

Investing in community buildings

Locality with Liberdade



locality
the power of community

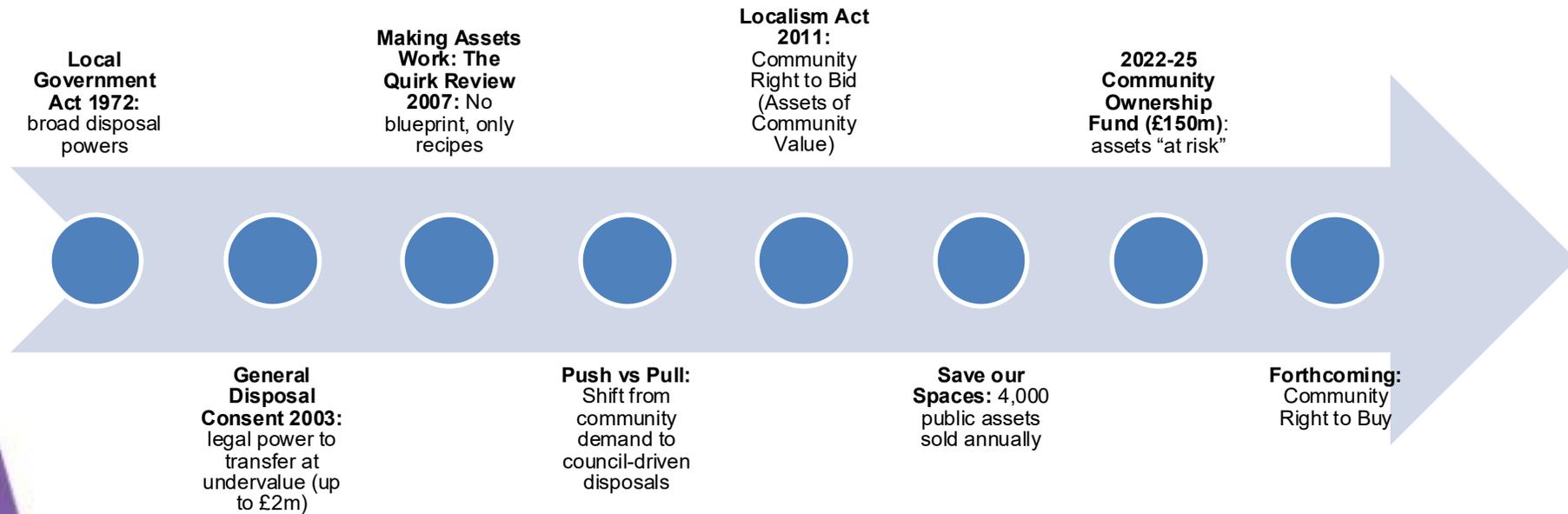
A photograph of a diverse group of people. In the foreground, a woman with dark curly hair and a bright smile looks towards the camera. Behind her, other people are visible but out of focus. The image is overlaid with a large yellow shape on the right side and a purple and teal shape on the left side.

**We believe in the power of
community to create a
fairer society.**

Why community buildings matter

- **Community Wealth Building:** community anchors, circulating wealth locally
- **Investing in the voluntary sector:** strengthens community organisations, reducing dependency on grants
- **Routes to community-led service delivery:** co-produce services with communities, co-location and “hubs”
- **Pride in place:** visible regeneration and civic pride
- **Resilience against future shocks:** pandemic lessons, emergency response
- **Unlocking external investment:** funding streams councils can't access, community shares, crowdfunding, social investment

Policy timeline



Myth-busting

- **Communities lack skills or interest. Reality:** Many groups have strong governance and entrepreneurial capacity. Support is available.
- **Assets will be “captured” by one group. Reality:** Legal structures (CIO, CIC, asset locks) prevent private benefit.
- **It’s too politically sensitive. Reality:** Precedents demonstrate that community ownership enhances the council's reputation and fosters community trust.
- **It means freehold only. Reality:** Typically, it’s a long lease, although length is important for funding (funders need 25+ years).
- **It’s a financial liability for groups. Reality:** Yes, if there isn’t a viable plan, but it can be a springboard for long-term success.
- **It’s a financial risk for councils. Reality:** CAT reduces maintenance liabilities and unlocks social value.
- **It’s just about saving old buildings. Reality:** It’s about creating vibrant, multi-use space for future needs, including new build, housing and much more.

Strategic issues and opportunities

Risks:

- Perceived loss of control
- Capacity gaps
- Technical hurdles (TUPE, procurement)
- “Hands tied” deals - setting groups up to fail

Reward:

- Civil society and local government are two sides of the same coin
- Leveraging external investment and charitable funding
- Visible regeneration
- Economic impact
- Volunteering

Cost of doing nothing:

- Blight from empty buildings
- Lost social value
- Increased maintenance liabilities

Practical solutions for councils

- Develop a strategy (for consistency, transparency & decision making)
- Publish surplus assets list
- Standardise processes: EOI, Business Plan guidance, Lease template
- Secure long leases (25+ years)
- Aftercare

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Stages and roles

- **Identify surplus assets and audit:** Property, community, regeneration teams
- **Publish pipeline & invite EOIs:** Communications, community engagement, sector partners
- **Assess EOIs and shortlist:** CAT panel (Property, Legal, Finance, Community, etc)
- **Business plan development:** Community group + council + external support
- **Negotiate Heads of Terms:** Legal, Property, Finance
- **Transfer and monitoring:** Community liaison



Lessons

- Leadership from the top of the council
- Start with community *need*, not just saving a building
- Secure long-term tenure for viability
- Blend income streams (enterprise + grants)
- Build governance capacity early
- Use phased development to manage risk

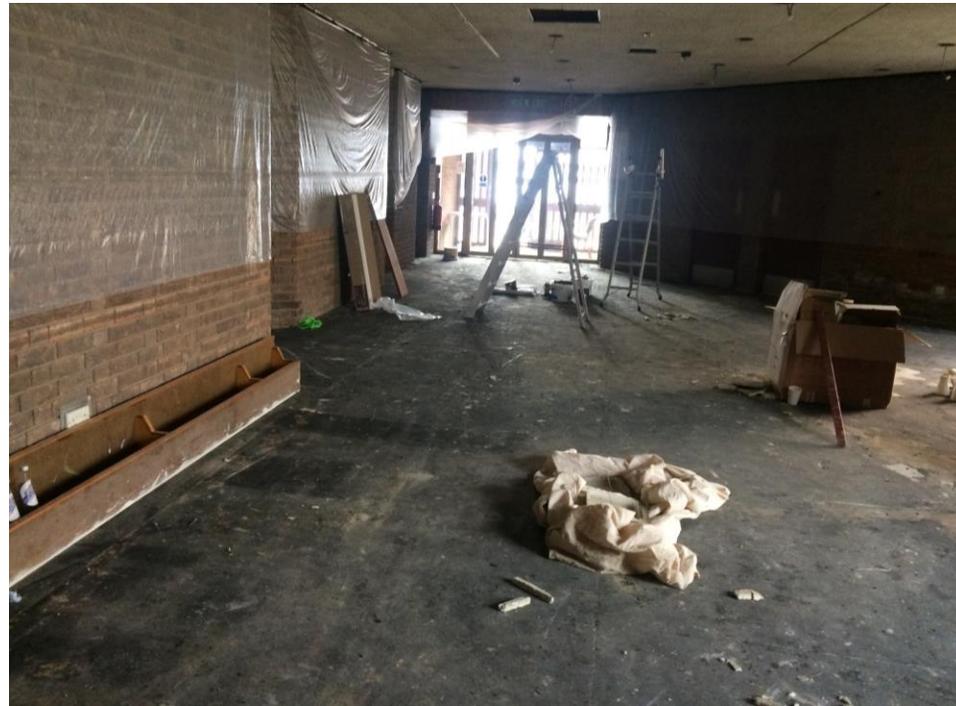


Rob Huggins

CEO

Gosforth Civic Theatre













Organisational Development

"Every day is a school day"

Financial Sustainability

"Financial freedom creates choice"

Artistic & Community Development

"What we really want to be doing"

**Theory of Change
2025 - 2030**

Gosforth Civic Theatre (GCT) is a 200-seat aspirational cultural venue founded by people with learning disabilities (PWLD) for everyone

- We programme high-quality theatre, dance, music and community activities
- We run a high-quality Café/Deli at GCT which provides work placements for PWLD
- We deliver 9 arts and health programmes for PWLD at GCT
- Our artists with a learning disability create and perform dance and physical theatre at regional and national performance platforms
- We develop talent pathways for emerging young dancers with a learning disability through our outreach programme in SEND schools and colleges
- We proactively share our learning and organisational model with other organisations nationally

Activities

Strengthen Governance

We will continue to improve how our community have the power to make decisions about what happens at GCT via our SEND board, Youth board and our Board of trustees

Improve Communications

Take a strategic approach to developing our local, regional and national communications

Enhance Culture and Values

Invest in our strong, engaged, and accountable team

Optimize Data Usage

Improve how we collect and analyse data to make informed decisions and measure impact

Diversify Charitable Income

Build relationships with private corporate donors
Increase opportunities our community has to support us

Be Entrepreneurial

Be creative in how we use the building to grow earned income

Expand Youth and Community Activities

Develop partnerships with other great organisations to increase youth and community activities at GCT

Create "The Big Show"

Build artistic co-creation opportunities between PWLD and other community groups using GCT

Develop Artistic Excellence

Formalise talent pathways through and beyond GCT for emerging young dancers with a learning disability

Develop Cultural Programming

Achieve financial freedom to programme beyond the need to break even

Create Opportunities to Change Minds

Create natural interactions and structured engagement opportunities between PWLD and the community.

Fundamentally alter both community expectations and self-perceptions about what PWLD can achieve, enabling PWLD to develop higher aspirations for themselves

Create a Sustainable Model

Use our governance and story to move from traditional "helper/helped" relationships to recognising PWLD as community builders and contributors

Long Term Goal

People with learning disabilities are valued members of society

Intermediate outcomes

Impact





Thank you!

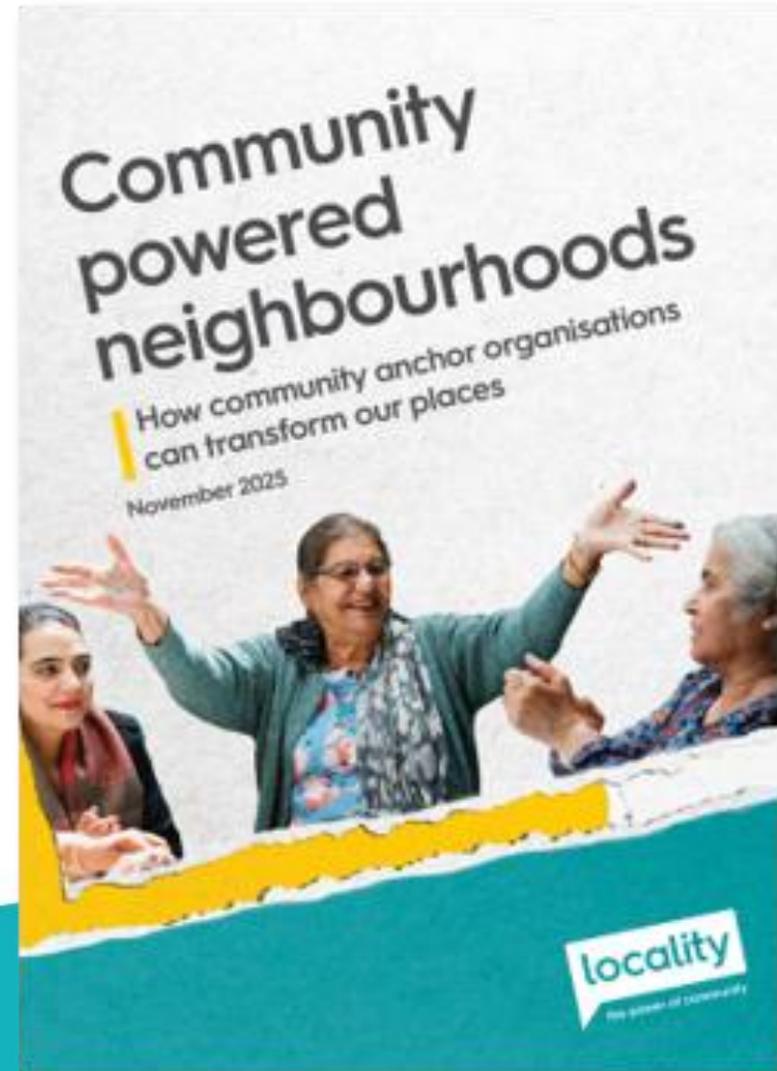


Q & A



Beyond assets – we're here to help councils and boards

- Training and capacity-building for Board members.
- Facilitation of inclusive community-led decision-making processes.
- Expertise in the “powers and tools” in the policy toolkit, i.e. Neighbourhood Planning, ACV and CAT.



Get specialist advice and support

Our team of local experts cover:

- Governance
- Business planning
- Financial resilience
- Community engagement & impact
- Marketing & communications
- Collaboration
- Ownership of land & buildings

Talk to us!

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Unlock the power of your community with us

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