the federal level. This can therefore provide a less complex (but possibly less redistributive) system of public finance that could more easily be levered into TIF mechanisms for regeneration. Concern in the UK centres firstly on revenues going back to the central UK Treasury from a TIF policy that is conceptually more localised in focus. Conversely, this national treasury 'pot' of finance for providing TIF revenue in the UK does allow some support for the overall process at a wider scale, because it can strategically allow improved working between (and not just within) local authority boundaries.

The degree of risk taking is fundamental to the introduction of TIFs, and, as in the USA, proposals are assessed against rigorous risk assessment measures. TIFs will not work everywhere, and in some areas the risk cannot be taken unless stakeholders are certain that they will claw back investment via future business rates. The private sector bears the most risk, and is prepared to shoulder most of the risk, although checks and balances in local authority borrowing (some of it backed by the Treasury) will need to ensure the local authority does not get into bankruptcy difficulties.

The degree of focus on localism in policy tends to be at the forefront of thinking on whether TIF policy transfer would succeed. A full devolution to local government would result in full retention by each local authority, and mean a greater proportion of losers as authorities compete in what would arguably end up as a zero-sum game. Furthermore for TIF, a full-localised retention of receipts would not only be contentious, but also difficult to manage for local authorities that do not have sufficient resources to fund such projects. This is not to say that local authorities would not welcome TIFs, as it would mean that local authorities could control their own budget against such schemes.

The dynamic nature of development in the wider property market cycle is another key element that would affect the success of TIF policy transfer to the UK. If a development project were undertaken at the peak of a boom and a cyclical fall began to occur, the rates clawed back would be at a lower value relative to the infrastructure costs paid out during the high-value boom period. The concern for cyclical markets in the industry is one particular advantage for TIFs in comparison with other financial tools, such as simple, public-funded projects that do not allow for any private partnership and private risk. In a recession, the cost of land purchase and/or infrastructure costs will be cheaper relative to the projected increase in value once the market picks up and rates are captured.

The ease of primary legislation change within the countries of the UK is vital to the transfer of TIFs. If TIFs enable local authorities to retain business rates, it will need primary legislation to have the policy introduced. Alternatively, there could be a 'shadow retain', where the secretary of state provides a grant for the amount which would have to be retained. This 'shadow retain' would be one possible way around an immediate change in primary legislation. To emphasise this legal complexity in the introduction of TIF due to different devolved legal systems, differences in the UK home nations legal structures can be identified. English law sets out that primary legislation would have to be changed if TIF were to be introduced without a 'shadow retain'. In Scotland, primary legislation would not have to be changed, and hence the reason for pilot schemes getting the go-ahead in Scotland. To get around the need for primary legislation change in England, it was argued that half a dozen schemes would need to be tested with a view to changing existing law.

The level of public-private development balance within a TIF scheme is instrumental in ensuring regeneration success. Concern was held over whether commercial models of development for profit were not to the detriment of social models that provide public goods from public-sector part-financing. This balance is more difficult in times of recession, when commercial interests would be less likely to invest up-front. A re-tipping of the balance through TIF is possible however, as it could bring forward revenue and be used as a catalyst to get private development off the ground. These schemes can then enable benefits to both public-sector interests and those in the private sector.

As brought out in the US TIF literature, whether a particular area was inside or outside a local authority boundary was important to TIF success. This is especially so if the additional revenue generated by the TIF does not go back to the specific local authority, particularly if it 'overspills' into a neighbouring authority that has not put any investment into the scheme. In terms of public administration, the problem of boundary capture is of the greatest importance, as there may be double counting of tax revenue if a particular scheme straddles two local authority boundaries. The adoption of TIFs in the UK as more of a site-specific project (eg the Kings Cross proposal), which will have tax extraction directly attached, will make this problem of overspill and double counting less problematic.

The sector- and land-use focus in providing TIF based models for catalysing regeneration is also key in spatially targeting economic development. The land-use focus tended to be on transport, or more specifically light-rail provision, when front-loading finance within a scheme. The light-rail schemes, in an indirect way, can stimulate the land value from retail development in proximity to city centres. Transport or people in transit can have a significant influence, although it also depends on wider master planning and not necessarily just the rail link. Mixed-use planning as part of a TIF scheme is seen as beneficial, and it is argued that transport intersections with a mix of housing and other land uses such as commercial office space can anchor in potential — and even provide an alternative land-use tax base from the uplift in housing value.

Another key characteristic element to the potential success of policy transfer from the USA to the UK in the form of TIFs was the level of front (to back) loading of finance. With TIFs having a predominant mechanism to front-load finance, the appeal stems when there is a shortage of finance in the first place to fund and stimulate regeneration efforts. Furthermore, if this front-loading of finance were to be a chosen method to fund a project, an accurate valuation (such as Residual Land Value method) of projected land uplift value would need to be integrated into the appraisal calculations.

A final consideration in the introduction of TIF is the degree of stakeholder interest. It was found that the majority of stakeholders affected by the policy's introduction needed universal commitment to the project. Local authorities tended to lead the projects, although the city adopting the TIF approach would tend to be constrained and limited financially, but willing to cooperate with other partners and support the project for its constituents. If the project was an area-based scheme, then the local authority were more likely to get involved in a bidding process and choosing a partner. This may depend on the landowners of the particular project however, and if a developer had a lot of land in the proposed area, then the developer would become the lead partner. Despite this, the partnership can be varied if it is a large-area-based scheme, especially as the funding landscape is made more complex because (a) the local authority may have differing degrees of financial strength; and (b) at the same time, the private developers are finding a lot of these schemes unviable. In light of this viability, it may well be that the local authority deals with decontamination or helps at the master planning stage, eg for compulsory purchase or land assembly. So it is mainly joint ventures that would take up TIF methods of funding. The local authority will make the initial move, and then the developer will follow under a partnership arrangement.

CONCLUSION: CHECKLIST OF TIF CONCERNS FOR REGENERATION AND RENEWAL

In drawing together and concluding the key issues apparent in the US TIF literature and the fundamental characteristics of TIF considered in the UK by interviewees, a 'check-list of TIF concerns for regeneration and renewal' has been generated (Table 2). This check-list provides a useful insight into the majority of questions that need to be asked when a TIF project is being drawn up, whether in the USA, the UK, or elsewhere. The questions thematically address several issues, such as the need to consider all costs and benefits that are both social and private, as well as stakeholder considerations, spatial implications for area development, the technicalities of capturing and processing, and ensuring the viability of TIF funded projects.

The fundamental focus given this

Table 1: Case study characteristics (ABS Census, 2001)

Key concerns
1. Does the development address 'blight' and deprivation?
2. Would the development not be redeveloped 'but for' the use of TIF?
3. Have all costs and benefits (private and public) been considered?
4. Has TIF designation considered speculation, displacement, stigma or crowding out of private investors?
5. Is the TIF likely to allow a capture of revenues from overlapping taxing jurisdictions?
6. Has the TIF been selected mainly on the grounds of an area having fast-growth?
7. Does the TIF detrimentally cost (or significantly benefit) other areas outside the TIF, or produce a net zero-sum gain for areas inside and outside the TIF district?
8. Have all stakeholders been considered in negotiation of the TIF, such as the interests of developers, local authority officials, and neighbourhood groups? Is there a collective will to make the project work?
9. Have increased service needs not funded by TIF been included (eg schools)?
10. Is there transparency of gains from unelected and thus publicly unaccountable stakeholders gaining from publicly-financed projects (eg commercial developers)?
11. How complex, costly and time-consuming will it be to implement, monitor and control the TIF funded project?
12. Is there a need to ring-fence the capture of tax in the TIF agreement to protect the revenue streams of business rates uplift?
13. Is the upfront finance available for a TIF project while keeping national debt at a reasonable level?
14. Is the use of TIF appropriate given the necessary tools and guidance?
15. Has the sector mix and land-use focus been considered in the TIF district; is there opportunity to make other tax gains (eg residential)?
16. Has an appraisal, assessment, and evaluation been considered — particularly to ensure the TIF project is viable? (eg is the future uplift projection accurate)
17. Is the finance prudential given the risks involved in the TIF project?

Source: Author

checklist is to ensure that TIF is being used to tackle blight where uplift in property value would not necessarily flourish without such a financial catalyst. This means that renewal and regeneration, particularly urban, should be central to the aims of using TIF in the UK, as it was in the USA initially. If at the outset the case given for using TIF is to undertake regeneration and renewal, and if the tool is agreed, there is a strong need for a prudential approach taken in awarding finance to particular projects. Risk is at the forefront of a mechanism that provides finance now on the basis of hypothetical future inflows of revenue, and thus risk of non-uplift must be accounted for as much as possible.

The consideration of using TIF in the first instance in the UK is to provide an alternative source of funding for development, both public and private, where the means of provision is increasingly less likely to be from public grants — given the argument that the public debt is too large. TIF can potentially increase this debt in the short term, and more medium term if upfront finance is not repaid owing to project default, or if there is a less-than-expected uplift in a future tax base. Hence, the fundamental premise of this paper is that TIF should be promoted as a powerful tool to fund long-term public and private benefits, as long as a prudential approach to financing urban regeneration and renewal is taken.

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