

Roots of Resilience

A report on the value of Bristol's community spaces



February 2025

ROOTS OF RESILIENCE

Across the country, people enjoy taking part in activities within vibrant civic spaces.

These are the places where we meet friends, form partnerships, and experience new things, yet often suffer from underinvestment, high running costs, and uncertain futures.

All buildings are falling-down; it's not a case of *if*, but *when*. Keeping them standing demands relentless effort and the unique community energy that only civic spaces inspire. Like gardening, some flourish while others wither. We learn and adapt as buildings die and are reborn.

This energy and the force of dedicated community champions determines a space's fate. We must move beyond relying on a few tireless individuals toward a resilient, collective model that secures our community infrastructure for all citizens. Think of a space you love. When it's threatened, who will be there to save it? Viability depends on all of us banding together.

That's why 16 Community Anchor Organisations in Bristol have united to share their stories, data and future aspirations. We call for a strategic, collective, and adaptable approach to managing community assets – one that meets global challenges like conflict, migration and climate change.

Support this journey by sharing, volunteering, and championing these remarkable beacons of hope and possibility. **For yourself, the communities of today and those who will follow.**

Context

In 2021 the [100 Beacons Report](#) highlighted the threat to community spaces in a time of financial crisis. It led to Bristol City Council's one-off £4m Community Resilience Fund.

"Our proposed steps will enable Bristol to lead the nation in safeguarding community infrastructure."

Stacy Yelland, CEO
Eastside Community Trust

In 2024, Trinity Community Arts, Eastside Community Trust, Windmill Hill City Farm, and 13 other Community Anchor Organisations, recognising an ongoing threat, launched the [Roots of Resilience](#) campaign, urging action to safeguard and improve Bristol's shared spaces.

Alongside our manifesto, this report, based on new research, aims to:

- Document how these spaces support public health, social cohesion, and community wellbeing, reducing public spend
- Strengthen the case for community ownership and management.
- Provide evidence to support policy changes and secure long-term investments for sustainable, accessible community assets for future generations.



Progress so far...

Progress against recommendations from the Roots of Resilience Manifesto

- **Involve a community-focused council officer in Community Asset Transfer (CAT) decisions** – Achieved
- **Review CAT effectiveness** – Community organisations and senior council members and officers are engaged in a joint review of community asset management, including lease lengths, protecting assets, fair rents and investment
- **Set targets to increase community-asset transfer rate** – Involvement of Voscur and BCC Neighbourhoods Team involvement in property disposal strategy under consideration
- **Appoint a councillor as lead for community assets** – Achieved (Chair of Health and Communities Committee)
- **Develop a capital investment strategy for organisations with CAT leases** – Case for support for a follow-up to Community Resilience Fund under consideration

"We did receive £200,000 to help with the building of the new hall, which cost over £400,000." Since we built the large hall people have flocked to use it..."

Meadow Vale Comm Centre



St Werburghs' Comm Centre

Survey Findings

Varied Building Conditions

Building conditions vary from excellent to poor and correlate with the investment made into them. 70% of responses cited renovations and building improvements as the most needed area of work.”

Community Use and Social Impact

Annual user numbers vary significantly, from smaller centres serving 3,000 people to larger venues with over 70,000 users annually. Spaces are in high demand with some venues hosting multiple groups weekly and others noting an upturn in users after recent improvements.

Buildings have a strong multi-functional use, serving not only as community centres but also supporting a variety of education, arts, health & social care and economic outputs. They host everything from community events and classes to emergency support services and cultural programming.

“We are trying to build the ones that are needed new, from scratch! e.g. a new, long-term future for Southmead Library...”

Southmead Development Trust



CASE STUDY – Southmead Development Trust



Empowering the Community Through Local Services

Southmead Development Trust plays a pivotal role in creating a cohesive and thriving community. Without its services, many vital offers in the area would cease to exist. The Trust provides a range of free and low-cost activities, youth engagement via the Southmead Adventure Playground & Youth Space and employment services to keep the community connected. Additionally, they provide mentoring and skill-sharing opportunities and mental health support through their community gym and wellbeing programmes, ensuring that residents are supported in their personal and professional growth.

The Trust also plays a critical role in amplifying the voices of Southmead's residents. Its impact is especially felt through initiatives like the *Mead Magazine*, which ensures the most digitally excluded individuals stay informed about local activities. The Greenway Centre – saved by and for residents – remains a vital community hub.

In times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living pressures, the Trust continued to provide essential services, including vaccination clinics and support for vulnerable groups. Through a network of partnerships and volunteers, the Trust continues to meet the ever-evolving needs of the community.

CASE STUDY – Southmead Development Trust



Horizon Group Case Study – Seeding the Future

Steve had wanted to run his own group for several years. He used to go attend a local youth group for people with a learning disability, but this closed when the Council closed Southmead Youth Centre. Steve wanted to create and lead something similar.

He had an idea of what he wanted but was quite worried about the different things he would need to do to run the group. We started meeting weekly and talking about what he was worried about what steps we could put in place to help...we worked to set the group up and Steve was involved in all aspects. Together with his family, he created membership forms, made an application for funding for resources from *My Community Bristol* for set up costs...

There was a great turnout at the launch and people really enjoyed themselves and wanted to keep coming back. Steve leads the group and checks what activities the group would like to do next, then oversees the plan. The group has been running for a year now, in our Greenway Community corner, an area of the cafe that is free for community groups to use. Their membership has increased to the point where they will be moving into a bigger room from March.

Survey Findings

Mixed Funding Models

Organisations rely on mixed funding—internal capital investments, grants from Bristol City Council (e.g. Community Resilience Fund, Cultural Investment Programme), and external capital funds—to carry out both essential maintenance and future improvements. Though this is a strength, it further adds to the complexity of assets management.

Local Authority Partnership

Feedback on the role of the local authority focused on improving relationships with officers to get clear and consistent officer support:

- *"We would like a clearer process around measure social value in order for our impact to be truly appreciated and offset against our charges."*
- *"...Council officers to be based in community spaces where they can help e.g. housing officers, case workers, advice workers, parks officers"*
- *"Ability to bring in funding to make improvements...However we are often told that we are 'just a tenant.'*

"The process and relationship could be treated more positively by officers to support the efforts of the voluntary sector in maintaining and managing publicly owned assets for shared use by communities." Survey respondent



CASE STUDY – Black South West Network (BSWN)



The Coach House: A Beacon for Community Ownership and Racial Justice

Community assets hold deep historical and cultural significance, yet their long-term sustainability is often at risk. The Coach House stands as a testament to the resilience and ambition of Black South West Network (BSWN), which secured this space in 2021 with a vision to create a hub for culture, innovation, and community-building for Black and Minoritised communities in Bristol and the Southwest.

Through a 125-year lease and £1.5 million in secured investment for the 1st Phase of a comprehensive refurbishment, we are transforming the Coach House into a multi-purpose space designed to challenge inequities, create opportunities, and build alternatives in social, economic, and cultural spheres. It is more than a building; it is infrastructure for racial justice, innovation, cultural and enterprise enablement, workspace, and networking for grassroots organisations. However, accessing such spaces remains a steep challenge for many. The cost of acquiring and maintaining community assets disproportionately impacts racialised communities, where entrenched funding disparities, capacity constraints, and systemic barriers make ownership and sustainability an uphill struggle.

CASE STUDY – Black South West Network (BSWN)



The Structural Barriers to Community Asset Transfers

Despite the growing need for community-led spaces, the process of securing and maintaining assets remains deeply inequitable. Many grassroots organisations, especially those led by racialised communities, face insurmountable barriers to asset ownership, from prohibitive land costs to inaccessible funding streams. The reality is stark: communities that have historically been excluded from wealth-building opportunities struggle to secure the very spaces that could serve as platforms for social change.

Even for those who succeed in acquiring assets, the financial burden of upkeep and refurbishment can be overwhelming. Many community buildings, transferred decades ago, have suffered from chronic underinvestment, leaving them energy-inefficient, structurally unsound, and difficult to repurpose. BSWN's Exploring Community Assets programme has highlighted the urgent need for policy changes, including community covenants and strengthened Right to Buy protections, to level the playing field. Without sustained investment and structural reforms, vital community spaces will remain out of reach for those who need them most. Our strategy now focuses on mobilising communities, amplifying their voices, and advocating for long-term policy solutions that prioritise racial justice in asset ownership and stewardship.

SURVEY FINDINGS

From Bristol's 16 Community Anchor Organisations

16
buildings

480
staff

63%
user-led

984
volunteers

14
CAT*
leases

291,700
annual users

70%+
from sources
outside of Bristol

£30m+
combined capital
works spend

27%+
from sources
outside of Bristol

£16m
combined
annual turnover

£33m- £47m
combined local economic
impact per annum

56%

said their building was in
a average to poor condition

Estimated capital
investment needed
over next 5yr

£40m
£12m renovations
£8m repairs, maintenance
£4m accessibility
£6m green measures
£4m fixtures, fittings
£3.2m equipment
£2.8m digital & IT
indicative investment

*Community Asset Transfer

100 Beacons - Delivering Social Impact

With over 100 community buildings located in neighborhoods from Southmead to St Pauls, Easton to Bedminster, the city is supported by a network of spaces, big and small serving the needs of diverse communities, reflecting Bristol's broad cultural identity, and delivering benefits and savings to the local authority.

Established social value methodologies such as the **HACT Social Value Bank**, demonstrate the broad benefits of community buildings in enhancing wellbeing and social cohesion effectively reduce the reliance on costly statutory services.

This can effectively reduce reliance on costly statutory services. This has been demonstrated in multiple studies, including research commissioned by the UK Government, which recognises the role of community assets in preventing health and social care costs.*

Social value

£44m

social value

16 buildings

£13m

revenue savings

16 buildings

£82m

revenue savings

100 buildings

References & Methodologies

Economic Impact Calculation

- Estimated by applying a local multiplier (1.76–2.50) to a baseline annual turnover
- The multiplier reflects research on local economic benefits from community investments

Social Impact Calculation

- Based on HACT Social Value methodology, assuming an average of £150 of social value per user
- Sensitivity analysis: using £100–£200 per user gives a range of ~£29.1m–£58.2m
- Derived from prior assessments in similar community contexts

Public Sector Savings Calculation

- Assumes roughly 30% of total social value translates into savings on health, adult social care, and other statutory services (~£13m annually)
- This 30% estimate is supported by SROI and HACT studies, with research from the New Economics Foundation, the King's Fund, and community evaluations suggesting a 20–40% range

*Methodology Sources

- HACT Social Value Bank, widely used in public sector evaluations
- Power to Change (2020), *Community Hubs: Understanding Survival and Success*
- Locality (2018), *The Great British Sell-Off: How We're Losing Our Vital Community Spaces and How to Save Them*
- Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) (2019), *Community Ownership and Management of Assets*

TRINITY:

Thanks to the following **Community Anchor Organisations** for their contributions to the survey: Ambition Lawrence Weston, Artspace Lifespace, Black South West Network, BS3 Community Development, Community In Partnership Knowle West, Eastside Community Trust, Fishponds Locality Action Group Limited, Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust, Meadow Vale Community Centre, MV Balmoral, Redcatch Community Garden, Southmead Development Trust, St Werburghs Community Association, Trinity Community Arts Ltd, Wellspring Settlement, and Windmill Hill City Farm.

If you would like to share your story managing a community asset, please get in touch.

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Data Disclaimer: This report is based on evidence submitted by third parties as part of our Community Lettings Survey. While we have aimed for accuracy, we cannot guarantee the completeness or reliability of the data. Findings reflect the responses received and may not capture all perspectives. Users should interpret the results with these limitations in mind and consider additional context where necessary.

