

What goes around, comes around

A long-running dispute about who owns the rights to Monopoly has dogged the world's most successful board game. **Ciaran Jennings** reports on a new initiative involving an area on the board that is bound to raise the eyebrows of LVT supporters

SET IN THE heart of London's theatreland, Coventry Street was laid out in the West End in 1681 and is probably best known worldwide as one of the three yellow squares at the top of the Monopoly board.

This is ironic for two reasons. First, the modern Coventry Street is today at the centre of a scheme to form a Business Improvement District (BID) that could prospectively be funded by a land value tax. Second, the game of Monopoly, which put Coventry Street on the world stage, has long been the subject of intense wrangling over the nature of the game and who owns its rights. How did this arise?

In 1904, Lizzie Magie, a passionate supporter of Henry George's arguments for LVT, patented a game called the Landlords' Game. It was designed so that it could be

played in two separate but connected ways. The aim of the first was for players to buy and sell property in such a way that the contestants attempted to bankrupt their opponents. The second way involved players adhering to the Georgist philosophy of communal benefit – the more land each player owned the more LVT he or she paid.

Some 23 years later, Dan Layman decided to develop an offshoot game, which he patented as Monopoly.

Layman also patented his rewritten rules, which dispensed with the

Georgist perspective and focused on the capitalist method. In 1934, Parker Brothers bought the rights for Monopoly from Charles P Darrow, who had passed it off as his own invention. Parker Brothers had to buy the rights to Layman's game as well as the Magie version after they discovered these pre-dated Darrow's claim.

In 1974, Ralph Anspach, an economics professor, decided he wanted to show how business monopolies were a bad thing and how they could be dismantled. He based his game, called Anti-Monopoly, on Monopoly. General Mills, which had bought out Parker Brothers, went to court to stop him. Anspach lost his rights when judges ruled that his game was too similar in design to Monopoly.

The Coventry Street initiative is bound to raise some eyebrows among Henry George's supporters. BIDs are a Government initiative designed to get local businesses to work together and form a non-profit making management company to co-ordinate and implement development over a local area.

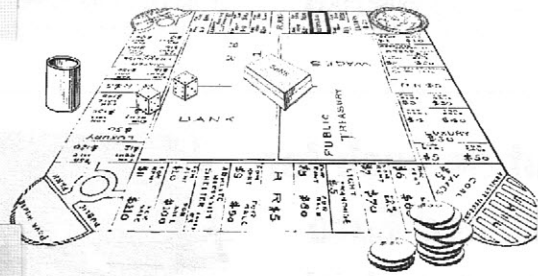
Coventry Street is one of five areas looking to become a BID as part of a scheme called the London Circle Initiative, and wants to run itself along the same lines as BIDs in the US. These tax property owners, sometimes using

LVT, to revitalise areas. The idea behind BIDs is to create a company to administer £4.6 million of Single Regeneration

Budget (SRB) money from the Government.

Julie Grail, director of London Circle, says: "The Government has allowed a levy to be made on all businesses in a BID but the details aren't finalised. This would be based on the current rating list, so the burden would fall on tenants. The rating list could be used more effectively through making landlords pay as well. Landowners are keen to pay and get involved so that they have an influence over how the area is developed."

BIDs see companies working together for communal benefit. Perhaps Lizzie Magie has had the last laugh.



Coventry Street is best-known for its position on the board of the successful game, Monopoly, which has its origins in a game invented by avid Georgist Lizzie Magie in 1904