

# ROOTS OF RESILIENCE: Saving Community Spaces



Image: Trinity Centre garden.

Our community, civic, and cultural infrastructure has played an indispensable role in supporting our communities for decades and has proven its worth through the pandemic and cost of living crises. However, the process underpinning decisions on disposal of council-owned buildings hugely undervalues the impact and role. Without changes to these, the future of these spaces will always be at risk.

**This manifesto calls on Bristol City Council to take urgent and transformative action to protect and enhance our shared spaces for the benefit of our communities.**

As individual organisations we help the unique communities we serve. Together we form the vital fabric of the city, enriching the lives of Bristolians and contributing to the overall health of the city-wide community.

But current policies and practices are posing a serious threat to the long-term sustainability of this vital network.

# Our asks

Budgets constraints won't change but our recommendations would ease the burden on the Council in the short term, emphasising empowerment and addressing community needs.

## **Review the Community Asset Transfer process**

Invite all organisations with experience of the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) process to review the current system and make recommendations for change to be implemented in 2024. This includes reviewing how the council assesses social value and adopting a sensible matrix that is relevant to the work carried out in the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector running social infrastructure.

## **Adopt a goal to increase the number of community-owned assets**

In line with the One City Plan, the Board should set a target around an increase in community-led buildings, and the Homes and Communities Board should adopt a goal to develop a Community Assets Strategy.

## **Assign leadership for community assets to an elected member or senior leader**

There is currently no leadership within the council at officer or elected member level for city social infrastructure, yet this sector is called on continually to respond to crisis at community level. Having leadership within the council would provide more recognition of the cross-cutting benefits provided by community-led buildings to different council departments.

## **Delegate authority to officer level to award CAT leases, for 95 years, when these are up for renewal**

If an organisation has successfully managed a community building and applies for a renewal, it is only possible to get another 35 years from officers. Anything longer requires cabinet approval, which council officers have no capacity to support. We request delegation to officers to award 95 years if an organisation proves it can manage a space effectively.

## **Include representation from Neighbourhoods and Committees in the CAT decision-making committees**

Currently decisions are made solely by finance executives within the officers. There is no understanding or appreciation for the value of the social infrastructure within this group. There needs to be someone representing communities in the decision-making process.

**Community Asset Transfer (CAT)** is the transfer of management and/or ownership of public property from its owner (usually a local authority) to a community organisation for below market value, in return for social, economic or environmental benefits.

# Transformative long-term changes

Several medium to long-term changes are needed to safeguard the future of our community spaces, and these changes should be backed by a full strategy to deliver the transformation needed.

Along with partner organisations representing the community sector nationwide, we are calling on the Council to:

## **Create a framework for protection and disposal of council owned assets**

Review how decisions are made around the disposal of assets owned by the council.

Develop a new 'community' asset class that prioritises the preservation and social use of community spaces. This offers a clear distinction between assets of community value and other assets in the Council's portfolio, helping to define and streamline decision making, and complementing the 'asset of community value' designation process.



Image: Redcatch Community Garden.

## **Implement a fair rent structure**

Establish a fair, transparent rent structure that considers the financial sustainability of community spaces and the social or investment benefits provided through free or subsidised leaseholds.

Reward successful organisations that have invested time and efforts in asset repair and renovation through fair rental review processes as part of leasehold renewals.

Design a 'joint shareholder' option to asset transfer where Bristol City Council accepts a share of either the profit or liabilities during a specific period to enable a more dynamic partnership investment model.



Image: Easton Community Centre.

## **Develop a capital investment strategy**

Prioritise capital investment from available funds; for example, allocating a percentage of the strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for investment in community infrastructure.

Establish an annual capital budget allocation for community organisations with CAT leases, supporting asset repair, improvements, accessibility measures, and green energy initiatives.

Ensure existing capital budgets are optimised by redirecting existing resources into maintaining existing community infrastructure, that underpins a voluntary, civic and cultural sector that brings exceptional value to the city.

**Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** is a charge which can be imposed by local authorities on new developments to help deliver local infrastructure.

## **Bristol at the forefront**

Councils nationwide are facing the same questions with regards to the future of community and social infrastructure.

In Bristol we have an opportunity to set a new precedent for the rest of the country on this national issue.

The One City Plan already recognises the positive impact of sustainable community anchor organisations, and places an emphasis on the importance of communities having a role in managing their own spaces. The Plan calls for a doubling of these facilities by 2040 – a goal which is only achievable through the changes outlined above.

By incorporating the asks set out in this manifesto, Bristol's councillors can demonstrate a model of positive cooperation and community ownership and management which works for all our communities.

# How YOU can help save and strengthen Bristol's community spaces

The Community Anchor organisations who have created this manifesto are inviting councillors, decision makers, city and business leaders to talk to us directly, understand more about the work we do and see how these changes could enable us to make a much greater impact across the whole city.

The wider Bristol community are also invited to share their thoughts and feelings on what their local community space means to them, by writing on a ribbon or sharing a word, sentence or memory on social media using the hashtag **#CommunityRoots**. Together these ribbons will help highlight the importance, and value of our community spaces and demonstrate how our community spaces provide roots of resilience across the city.



For further information, please contact:

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# Our impact

The below map of the city offers a small snapshot of the incredible work anchor organisations are already achieving across the city. Just imagine what could be achieved if we had longer-term security, and were empowered to do more in response to the localised needs of our communities.

