

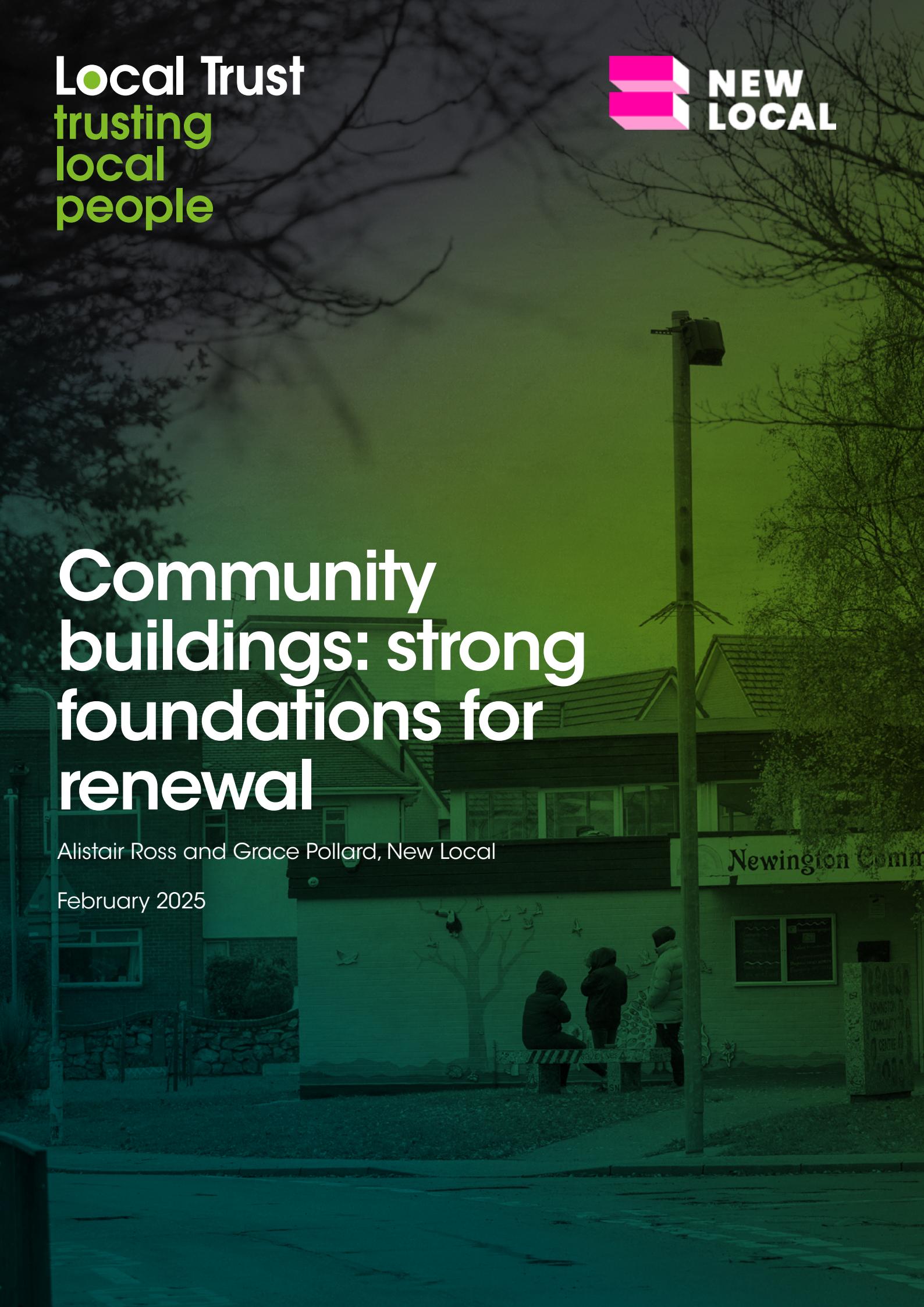
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Community buildings: strong foundations for renewal

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February 2025



Local Trust

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Sue Ansarie for support with proofreading and referencing.

About New Local

New Local is an independent think tank and network of councils, with a mission to transform public services and unlock community power. We look for new, community-based solutions to some of our society's biggest challenges – and team up with innovative people from across all parts of government and communities to achieve change.

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Front cover: Newington Big Local community hub.
Photo: Local Trust/Ben Langdon



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Executive Summary and Introduction

Creating lasting change in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is once again a local and national priority (UK Government, 2025). After a decade, Big Local is entering its final phase. The initiative proves that long-term investment in community-led action is critical (ICON, 2025). Specifically, it proves that investing in community-run buildings provides essential infrastructure for neighbourhood renewal.

Community-run buildings benefit the people, partnerships and places that support neighbourhoods to thrive, and across the 150 Big Local areas they have proven to be catalysts for social, economic and civic change (Local Trust, 2022a). They offer chances to meet other people in an informal setting, participate in a range of different activities, receive support and advice on diverse issues, and access volunteer opportunities. Being community-led fosters a sense of ownership and shared purpose, and over time these buildings can become familiar places where people feel safe and supported (Trup et al., 2019). These spaces contribute to addressing social isolation (Popay et al., 2023), improving wellbeing (Popay et al., 2023), strengthening local economies (ICON, 2025), and enhancing the effectiveness of public services by creating opportunities for collaboration (Local Trust, 2022a; Trup et al., 2019).

However, not all neighbourhoods have access to these buildings. Across England, 2.3 million people live in 'doubly disadvantaged' neighbourhoods which experience high levels of deprivation and have low levels of social infrastructure (including community buildings) (Centre for Progressive Policy, 2024). These communities and others face significant barriers – including investment, time, and support – to establishing new community buildings or renovating existing ones for long-term community benefit. The practical challenges include neglected buildings that require major investment, limited income to support ongoing operations, planning and process hurdles which are complicated for community members to navigate, and a shortage of people with the necessary skills, confidence, or time to take on governance and management (Local Trust, 2024b).

Trusts and foundations, strategic and local authorities, and national policymakers all have key roles to play in supporting more neighbourhoods to create thriving and sustainable community-run buildings that help to drive neighbourhood renewal. This support should include access to diverse income sources, opportunities to build skills and knowledge, reliable information about community needs, robust governance frameworks, and strong partnerships with local organisations and statutory bodies (Local Trust, 2025a). This support must be structured around the full lifecycle of a community-run building – from the initial stages of developing an idea, to taking on and opening a space, through to building long-term sustainability.



Bourne Community Hub. Photo: Local Trust/Richard Crease

However, there are three key challenges that those with the power and resources to help must grapple with: the short-terminist nature of current funding approaches; a preference for prioritising capital investment over investment in people; and finally striking a balance between maximising impact by funding work in areas already invested in, or targeting underinvested neighbourhoods which require more work and resource.

Community-run buildings have a significant role to play in supporting long-term neighbourhood renewal. With a renewed political and policy focus on neighbourhood regeneration, now is an important moment to learn from the experiences of the Big Local programme. This learning prompts a series of strategic questions for trusts and foundations, local authorities and national policymakers. These are explored at the end of this report.

This report draws from an aggregate review of Local Trust literature, insight and evidence as well as relevant research and insight from key sector and academic sources.

Chapter One: How community-run buildings achieve lasting change in neighbourhoods

Big Local demonstrates the value of community-run buildings as part of crucial social infrastructure

Across many Big Local areas, community-run buildings have been a foundation for community-led change. These buildings have provided space for people to meet and spend time together and have acted as hubs for a wide range of community activity. This work has prompted social, civic, and financial benefits for local people who visit and engage with activities or support.

What is a community-run building?

This report is about community-run buildings. We define these as physical buildings which are there for the benefit of a community. These buildings have community-led governance structures and are often run day-to-day by staff and volunteers from the community. There are a wide range of community-run buildings - in Big Local they included renovated civic centres, church halls and pubs alongside purpose-built structures - as well as rooms and areas within buildings. Community-run buildings may be owned outright by the community or leased.

Other community-run spaces such as parks and playgrounds play an important but different role in communities, and for that reason will not be covered in this report.

The importance Big Local partnerships placed on community-run spaces is evidenced by the considerable amount of investment in them. These partnerships were not directed or expected to invest in community-run buildings, yet since the beginning of the programme 40 of 150 area partnerships purchased or invested at least £50,000 in 42 "community hubs" (community centres or other buildings), accounting for £9m of Big Local funding (Local Trust, 2025a). How this looked varied across the country, whether that involved regenerating a derelict 1960s office and flat complex, investing in an existing community centre, breathing new life into a church hall, or establishing a purpose-built community centre.

Big Local and the community power experiment¹

- Initiated by the National Lottery Community Fund in 2010, Big Local provided 150 areas with £1.15m each, to be spent over 10-15 years.
- The fund was managed and supported by Local Trust with a unique principle: decisions on how that flexible funding was spent in each area were made by local residents.
- The decision-making power rests with resident-led partnerships in each place, meaning they chose priorities, designed activities and controlled the budget (Trup et al., 2019).
- Its long-term nature stimulated a focus on building capacity, confidence and cohesion, rather than delivering short-term projects.
- Community-run buildings have played a major part. 40 Big Local areas have spent significant amounts of funding either purchasing or investing in community hubs (Local Trust, 2025a).

The social, economic and civic benefits of community-run buildings ripple out across a neighbourhood - benefitting those from individual people and groups of residents through to local business and statutory services. The benefits of a community-run building will be different to each of those groups, but there are four cross-cutting themes we have identified: connection and cohesion, health and wellbeing, agency and empowerment, economy and growth.

Generating these benefits is not without difficulty and Big Local partnerships faced challenges including maintaining support for their use of the space, nurturing relationships with statutory partners, and achieving financial sustainability (Local Trust, 2024b). However, when these partnerships were able to overcome these challenges, community-run buildings became a catalyst for change (Local Trust, 2025b).

¹ See more at the Learning from Big Local website. Available at: [Learning from Big Local](#)



Worlds End and Lots Road summer event 2025. Photo: Local Trust/Claudia Leisinger

Community-run buildings provide spaces for people in a neighbourhood to meet, spend time with one another and build stronger feelings of belonging.

Community-run buildings provide opportunities for informal encounters that are otherwise unlikely, including the chance to meet others outside of a person's normal social group (Gregory, 2018). This is due to the wide variety of activities and events that they offer which are reflective of local interest or need. Why or how a person chooses to visit the building is up to them, whether that be dropping in for a coffee or lunch, joining an exercise or hobby group, booking or joining an event, accessing a council or NHS service, or helping run the space as a member of staff or a volunteer. Whatever it is that draws them to use the building, they will meet and interact with others while they are there.

Over time, the presence of community-run buildings can help to improve people's relationship with fellow community members. With continued use, the people who visit community-run buildings may become closer and form friendships as they spend time with each other (New Local, 2025). They may bond over shared interests or shared experiences within the building, creating the foundations for trusting relationships (UK Government, 2022). The building itself also improves people's perception of a place. These freshly built or revitalised structures lift the appearance of an area, making people feel happier about spending time in the neighbourhood and acting as a visible reminder that fellow community members are working to improve their area (Trup et al., 2019; Local Trust 2025b).

To deepen the positive impact of community-run buildings in neighbourhoods, it is important that they are inclusive and accessible spaces for everyone. Both funding and access to advice and support are needed to help communities improve the accessibility of these spaces, with particular focus needed on:

- Physical accessibility (e.g. easy to reach, step-free access, easy to navigate) (Trup et al., 2019).
- Financial accessibility (e.g. ensuring low- or no-cost activities) (Trup et al., 2019).
- Cultural inclusivity (e.g. reflective of local identity, multilingual signage and staff or volunteers) (McCabe et al., 2017).
- Psychological inclusivity (e.g. trauma-informed approaches, visible diversity of staff and volunteers) (McCabe et al., 2017).

However, the experience of some Big Local partnerships indicates how challenging it is to make a building accessible to all. Some partnerships struggled to make older or repurposed buildings physically accessible (e.g. creating step-free access, adding lifts or accessible toilets, creating wide corridors) due to the capital required and the technical difficulty (Trup et al., 2019). Other partnerships with the ambition to retrofit could not do so due to funding timelines (Local Trust, 2025a). Big Local partnerships also had to operate community-run buildings on very tight margins (Trup et al., 2019), making it challenging to deliver free services or activities (UK Government, 2022). Meanwhile, making buildings culturally and psychologically accessible required considerable engagement with the community, as well as the slow process of trust and relationship building (Local Trust, 2022a). It is also important staff in these buildings have access to training which builds their skills navigating conflict, supporting people in distress, and managing boundaries, to create safe spaces (Trup et al., 2019).



Ramsey Million Big Local. Photo: Local Trust/Jessie Powell

Community-run buildings bring people together, get them active, and get them talking. People's mental and physical wellbeing benefit as a result.

These buildings play a key role in combatting social isolation and improving mental wellbeing by connecting people to each other and to support (Popay et al., 2023; Langdale et al., 2021). They are sometimes the only place for people to connect with others, and by developing friendships and relationships, people build confidence, build resilience and feel more comfortable reaching out for support at the first signs of need (APPG, 2022). This, alongside other targeted activities such as counselling, peer-support groups, and creative sessions, increases people's happiness and wellbeing (McCabe et al., 2017).

Community-run buildings also play a crucial role providing access to the activities, knowledge and support, which improves people's physical health. This can include a range of activities, whether that be dance, yoga, or other exercise classes. When there is accessible, well-maintained green space nearby there may also be activities such as football matches or walking groups (Trup et al., 2019). These buildings, being community-run in nature, offer activities tailored to community need and interest which makes people more likely to take part, increasing physical activity levels (What Works Wellbeing, 2023).

Activities and classes are also often run, which can benefit people's nutritional health. This may include cookery classes as well as access to money advice and small grants to help buy the ingredients and equipment needed to cook healthier meals (Studdert et al., 2023). Without these spaces, many residents would not have access to affordable and accessible activities, knowledge and/or support networks that all contribute towards boosting physical health (Gregory, 2018).

As witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic, these spaces can also become hubs that enable people to rapidly respond to crises. During the pandemic staff and volunteers involved in running community buildings quickly pivoted to turn these spaces into hubs for food distribution, emergency support, digital access and volunteer mobilisation (Langdale et al., 2021). Their ability to pivot quickly to provide this support was driven by the very fact they are resident-led and accessible to the community (Langdale et al., 2021). In contrast, statutory services can often find it challenging to flex their support as quickly and nimbly as these spaces do.

Community-run buildings provide opportunities for people to interact with statutory service providers. Over time, this can influence how these services work and improve their quality and reach.

These buildings provide physical spaces for service providers to deliver support or speak to people about the support they offer, which over time can help to improve the service and its reach. In some Big Local areas, local council or health staff have used community-run buildings to hold group consultations and gather people's views on their neighbourhood and local services. As a result, they have tweaked services to better respond to community need (Power to Change and Local Trust, 2020). In other areas some services have co-located into the building. In both cases this has helped services deliver support to more people (Power to Change and Local Trust, 2020). While this is all undoubtedly dependent on relationships between the respective partners being active and strong, sharing a physical space makes this much easier.

Through active community engagement, these spaces also become touchpoints for isolated groups who are less likely to engage with statutory services (Power to Change and Local Trust, 2020). People from these groups become more likely to engage with these services after being referred into one by a staff member or volunteer at a community-run building, visiting a drop-in session run by the service, or by visiting the space and finding a service fully co-located within it (Popay et al., 2023).

The quality of statutory services benefits from strong, long-term relationships between a community-run building and a statutory partner. The building acts as a touchpoint for service providers to more frequently engage with communities and community leaders, deepening their understanding of community need and those who are working in the space. Over time this can foster strategic alignment amongst partners, and support services to become more joined-up and reflective of community needs (NHS Confederation, 2024). In turn, people not only receive better, more tailored support but also feel listened to, which improves their wellbeing (Local Trust, 2022a). This can play a role, alongside wider system change work, in shifting services from preventative to reactive, improving community health and wellbeing (Local Trust, 2022b; New Local, 2025).

As people continue to come together at these spaces and share challenges and ideas, they connect with other like-minded people and feel galvanised to make things better for their communities.

Community-run buildings provide opportunities for people to come together and talk about things in their neighbourhoods they do not like or think need changing. These informal conversations led to the creation of new groups or activities in multiple Big Local areas (Trup et al., 2019). Community-run buildings help to bring together different people to think about and develop grassroots approaches to tackling local issues (Local Trust, 2024a). Community-run buildings in Big Local areas have initiated activities including community fridges, food parcel deliveries and low-cost food hubs that were set-up to respond to resident concerns about Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis (Local Trust, 2022c).



Heath Big Local. Photo: Local Trust/Richard Richards

These spaces circulate money through the local economy and help people to develop skills and find volunteer and employment opportunities.

Community-led spaces create roles for residents, whether that be in the governance, maintenance, programming or management of the space, or delivering activities from it. These roles can be paid or voluntary, providing skills development opportunities and practical work experience. Over time, these opportunities can support people to develop the skills, confidence and aspirations to help progress their employment opportunities, in some instances leading to long-term financial benefits (What Works Wellbeing, 2020; Trup et al., 2019; ICON, 2025). These economic benefits may be modest but are meaningful in places where such opportunities are otherwise lacking.

Community-run buildings also drive footfall in the surrounding area. When people visit the building they will pass neighbouring nearby shops, cafes and services and this footfall could increase demand for these businesses (ICON, 2025). Community-run buildings also procure goods and services from local businesses, helping money to circulate through the local economy. Other businesses and social enterprises may also be located in the building (Gregory, 2018).



Shadsworth with Whitebirk Big Local. Photo: Local Trust/Orrin Saint Pierre

Chapter Two: What community-run buildings need to thrive

While the benefits are clear, investing in community-led spaces can feel risky because of uncertainty around whether they will survive and flourish for community benefit.

It is essential that policymakers, funders and place partners recognise the importance of investing in and supporting community-run buildings as part of efforts to improve outcomes in neighbourhoods. But investment and support must be tailored to the needs of the building and the community to ensure these spaces thrive for the long-term, especially as setting up and successfully managing a community-run building can be really challenging.

Those seeking to establish a community-run building face a range of challenges including but not limited to: a highly-competitive and short-terminist funding landscape; spaces in poor condition that require costly repairs; making the building sustainable; the prospect of navigating planning processes and building a purpose-built hub from scratch; and finding people with the skills and knowledge to help establish and then run the space, or building the capacity among people to do so. Against this backdrop, it is easy to see why some may be hesitant to invest time and effort into establishing a community-run building in doubly disadvantaged places where resource, skill and knowledge are already stretched.

The learning from Big Local provides a blueprint for how community-run buildings can be supported to thrive in the long-term.

The learning from the Big Local programme and elsewhere shows a thriving community-run building is one that is:

- Operating under a model suited to the area and those running it (whether that be lease or ownership) which protects community control
- Financially sustainable due to diverse income streams
- Managed by a knowledgeable and skilled team that plans for the future
- Proactively, rather than reactively, maintained
- Governed by a group of community members, in partnership with the community as a whole
- Accessible to the whole community, delivering social, economic and civic outcomes for all
- Well connected with other partners, services, and organisations

But how is this achieved? For communities to make this a reality they need capacity and opportunity to generate different income streams, opportunities to build skill and knowledge, information and insight about a place and its people, an understanding of how to set up robust governance and management systems, and strong partnerships with other local organisations, services, and partners (Local Trust, 2025a).



Moorsley and District CIO community hut. Photo: Ryan Herman

Trusts and foundations, local and national government efforts to support community-run buildings need to be focused on the three core stages of the lifecycle of these spaces: (1) when the ambition is being nurtured; (2) at the point when a community begins running a space; (3) day-to-day running and longevity of these spaces. In the next section we explore each of the seven factors above and review what is needed at each of these stages.

Figure 1: The three stages of a community-run buildings lifecycle



The needs of a community-run space will evolve as it grows, and support must evolve to match this

Needs: Occupancy mode

<p>Nurturing the ambition (prior to taking on the running of a community building)</p> <p>Prior to taking on the running of a space there needs to be a shared foundational understanding of local needs, how a community building meets these, and different occupancy models that allow for this. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A clear shared vision for what the space is for, rooted in community need.• A shared understanding of different ownership models (short-term lease, long-term lease, community asset transfer) and the benefits and drawbacks of each.• A shared understanding of different community group organisational structures (MyCommunity, 2019).• Feasibility and an options appraisal of building ownership to test viability and risks.• An understanding of asset locks and how they ensure buildings are used on an ongoing basis for social and community benefit.• An appreciation of the time, and often delays, linked to capital projects.• An understanding of planning permission processes and challenges.	<p>Starting well (starting out running a community building)</p> <p>Community groups taking on ownership or management of a building for the first time need considerable external support and capacity-building. Starting well requires time, space and trust for those involved to ensure the community running of a space is effective.</p> <p>This could look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to long-term, flexible capital to allow community organisations to build up ownership skills and knowledge.• Low-risk arrangements (e.g. short-term leases) to build operational experience.• Shared agreements through service level agreements (SLAs) or collaboration agreements which clarify responsibilities while still allowing shared management.• Access to legal advice for those taking on the building to understand legal obligations tied to the building.• Support from specialist organisations.	<p>Thriving for the long-term (sustaining the running of a community building)</p> <p>As time progresses and there is greater trust in the community, skills and confidence grows. This means longer term options can be explored. Predominantly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community asset transfer or long-term lease to provide stability.• Building a purpose-built space.
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Needs: Financial sustainability

<p>Nurturing the ambition (prior to taking on the running of a community building)</p> <p>Prior to taking on the running of a building, communities need the time and financial skills and knowledge to help them develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Initial business plans for the building which identify multiple income sources.An understanding of long-term liabilities.	<p>Starting well (starting out running a community building)</p> <p>Communities require the following resources when taking on a building to provide stability in the initial stages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Access to startup grants to cover early expenses such as maintenance, retrofit, etc.A balance of paid staff and volunteers to manage the building and its activities.Systems for financial monitoring.	<p>Thriving for the long-term (sustaining the running of a community building)</p> <p>To ensure the long-term financial stability of the building, communities must maintain sufficient resources to cover financial setbacks as well as diversify income streams. The following are important:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A focus on stable income generation through rent, services or regular events.Financial reserves to cover unplanned expenditures.Access to social investment opportunities (e.g. impact investing).Understanding of, and confidence exploring enterprise models.
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Needs: Maintenance, upkeep and improvements

<p>Nurturing the ambition (prior to taking on the running of a community building)</p> <p>Prior to community running of a space there needs to be a thorough understanding of a property's status. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An understanding of property condition and maintenance needs before acquisition.• An assessment of energy efficiency, sustainability risks and retrofit needs.	<p>Starting well (starting out running a community building)</p> <p>Early maintenance work should focus on long-term adjustments to keep costs down and protect against future challenges. Action to achieve this could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allocating budget for maintenance from day one and define maintenance responsibilities.• Using retrofits to reduce future costs.• Integrating efficiency and low-carbon measures.	<p>Thriving for the long-term (sustaining the running of a community building)</p> <p>In the long-term, communities who run a space need to be proactive rather than reactive in maintaining and improving it. This may look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementing a cyclical maintenance plan to guard against wear and tear and prevent larger costs in the long-term.• Investing in efficiency upgrades when capital allows.• Planning for renewal funds and capital investment.• Investing in flexible use options (e.g. movable walls, modular units) to ensure a wide range of uses.
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Needs: Management and day-to-day running

<p>Nurturing the ambition (prior to taking on the running of a community building)</p> <p>Communities with an ambition to run a space require a skilled and knowledgeable team ready to take on a building. This looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A management team or existing trusted local organisation to take on the building.• An understanding of legal, health and safety, insurance and safeguarding requirements.• An understanding of gaps in governance, management and technical skills.	<p>Starting well (starting out running a community building)</p> <p>In the early phase it is essential that the ownership team has the resources and processes in place to support their work, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear operational policies, roles and training for staff and volunteers.• Systems for bookings, safety and finance.	<p>Thriving for the long-term (sustaining the running of a community building)</p> <p>Long-term stability requires recognition of, and proactive planning for, the reality that the management team will change over time, through for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership succession plans.• Plans to avoid volunteer burnout.• An understanding of legislative changes and adapting policy and use based on these.• Ongoing capacity building opportunities.• A pool of resource and skill shared across several local community buildings.
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Needs: Governance and community participation

<p>Nurturing the ambition (prior to taking on the running of a community building)</p> <p>It is critical that there is broad community engagement about a building before it moves to, or is built for, a community to run. This can be demonstrated through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A community mandate which is in support of a local organisation or group of individuals taking on building ownership.• A vision of use which reflects a wide range of community perspectives about how the building could and should be used.	<p>Starting well (starting out running a community building)</p> <p>Governance should be reflective of local need and transparent to the community. The following are key:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge to select the right ownership model and awareness of the associated risks.• Knowledge of the right legal structure for the group owning the building. The legal structure can affect the type of funding or investment groups can apply for and the way in which the community has a say in running the organisation (MyCommunity, 2018).• Inclusive governance structures with transparent decision-making and feedback routes to the wider community.	<p>Thriving for the long-term (sustaining the running of a community building)</p> <p>To ensure long-term sustainability the building's ownership team should strive to maintain community involvement in and backing of the building's use, through e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular reviews of participation and governance.• Open membership.• Use of storytelling to evidence the building's use.
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Needs: Community benefit

<p>Nurturing the ambition (prior to taking on the running of a community building)</p> <p>The use-case for a space should be built on data and insight on the area and the local community. Inputs to support this should include community members from the earliest point possible and could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A framework which defines how a building will deliver value to local people with a focus on social, economic and civic outcomes.• A map of community needs, local services, and service gaps.• A map of who could benefit but also who might be at risk of exclusion.	<p>Starting well (starting out running a community building)</p> <p>It is important that early activity provides new opportunities that are accessible to the community - these could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early activity to build credibility, e.g. events, services and volunteering.• Digital services to ensure reach into communities.• Activity and offers which align with existing local opportunities and integrate the building into a place.	<p>Thriving for the long-term (sustaining the running of a community building)</p> <p>It is important that the ownership team continuously reflects how the building can meet local need, especially if that need is changing. This could look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular reviews of community need and opportunities, with activities adapted based on these.• Impact monitoring tools and frameworks.
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Needs: Relationships with partners

<p>Nurturing the ambition (prior to taking on the running of a community building)</p> <p>Before a community steps in to run a space it is important there are opportunities for community groups and organisations to build relationships with a range of local stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trusted relationships between local authorities, funders, anchor institutions and community groups.• An understanding of joint-use or co-location opportunities.• An understanding of how the building and its use relates or connects to local strategies or priorities, including community cohesion, public health, economic development, employment and skills, and health improvement.	<p>Starting well (starting out running a community building)</p> <p>Early work around establishing a community building should focus on bringing partners together:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formalised partnerships through leases, SLAs or collaboration agreements.• Clearly defined expectations and roles.• 	<p>Thriving for the long-term (sustaining the running of a community building)</p> <p>Relationships should be nurtured over time to ensure the building is able to meet emerging challenges and opportunities, for example through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activity to maintain partnerships for funding, maintenance and shared delivery.• The ability to connect with other groups operating in different neighbourhoods to share knowledge, skills and resources.• Identifying and, where possible, aligning with local and regional strategies in order to develop shared goals.
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Chapter Three: How systems can support the needs of community-run buildings

Trusts and foundations, councils and strategic authorities, and national policymakers all have roles to play in supporting community-run buildings to thrive as a key foundation for neighbourhood renewal.

How this looks will vary across each place, but there are three live challenges each must consider if community-run buildings are to thrive in the long-term. With each challenge we pose some important sector-specific questions for further consideration and discussion.

The prevalence of short-term funding and the pressures driven by political cycles are at odds with the long-term, patient approach that community-run buildings require to take root and thrive.

The long-term approach required to establish community-run buildings faces several barriers. These include short-term funding cycles, fragmentation between different funders requiring different or specific outputs, and political pressure for "quick wins". The relationships, capacity and knowledge building needed to ensure community-run buildings thrive for the long-term are at odds with these short-term drivers. When these spaces are then also required to respond to competing demands of different funders and partners, their ability to meaningfully engage with, support and build community disappears. Instead, time is spent on managing different programme requirements, including handling different monitoring and evaluation requests.



MyClubmoor community hub and garden. Photo: MyClubmoor Big Local

Questions for further reflection

Trusts and Foundations:

- How could future funding programmes be designed to ensure long-termism is built in and that application and reporting requirements are light-touch, flexible and able to reflect community priorities?
- What is preventing you from moving to more long-term approaches?
- How are you working with other trusts and foundations to align investment and support, reduce conflicting requirements and deepen the impact of your funding?

Councils and Strategic Authorities:

- How could funding from various sources and partners be pooled to help create long-term funding opportunities for community-run buildings?
- What steps are you taking to ensure your own funding is underpinned by light-touch and proportionate application and reporting requirements?

National policymakers:

- How can you design future funding programmes to build on and deepen the impact of existing funding for community-run buildings?
- What steps are you taking to ensure that existing and new funding programmes have light-touch and proportionate reporting requirements?
- Where local areas are in receipt of multiple funding streams supporting community-run buildings and community activity, how are you ensuring reporting requirements are coordinated and streamlined?

Community capacity and capability to initiate, develop and run community spaces is just as vital for their success as the physical building itself - but funders often prioritise capital investment over revenue.

Funders need to consider the balance and flexibility around funding both capital and revenue investment. At the moment, funders are often keener to invest in renovating or building new infrastructure, with less appetite to fund day-to-day running costs, the costs of staff and volunteers, and capacity and capability building.

The latter was a core part of Big Local, and Local Trust worked with organisations such as the Centre for Sustainable Energy, Locality and Shared Assets to provide specialist support to communities. These partners helped community-run buildings run more efficiently and effectively, whether that be by providing active support on how to reduce energy usage and cut associated costs or by providing advice on ownership and governance.

Investing into staff and volunteer capacity is also crucial to create sustainable community run buildings, and should include areas such as legal, health and safety, insurance and safeguarding requirements. Doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods in particular may need more support with capacity and capability building so that community members feel ready and able to take on running a community space.

Questions for further reflection

Trusts and foundations:

- To what extent are you offering a 'funder plus' model here, which pulls on your expertise and networks to build the capabilities and resources of communities running buildings? (IVAR, 2025). Are there also opportunities to do this collaboratively, with other funders?
- Where are the opportunities to link community-run buildings to diverse support options which insulates them from the impact of losing support when any given funding stream ends?

Councils and Strategic Authorities:

- Can you build in flexibility for both capital and revenue funding into programmes supporting community-run buildings?
- How are you working with community sector infrastructure bodies to ensure community-run buildings in your area can access advice, support and training and can connect with each other to share learning and resources?

National policymakers:

- Can you build both revenue and capital funding into future programmes supporting community-run buildings?
- Are there opportunities for flexibility within existing funding streams to invest in capacity and capability building where needed?

National and local government and funders have strategic decisions to make about how to ensure a lasting legacy from investing in community-led spaces – there is a risk that this investment brings short-term improvements but does not build the foundations for long-term neighbourhood renewal.

Council and strategic authority areas with Pride in Place funded neighbourhoods will need to consider how to maximise the long-term impact of this investment. For example, through ensuring this work connects to and shares learning with other long-term work happening in neighbourhoods and connects into other ways local government is working with communities and partners around neighbourhood footprints to ensure better decision-making, services and outcomes for people and communities. These areas will also need to consider how to apply the learning from these neighbourhoods to other neighbourhoods albeit without the same substantial investment. Councils and strategic authorities will also be considering how to leverage funding for areas not in receipt of Pride in Place funding – again there may be opportunities here to draw in diverse funding, but it is critical to consider how to maximise the long-term impact. Trusts and foundations have strategic choices to make about whether to crowd in more funding into Pride in Place areas or to invest in other neighbourhoods and to work closely and constructively with local partners to maximise the long-term impact of funding.

Questions for further reflection

Trusts and foundations:

- How can you work with public sector and VCSE partners in a local area to ensure that together you maximise the long-term impact of investing in community-run buildings?
- Are there opportunities to work with other funders to avoid duplication and fragmentation, and in doing so strike a balance between deepening investment in places where community infrastructure is already being invested in with the need to support areas which are still underinvested in?²

Councils and Strategic Authorities:

- If you have a neighbourhood in receipt of Pride in Place funding, how will you deepen the impact of this investment and draw out learning for other neighbourhoods in your area?
- For areas without Pride in Place funding, how are you building the case for investing in community-run buildings as a foundation for neighbourhood renewal and leveraging diverse funding opportunities to enable this?

National policy makers:

- Should there be a minimum social infrastructure guarantee across all communities, and what would this look like?

There is a significant opportunity to create lasting change in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with collective strategic effort across national and local government, trusts and foundations, communities and other place partners. Growing and revitalising thriving community-run buildings in more neighbourhoods across the UK is an important foundation for this work -the learning and legacy from the Big Local programme provides us with practical insight and strategic questions to guide impactful, cross-sector efforts to achieve this.

² Organisations including IVAR and the Association of Charitable Funders provide opportunities for funders to come together and align their work in this space.

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About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources, and decision-making into the hands of communities. We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding, and to draw on the learning from our work delivering the Big Local programme to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

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