



**Asset  
Transfer  
Unit**

Inspiring people,  
transforming places

# **Advancing Assets for Communities Year Two**

People, Places & Partnerships



The **Asset Transfer Unit** helps to empower local people and organisations to transform land and buildings into vibrant community spaces whilst supporting the development of a thriving third sector. We are the leading provider of expert advice, guidance and support concerning the transfer of under-used land and buildings from the public sector to community ownership and management - helping organisations to develop those assets and deliver long-term social, economic and environmental benefits.

The Unit is led and managed by the **Development Trusts Association** - the UK's leading network of community enterprise practitioners - in association with **Community Matters** and the **Local Government Association**. It is funded by **Communities and Local Government**.

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# Executive Summary

Two and a half years since the publication of *Making Assets Work: the Quirk Review*, the Development Trusts Association (DTA) examines the progress of participants in the Advancing Assets for Communities demonstration programme. In *People, Places and Partnerships*, the DTA's second annual review of programme activity, it reveals that:

- Support from the programme is expected to result in one third of pilot projects from its first and second years transferring into community ownership before the end of the financial year 2009-10;
- 45% of transfers are going ahead in rural areas, and 50% in areas ranked amongst the top two quartiles of the IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation, DCLG, 2007).
- The political control of the council has little or no bearing on the success of transfer activity;
- Strategic developments lag behind practical progress to promote a 'transfer culture' in England – one sixth of top tier local authorities have community asset transfer strategies, of which 75% have received direct support from the DTA;
- A strategic approach to asset management and development is essential if a 'transfer culture' is to evolve and deliver community empowerment and resilience as well as public sector efficiency savings;
- Successful one-off transfer projects can support the evolution of a 'transfer culture'. However particular care needs to be taken not to set unrealistic expectations for those historically under-invested elements of the public estate, where the time and money needed to effect successful transfers is substantial, and where the challenges the third sector faces in generating income are exacerbated by the prevailing economic climate;

**Programme Aim 1:** to support and strengthen public-third sector partnerships concerned with progressing the transfer of assets from Local Authority ownership and control to communities.

## Recommendations:

- 1** A 'Partnership Roadmap' is needed to showcase good practice and provide appropriate guidance to transfer partnerships;
- 2** Best practice concerning third sector consultation and involvement in the development of local authority transfer frameworks should be shared with future programme participants and more widely;
- 3** Jointly devised project plans or 'expectation documents' - setting out what each party will undertake to deliver and when – should be encouraged to build trust and support successful partnership development.

**Programme Aim 2:** to devise and disseminate messages, tools and guidance to embed the community asset transfer agenda in Local Authorities – in particular, to overcome the barriers identified in *Making Assets Work*.

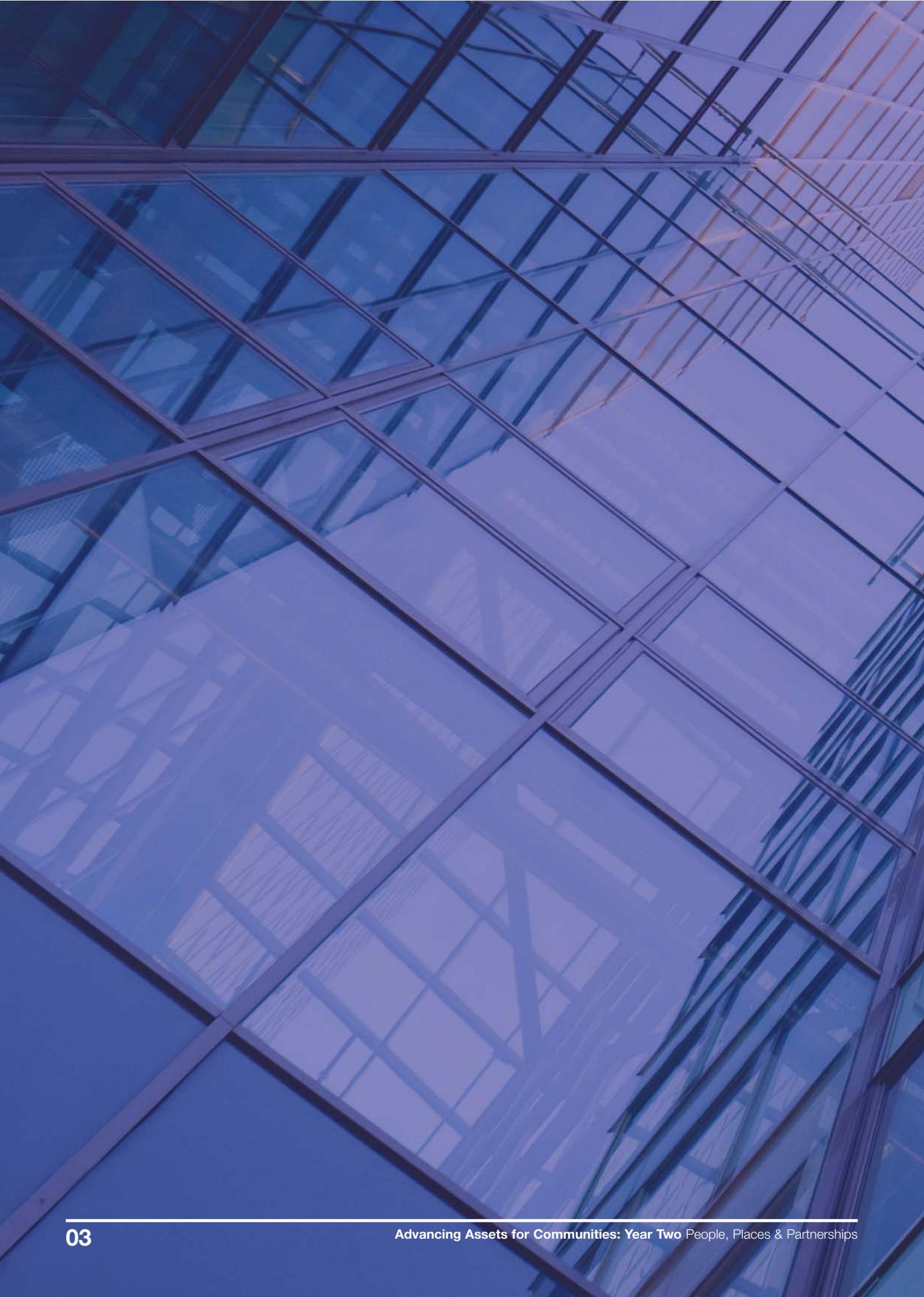
### **Recommendations:**

- 1** Community Asset Transfer strategy workshops should be delivered across the country so that a greater number of local authorities can benefit from the Advancing Assets programme;
- 2** An ATU presence at local authority asset management events needs to be ‘stepped up’ to promote the link between the efficiency and CAT agendas as well as call attention to attendant risks to the third sector;
- 3** Third sector asset management and development pilots should be established to complement CLG’s Total Place initiative – with the aim of compiling evidence to better understand the possible expansion of such an approach in the future.

**Programme Aim 3:** to advance community asset transfer projects in different locations and build confidence in the feasibility of asset transfer through a partnership approach

### **Recommendations:**

- 1** Good practice examples of councils affording community enterprises helpful ‘windows of opportunity’ should be explored in greater detail, communicated to interested parties, and used to promote a ‘community right to buy’ for England;
- 2** Further work is needed to promote the role loan finance and equity capital might play in asset based development by the third sector;
- 3** Community enterprises need guidance and tools to facilitate whole life costing activity, highlight issues affecting specific asset genres, and explore the potential for innovative public-third sector ownership models to evolve where significant refurbishment capital is required. A compendium of good practice concerned with the contribution of high quality community infrastructure to the built environment ought also to be produced in conjunction with Asset Transfer Unit Stakeholders;
- 4** Detailed legal guidance is required to ensure the terms of transfer negotiated by councils and community enterprises are mutually beneficial. This needs to be endorsed and, potentially, enforced by Government to enable the development of a more ‘level playing field’.



# Advancing Assets for Communities Year Two

People, Places & Partnerships

# Introduction

## 1

The Advancing Assets for Communities demonstration programme, managed by the Development Trusts Association (DTA) and delivered in partnership with ACRE, Community Matters and the Local Government Association, continues to implement the recommendations of *Making Assets Work: The Quirk Review of Community Management and Ownership of Public Assets* [Quirk, 2007].

*People, Places and Partnerships* is the second annual review of progress and good practice deriving from the programme's delivery. The first, which was published in July 2008, outlined the progress made around the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) agenda during the 12 months which followed the Government's formal response to the Quirk Review – highlighting the lessons learned, and identifying the challenges and opportunities facing public and third sectors alike based upon practical experience.

Since then, the political and economic climate has changed dramatically and, with that, the flavour of the programme delivered through 30 local partnerships during 2008-9. Policy developments – amongst them, the *CAA Framework Document* [2008], *Communities in Control* [2008], the *Operational Efficiency Programme* [2009] and *Room for Improvement* [2009] – provided timely navigational aides for public sector proponents of the CAT agenda in the context of the 'credit crunch'. The infrastructure to support public-third sector partnerships in progressing transfer activity evolved apace and, most significantly, saw the establishment of the Asset Transfer Unit (ATU) - a new national information, advice and resource hub which handled enquiries from more than 200 public and third sector sources in its first six months of operation. The number of transfers being actively progressed with the support of other experienced third sector infrastructure bodies also increased significantly, with around 250 active projects known to the ATU at the time of writing. As a result, almost half of top tier local authorities in England have received some level of practical support in progressing the CAT agenda since April 2007.

Such developments are beginning to broaden the agenda's appeal beyond the proponents of community empowerment and third sector evolution - to encompass those in local government tasked to deliver against the Comprehensive Area Assessment process, as well as those concerned with delivering more strategic approaches to asset management. At the same time, there is emerging evidence that a more enterprising approach is being adopted by what might otherwise be described as 'traditional' community groups as a direct result of engagement in CAT activities.

The Quirk Review concluded that the purpose of community asset transfer is community empowerment. Whilst recent independent research points to the lack of objectively corroborated evidence to support the hypothesis that community

empowerment outcomes flow from CAT activity, first hand experience has convinced the ATU that the empowerment of beneficiary communities is already happening [Pratchett, L., Durose, C., and Lowndes, V., *Empowering communities to influence local decision making: evidence-based lessons for policy makers and practitioner*, LGRU: 2009]. For example, some communities have formed open and inclusive membership organisations to assume responsibility for significant assets that were previously owned and managed by the public sector, whilst others have forged grass-root groups to submit and progress ideas in relation to public sector assets transparently advertised as being ‘for transfer’.

The full impact of recent transfers upon communities the length and breadth of the country will only be felt as the activities of transfer recipients deliver social, economic and environmental outcomes in the years to come. However, as this report demonstrates, there is already a great deal to celebrate and learn from. Chapter 2 reviews the programme’s origins, aims and delivery methodology. Chapter 3 provides headline outcomes from the programme’s operation to date and considers the ramifications of those outcomes, lessons learned and good practice for future policy and delivery. Chapter 4 outlines such conclusions as may be drawn from the programme’s second year and looks ahead to Year 3 and beyond.

# Origins, Aims and Methodology

## 2

### Programme Origins

*Making Assets Work: The Quirk Review of Community Management and Ownership of Public Assets* [Quirk, 2007] explored how to optimise the community benefit of publicly owned assets by considering options for transfer of asset ownership and management to third sector groups. The Review concluded that:

- 1** Any sale or transfer of public assets to community ownership and management needs to realise social or community benefits without risking wider public interest concerns, and without community purposes becoming overly burdened with asset management;
- 2** The benefits of community management and ownership of assets can outweigh the associated risks and opportunity costs. If there is a rational and thorough consideration of these, there are no substantive impediments to the transfer of public assets to communities;
- 3** There are risks but they can be minimised and managed. The essential ingredient in successful asset transfer is to have all parties working together. This needs political will, officer imagination and a more business focused approach from both the public and community sectors.

The Review also stated that what is required is not legislation or new powers, but guidance and support to help people understand and use existing powers to greater effect. It recommended five related actions to deliver the necessary change in culture:

- Publication of comprehensive, up-to-date and authoritative guidance concerning local authority asset management – including detailed and explicit guidance on the transfer of assets to community management and ownership;
- Publication of a toolkit for local authorities and other public bodies on risk assessment and risk management in the asset transfer process;
- Provision of greater access for local authorities and community organisations to expert advice and organisational development support around the transfer and management by communities of land and buildings;
- Smarter investment of public funds through the involvement of specialist financial intermediaries with appropriate expertise and the ability to achieve high leverage ratios;
- A major campaign to ‘spread the word’ – through seminars, road shows, training, use of the media, online and published information, and the dissemination of good practice as well as the promotion of ‘bottom up mechanisms’.

The Government committed to implementing those recommendations in its response to the *Quirk Review - Opening the Transfer Window* [2007] – where a detailed implementation plan called for a range of government departments, public

and third sector bodies to effect their delivery in partnership with one another. The Advancing Assets for Communities demonstration programme constitutes one of the suite of interventions intended to realise the Government's commitment to deliver against the recommendations of the Quirk Review - providing expert advice and support to public-third sector partnerships where they are principally concerned with community asset transfer.

**Programme Aims:** The Advancing Assets programme is intended to demonstrate the feasibility of community asset transfer and, through that process, enhance the potential for community management and ownership of assets as a contribution towards empowering communities.

**It aims to:**

- 1** Support and strengthen public-third sector partnerships to progress the transfer of assets from local authority ownership and control to community ownership and control;
- 2** Devise and disseminate messages, tools and guidance to embed the community asset transfer agenda within local authorities – in particular, to overcome the barriers identified in *Making Assets Work*;
- 3** Advance community asset transfer projects in different locations and build confidence in the feasibility of asset transfer.

**Programme Infrastructure and Methodology**

The Advancing Assets programme provides advice and support to public-third sector partnerships to develop shared plans for community asset transfer - from concept stage through the negotiation of terms, to transfer completion and implementation of partnership arrangements stretching into the future. The programme was launched in Spring 2007 and will continue until 2011 – involving, on average, thirty additional partnerships each year.

Calls for expressions of interest were issued in October 2007 and January 2008. In Year 1, 20 demonstration areas were selected from 57 applicants. In Year 2, 30 demonstration areas were selected from the 42 expressions of interest received - with two distinct cohorts: the first comprised unsuccessful applicants from the first year who re-applied; the second was made up of applicants whose interest in the agenda had been stimulated by developments in the interim (see Appendix I for a full list of demonstration areas). Despite staggered project scoping phases, this did not result in any discernible differences from the point of view of programme delivery and associated outcomes, although it is perhaps worth noting that 9 local authorities were also in receipt of Community Asset Programme monies (which may have acted as an incentive to participate).

Selection criteria reflected a readiness on the part of the local authority and third sector partners to give priority to partnership development around asset transfer and management; the availability of assets that could be considered for transfer; and the potential to contribute to the breadth of learning to be gained from the programme's operation with a view to wider dissemination. A Case Manager was assigned to each demonstration area and a scoping meeting undertaken with representatives of the local authority and third sector to explore the baseline position and opportunities and aspirations for asset transfer. A package of support to progress strategic development work and pilot asset transfer projects in each locality was agreed, then delivered using practitioner experts in accordance with the needs of individual demonstration areas.

The support offered was made available to both local authority and third sector partners and comprised a mixture of:

- Consultancy to facilitate the building of relationships and the creation of a fair and workable strategic framework for asset transfer based upon sound knowledge of relevant policy landscapes;
- Independent professional advice to help progress specific pilot project components - from business planning to tenure options;
- Professional and technical advice to bolster feasibility efforts – for example, merger options and specialist surveys;
- Social Return On Investment (SROI) seminars to develop social impact mapping and appraisal skills.

In addition, a series of roundtable events was delivered in the regions during Spring 2009, involving upwards of 175 public and third sector participants, to collectively explore the opportunities and challenges facing individual local authorities in progressing the CAT agenda.

# Year 2: Programme Outcomes

## 3

The outcomes of programme activity undertaken during Year 2 are detailed below – along with case studies to illustrate developments in individual demonstration areas. They build upon the lessons learned and good practice gleaned from Year 1 activity, and reflect both qualitative and quantitative data solicited from each demonstration area by case managers over the course of the year.

**Programme Aim: 1:** to support and strengthen public-third sector partnerships concerned with progressing the transfer of assets from Local Authority ownership and control to communities.

### Outcomes

The Advancing Assets programme places particular emphasis upon partnership working between the public and third sectors – recognising that long-term relationships underpin successful asset transfers. There is clear evidence that programme activity has improved relationships between local authorities and the third sector – overcoming historical issues around perceptions and experiences, developing understanding of respective positions, and identifying common ground. It has also in most instances improved communications within and between both parties – encouraging cross-departmental working, single and dedicated points of contact within local authorities, third sector mergers and plans for co-location, as well as the development of productive cross-sector working relationships.

#### Other related outcomes include:

- Improved cross-sector project planning – facilitating the development of shared visions for individual assets, clearly articulated expectations of both partners, and productive discussions about the delivery capacity, skills and resources that are available to both partners;
- Improved consultation and involvement of the third sector in the development of strategic transfer frameworks – encouraging buy-in and introducing third sector intelligence to evolving strategies, policies and processes for handling transfer requests, as well as wider plans for the disposal of publicly owned assets;
- Cross-sector innovation and collaboration – with the extension of pathfinder co location plans to realise efficiencies and high quality service delivery to the third sector; local authority support for groups seeking to secure asset refurbishment funding; and the provision of tapered revenue support and ongoing service level agreements to help establish viable transfer exemplars.

#### Case Study 1

Allerdale Borough Council and North Allerdale Development Trust

#### Case Study 2

Leicester City Council and Highfields Community Association

#### Case Study 3

Bradford MDC and Keighley Voluntary Service

## Challenges and Barriers

Partnership development activity supported through the Advancing Assets programme has also highlighted some common challenges that have on occasion threatened to undermine the community asset transfer process. These include:

- The existence or emergence of confrontational relationships because of conflicting agendas and inadequate communication – resulting in extended transfer time frames and an increased real cost of transfer negotiations for both parties;
- Politicisation of related processes, sometimes exacerbated by the third sector, and an associated failure to pay sufficient attention to corporate risk management requirements – affecting officer buy-in and complicating the detailed negotiation phase required to complete transfers;
- Difficulties in engaging with sufficiently high-ranking local authority officers and Members at appropriate stages – increasing the potential for projects to be derailed despite the considerable time and energy invested by both partners. When transfer efforts do ultimately fail, despite professed buy-in by lower ranking local authority elements, this tends to result in strained relationships between partners as well as a distinct ‘community disempowerment’ outcome;
- Public sector restructuring exercises – challenging the potential for trusted and long-standing partnerships to be established across departments, as well as between the public and third sectors;
- An ‘eleventh hour’ approach to consultation and involvement – limiting understanding of respective positions, identification of common ground, and scope for collaboration to achieve the best possible outcome for all concerned. This fosters a sense that transfer has been imposed or that there is a ‘hidden agenda’ to dispose of liabilities, rather than viable community assets and enterprises;
- A particularly risk averse approach from some local authorities results in an unwillingness or inability to invest the up-front time, energy and resources in building the capacity of the third sector to become self-sufficient over the short to medium term. This increases the challenge to third sector organisations seeking to become transfer recipients as well as arguably affording less certainty, support and flexibility than has often been afforded to the private sector in the context of property transactions.

## Key Lessons

It is important to acknowledge the benefits, costs and realities of working in partnership. Partnerships take time to develop. Productive partnerships are based upon people and relationships. It is imperative that partners understand their respective perspectives and agendas. Partnerships function most effectively where they benefit from a shared vision and articulate it in a jointly devised and agreed implementation plan. Communication and collaboration are essential to good partnership working. The anticipation and mitigation of potential conflicts is a necessary component of sustainable partnership arrangements.

## Recommendations

- 1** A 'Partnership Roadmap' is needed to showcase good practice and provide appropriate guidance to transfer partnerships;
- 2** Best practice concerning third sector consultation and involvement in the development of local authority transfer frameworks should be shared with future programme participants and more widely;
- 3** Jointly devised project plans or 'expectation documents' - setting out what each party will undertake to deliver and when – should be encouraged to build trust and support successful partnership development.

**Programme Aim 2:** to devise and disseminate messages, tools and guidance to embed the community asset transfer agenda in Local Authorities – in particular, to overcome the barriers identified in *Making Assets Work*.

## Outcomes

Of the 50 local authorities known to have adopted a dedicated community asset transfer strategy, or to have referenced CAT in asset management plans or related capital strategies, 31 have received support from the Advancing Assets programme. A further 6 local authorities are involved in the OTS-funded Community Assets Programme and are in direct receipt of support from a DTA-led delivery consortium. Therefore, 15% of top-tier local authorities in England are currently known to have developed strategies, policies and processes pertaining to CAT – of which 75% have received direct support from the DTA and its partners.

Increased awareness and headline understanding of the CAT agenda is now being promoted by the Asset Transfer Unit. The Advancing Assets programme supports organisations that are already aware of and/or engaged in relevant activities. During 2008-9, this included delivering Social Return On Investment training seminars and hosting 9 Regional Roundtable events involving more than 175 public and third

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**Case Study 4**  
Torbay Council

**Case Study 5**  
South Gloucestershire District  
Council and Winterbourne  
Medieval Barn Trust

**Case Study 6**  
Wirral Metropolitan  
Borough Council

sector representatives. It also involved the development of relevant film projects – in particular, *Building Community* which provides a first hand account of the work of partnerships progressing asset transfers. For further information, visit [www.buildingcommunity.org.uk](http://www.buildingcommunity.org.uk).

Participants in the Advancing Assets programme were also encouraged to make use of the Support Map accessible via the ATU website, as well as contributing to further development of its 'Practitioners Wiki' to support a virtual network of CAT practitioners up and down the country. Both online tools are intended to support 'second generation' transfers in demonstration areas where intensive support is no longer available.

## Challenges and Barriers

The challenge of culture change remains significant despite the work undertaken through the Advancing Assets programme, early promotional activity by the ATU, and the Audit Commission's emphasis upon strategic asset management through the Comprehensive Area Assessment process. This perhaps reflects the concerns articulated by local authorities in *Room for Improvement* [2009] where the perceived capacity of the third sector is cited as the principal cause for concern relating to the CAT agenda. It also reinforces the challenges involved in delivery of the Government's *Operational Efficiency Programme* [2007], which is likely to release significant numbers of community assets 'for transfer' where it is progressed in earnest, as a 'transfer culture' is underpinned by a strategic approach to asset management on the part of local authorities.

An embedded transfer culture is also dependent upon a commitment to strategic asset ownership, management and development on the part of the third sector. The third sector needs to embrace collective strategy and opportunities for mergers and co-location, in much the same way as the public sector, to ensure the viability of myriad groups and services in the face of tough economic circumstances. This challenge echoes the findings of the Quirk Review insofar as community purpose risks being over-burdened by the demands of asset management and development when local authorities pursue multiple transfer efforts in a relatively short time frame, and at a time when access to unencumbered refurbishment capital is set to become increasingly competitive.

A concerted effort on the part of third sector organisations is needed to build on the ad hoc culture surrounding the community asset transfer agenda, moving towards a more joined-up and mutually beneficial approach. One possibility is that third sector asset development agents operating over a wider area will be established, to acquire and develop assets, to reduce the burden and risk for local smaller not-for-profit organisations. However, this is liable to prove less feasible in sparsely populated areas where suitable organisations are largely absent and the potential for income generation is more limited. A critical question will be whether such agents are able to develop models to 'let go', in other words to transfer

ownership of viable assets as a going concern to local viable community organisations. If not, the risk is that many of the key benefits, not least community empowerment, will be lost.

In Year 1, the Advancing Assets programme demonstrated a reluctance on the part of some elected Members to dispose of the ‘family silver’ for less than best consideration. Looking ahead, there is the possibility that renewed caution will surface in the face of depressed values and in the context of an election climate. In addition, although the Advancing Assets programme has already made a significant contribution to the development of good practice and expert guidance to overcome the barriers identified in *Making Assets Work*, it will take time for local authority champions to emerge and for awareness of their success to grow. Transfer efforts - in particular multiple transfer efforts - are unlikely to be realised in the very short term and may yet flounder in the face of opposition from communities concerned about the motivations of councils advertising multiple assets ‘for transfer’.

## Key Lessons

A great deal remains to be done before the CAT agenda is firmly embedded in the psyche of local government as evidenced by a ‘transfer culture’, and it is increasingly evident that the same applies to the more risk averse elements of the third sector. However, there are encouraging signs where appropriate strategies, policies and procedures are becoming embedded and improved community and third sector engagement is taking place.

The increasingly important relationship between the efficiency and CAT agendas also needs to be articulated to encourage a ‘transfer culture’. Similarly, the third sector needs to respond to the growing emphasis upon strategic asset management and development with collectively authored plans of its own. It also needs to explore the potential for organisations with the capacity and experience to serve as area-wide third sector developers, to reduce the development burden upon smaller community organisations, while still enabling local ownership models. Finally, the ramifications of work undertaken through the Advancing Assets programme for the CAT agenda will need to be closely monitored to prevent trail blazing local authorities ‘retreating’ in the context of economic challenges and political change, and against a backdrop of localised concern on the part of the public.

## Recommendations

- 1** CAT strategy workshops should be delivered across the country so that a greater number of local authorities can benefit from the Advancing Assets programme;
- 2** An ATU presence at local authority asset management events needs to be ‘stepped up’ to proactively promote the link between the efficiency and CAT agendas as well as call attention to attendant risks to the third sector;

- 3 Third sector asset management and development pilots should be established to complement CLG's Total Place initiative - with the aim of compiling evidence to better understand the possible expansion of such an approach in the future.

**Programme Aim 3:** to advance community asset transfer projects in different locations and build confidence in the feasibility of asset transfer through a partnership approach

### Outcomes

Of the 75 pilot projects supported through the Advancing Assets programme since April 2007, 11 have already transferred into community ownership and a further 15 are expected to transfer before the end of March 2010 – representing an overall 'transfer conversion rate' of around 35%. The remaining 'transfer prospects' are subject to the completion of related activities, the identification of funding for refurbishment, and ongoing negotiations around the terms of any subsequent transfer.

5 out of 11 assets already transferred to the third sector with support from the Advancing Assets programme are located in rural areas. However, programme activity only represents around 10% of transfers currently being progressed, and more recent survey data continues to support the hypothesis that CAT is most frequently pursued in urban settings (SQW, *Local Authority Baseline Survey for the Asset Transfer Unit*, forthcoming). There is also a lack of sophisticated data available which may be used to consider whether coastal areas face distinct challenges in progressing the CAT agenda.

Of the 75 pilot projects supported across 50 demonstration areas since April 2007, 40% are located in areas rated amongst the 25% most deprived in England. 70% are located within the two most deprived quartiles according to IMD rankings. Half of all assets already transferred, and two thirds of assets expected to transfer during 2009-10, stem from the latter group - with 50% of those located in the most deprived quartile. It would be unwise to draw broad-ranging conclusions from such limited data at this juncture. However, the assumption that CAT activity is more challenging in deprived locations (due to competing priorities, more intensive involvement of the public sector, and the skills mix available to nascent community enterprises) may well merit further investigation in future.

The distribution of political control across Advancing Assets programme areas involved an equal number of local authorities controlled by the Conservatives and those with 'no overall control'. Taken together, they represented around 75% of programme participants. 15%-20% of local authority programme participants were Labour controlled, with the smallest number administered by the Liberal Democrats. From the 11 assets already transferred, the data suggests that the political orientation of local authorities has little - if any - bearing upon CAT outcomes. However, what is clear is that CAT activity is more likely to become politicised where electoral support for Members is more marginal - with mixed results for individual transfer efforts.

**Case Study 7**  
Brighton & Hove City  
Council and the Open Market  
Traders Association

**Case Study 8**  
Stoke-on-Trent City  
Council and Sneyd Green  
Community Association

**Case Study 9**  
North Hertfordshire  
District Council, the Hitchin  
Town Centre Initiative  
and Baldock Arts

**Case Study 10**  
Calderdale MBC  
and Hebden Bridge  
Community Association

Of the 75 pilot projects, 40% have focused upon the transfer of community buildings, whilst a further 40% of pilots related to libraries, leisure facilities and former schools. It is unsurprising that these asset genres underpin the majority of transfer efforts progressed through the programme since local authorities most frequently consider the transfer of stock lacking the capital value of operational assets and which are associated with the provision of discretionary services in the first instance. Additional motivational factors are likely to include wider policy initiatives – for example the move away from 25 metre swimming pools in the run up to the Olympics, and the Building Schools for the Future programme – and the investment requirements associated with such stock.

One third of pilot projects were heritage assets of one form or another. This perhaps reflects the difficulties local authorities encounter in trying to render such assets viable in a contemporary public sector setting. The transfer of heritage assets also points to their 'totemic' importance to communities, and to the strength of opposition which frequently surrounds efforts to dispose of them on the open market.

The emerging trend surrounding the preferred terms of transfer acceptable to programme participants indicates a preference for retention of ownership on the part of local authorities, and acceptance that a minimum 25 year leasehold length is required - with appropriate safeguards for both parties - to unlock much-needed refurbishment capital.

## **Challenges and Barriers**

The Quirk Review places considerable emphasis upon the risks to local authorities that are associated with progression of CAT activity. However, Year 2 programme activity also highlights some of the challenges that are faced by third sector organisations seeking to assume responsibility for public assets.

Community asset transfer takes time – an average five years from the establishment of the partnership between a local authority and community group. The reasons for this vary from place to place but include: a third sector partner being newly established for the purpose of taking on responsibility for an asset; a third sector partner needing time to develop its capacity to assume responsibility for an asset; a local authority needing time to develop confidence in a group's track record for delivery of services; a local authority needing time (typically 12-24 months) to progress a proposal for transfer through its internal processes; partners needing time to undertake appropriate community consultation in respect of a transfer proposal; and the need to secure planning permission and/or related refurbishment funding from a variety of sources. Such a timeframe can have implications for the ability of community groups to sustain the energy required to pursue transfer and this needs to be considered as a risk to the success of transfer efforts and organisational sustainability.

Some local authorities continue to express concern about the levels of demand for transfer, the capacity of communities to assume responsibility for assets, and the

levels of risk to which council tax payers might be exposed if community groups are entitled to raise finance against transferred assets. However, the most common cause of failure continues to stem from the lack of access to unencumbered sources of capital finance for refurbishment work, without which many assets identified 'for transfer' cannot be rendered compliant with legislation or fit for enterprising purpose. Reduced access to grant funding arising from the 'credit crunch', and a reticence amongst third sector groups to take on loan finance, both represent a challenge for community groups seeking to progress transfer activity.

Local authorities may also opt to dispose of multiple community assets in significant numbers, and within relatively short time frames, if the Government's Operational Efficiency Programme is accelerated in the face of significant pressure upon public sector budgets. Such a move is liable to stretch third sector capacity to breaking point in some areas, unless the capacity and skills already present within larger and more experienced third sector groups can somehow be harnessed for the purposes of stewardship – whether as authors of strategic asset development plans or as asset managers for the third sector in a particular locality. Likewise, the skills and capacity of strategic asset management and capital teams in local authorities is already acknowledged to be limited – in particular, in District Councils. These will both have implications for delivering the Government's High Performing Property drive in the future.

## **Key Lessons**

CAT activity takes time and money but can be progressed swiftly and effectively where there exist willing and able partnerships between local authorities and the third sector. Rurality, deprivation rankings and political context do not appear to constitute significant barriers to successful CAT activity. However, the 'state of the public sector estate' needs to be considered carefully where the CAT agenda is intended to support development of a thriving third sector. The transfer of under-invested stock represents a significant challenge where access to refurbishment finance is concerned, whilst heritage assets may impact upon the future sustainability prospects of community groups whose core mission is not linked explicitly to the preservation of the asset in question.

Third sector organisations risk investing significant time, energy and money into CAT activity, then failing to secure automatic rights to renew the lease arrangements they negotiate. This may well reflect a nervousness on the part of local authorities which will only be addressed by clear evidence of successful and well-managed community assets and enterprises that prove responsive to changing needs over time. However, more 'mutually' beneficial attitudes are called for in the future if the risk to community organisations is not to be deemed too high a price to pay for undertaking CAT activity. Improvements to associated processes are needed to limit the risk of failure as agreements reflecting the spirit of true partnership working are more likely to generate successful and sustainable transfers.

Finally, some local authorities have taken a 'hard line' in relation to the ability of community enterprises to raise finance under the terms of transfer being negotiated, whilst others have stated their opposition to freehold transfer – irrespective of prevailing circumstances – in relevant strategy documents. The former raises

questions about the extent to which councils are entering into a genuine partnership with community enterprises which are effectively being asked to accept responsibility for the maintenance of assets that could become significant liabilities before the agreed lease period expires. The latter implies only a temporary commitment on the part of local authorities, a lack of confidence in established mechanisms to impose 'asset locks' to ensure benefit flows to the community in perpetuity, or reflects their need to utilise asset portfolios to raise finance in difficult times – in particular, where they benefit from inflated land values.

## Recommendations

- 1** Good practice examples of councils affording community enterprises helpful 'windows of opportunity' should be explored in greater detail, communicated to interested parties, and used to promote a 'community right to buy' for England;
- 2** Further work is needed to promote the role loan finance and equity capital might play in asset based development by the third sector;
- 3** Community enterprises need guidance and tools to facilitate whole life costing activity, highlight issues affecting specific asset genres, and explore the potential for innovative public-third sector ownership models to evolve where significant refurbishment capital is required. A compendium of good practice concerned with the contribution of high quality community infrastructure to the built environment ought also to be produced;
- 4** Detailed legal guidance is required to ensure the terms of transfer negotiated by councils and community enterprises are mutually beneficial. This needs to be endorsed and, potentially, enforced by Government to enable the development of a more 'level playing field'.

## Case Study 1:

# Allerdale Borough Council and North Allerdale Development Trust

North Allerdale Development Trust (NADT) grew out of the national market towns initiative and is a community regeneration vehicle for rural market towns in the North West

### Asset Transfer Pilots

The North Allerdale Action Plan (2002) represented the culmination of three years community consultation with residents, community groups and voluntary, public and private sector representatives. It was born from the development of market town partnerships in the rural towns of Aspatria, Silloth and Wigton as the means to address the social, economic and environmental decline - widely accepted as synonymous with rural decline throughout Great Britain. The North Allerdale Partnership (NAP) came together as part of the national Market Towns Initiative to address these issues collectively, whilst individual town partnerships developed action plans to identify local issues and projects with the potential to provide a context specific response and help regenerate the town centres.

A Masterplan for Wigton's townscape (2005) led to a brief looking at the case for development of the town's Market Hall. Linked to the Borough Council's Corporate Improvement Plan 2008-11, wherein the local authority committed to increase the number of one-stop-shops available to residents to bolster access to key services. The Council subsequently agreed to partner with NAP and apply for funding from the Community Assets Programme to refurbish and transfer the asset into community ownership.

They were notified of their success in Spring 2008, and are now poised to become a registered charity in preparation for capital works to conclude and the asset to transfer during 2009-10. NAP became the North Allerdale Development Trust (NADT) in early 2008. Funding from the Council facilitated the appointment of a dedicated Chief Executive from March 2009 to drive forward their plans. With support from the Advancing Assets demonstration programme, NADT and the Council also worked together towards a second transfer of the Wigton Community Centre (WCC) during 2008-9.

WCC benefits from a town-centre location and was closed in the face of poor health and safety standards – attracting significant public concern about the availability of space for community activities. It is envisaged that the WCC will serve as an economic counterweight to the Market Hall to assist NADT in becoming self-sustaining in the future.

NADT was recently named winner of the Partnership & Strategic Working category of the North West Market Town Awards.



### Strategic Developments & Support

Reference to the Quirk Review is made in Allerdale Borough Council's Asset Management Plan 2007-11, wherein it states that it will consider the long-term loan or freehold transfer of buildings surplus to council requirements which may benefit the community, rather than always trying to maximize financial returns. A community asset transfer framework continues to be developed by Officers at the time of writing.

The Advancing Assets programme supported an options appraisal to look at the potential activities to be delivered through the Wigton Community Centre, with the future viability of NADT central to its development. It also provided much needed training around the build project itself and future building management for the Trust – recognising that responsibilities follow transfer, and require the requisite skills to be in place to ensure success and sustainability.

### Key Lessons and Factors for Success

- The level of commitment and support from the Council has done much to contribute to the partnership's success to date – seconding staff to the Trust, paying consultants to work on the partnership's Capital Delivery Plan for the Market Hall, as well as establishing an inclusive project steering group for the build phase of the project.
- The evolution and maturation of NAP – becoming NADT – over a period of ten years has provided the third sector organisation with a firm foundation upon which to build;
- The emphasis placed upon community engagement, a real commitment to partnership working with the local third sector, and a strategic approach to asset management underpins the good practice demonstrated in Allerdale.

The level of commitment and support from the Council has done much to contribute to the partnership's success to date

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Useful Links  
<http://www.allerdale.gov.uk/>

## Case Study 2:

# Leicester City Council and Highfields Community Association

Highfields Community Association (HCA) serves the Highfields and St Peter's inner city area of Leicester – working with culturally diverse communities to raise aspirations and achievement levels

### Asset Transfer Pilot

Highfields Youth and Community Centre opened in 1974 to enable the Highfields Community Association to provide social and recreational activities for local residents. Over the years, the Centre's work developed and now includes a full range of lifelong learning, community development and leisure services. The Centre was modernised in 2004 at a cost of £4.3m but remained under-utilised two years later due to strained relations between the Council and the Community Association.

Since then, the partners have worked to establish a foundation upon which to base the terms of any community asset transfer, most recently with support from the Advancing Assets programme. In January 2009, LCC's Cabinet gave delegated authority to officers to arrange for the transfer of the Centre by way of a full repairing leasehold agreement for a period of 25 years at a peppercorn rent. Detailed discussions about the terms of the lease and related service level agreement are ongoing at the time of writing, in part due to complexities associated with prospective TUPE arrangements for LCC staff working in the Centre.

### Key Lessons and Factors for Success

- Fully functioning partnership arrangements between a local authority and community group are required to progress transfer aspirations to a mutually agreeable conclusion. The cost implications of TUPE legislation for third sector organisations can be significant, and should be factored into any business planning activities as early as possible to provide a 'reality check';
- Elected Members need to reference key documents – for example, business plans - underpinning their decision to approve a transfer when delegating responsibility to Officers to finalise the transaction;
- Otherwise, Councils and third sector groups may be faced with significant legal costs where protracted negotiations ensue in the absence of clear parameters.

Over the years, the Centre's work developed and now includes a full range of lifelong learning, community development and leisure services

#### Useful Links

<http://www.leicester.gov.uk/>  
<http://www.highfieldscentre.ac.uk/>  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/leicester/>

## Case Study 3:

# Bradford MDC and Keighley Voluntary Service

Keighley Voluntary Service serves as a local resource for voluntary and community sector groups – encouraging partnership working, coordinating training activities and promoting volunteering

### Asset Transfer Pilot

Located in the town centre, Keighley's Central Hall is a Primitive Methodist Church. It was unused for a number of years until Keighley Voluntary Service (KVS) worked with Bradford MBC to develop joint plans for the development and transfer of the asset into community ownership.



KVS exists to promote the needs and voices of VCS groups throughout Keighley, and worked for more than five years to consult with the community about its aspirations for the Central Hall site and complete related business planning activity. In Spring 2009, KVS finally secured £1m from the Community Assets Programme - matched by a contribution of £650k from Bradford MBC - to make the building fit for purpose.

The Council has agreed to transfer the Hall on a 99 year lease for a peppercorn rent once capital works come to an end in Summer 2010.

The aim is to develop a third sector centre of excellence in Keighley – with a mixture of meeting rooms and office space for third sector groups as well as training facilities and spaces able to accommodate wider community functions. A refreshed Central Hall serving all elements of the community will contribute to town centre regeneration plans, and based upon the long term lease agreement, underpin development of a lasting partnership between the public and third sectors working in the area.

### Strategic Developments & Support

Support from the Advancing Assets programme helped the Council to consider a number of transfer prospects in the course of its recent 'Third Sector Review', as well as assisting KVS in preparing itself to assume responsibility for Central Hall following its refurbishment.

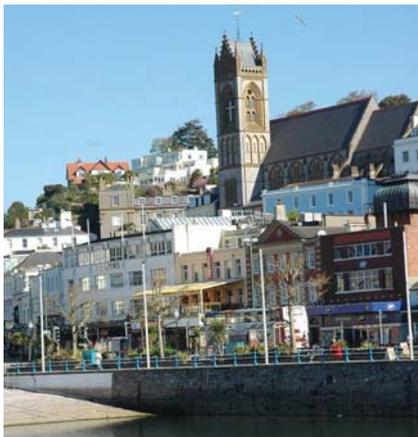
Notably, the Council has since opted to employ a dedicated Community Asset Transfer Officer. The officer will work across departmental boundaries and oversee development of appropriate policies and procedures in conjunction with the DTA to facilitate further transfers in the future.

**Follow the KVS transfer story through the refurbishment phase and beyond via the Asset Transfer Unit's building community website.**

Useful Links

<http://www.keighleyvs.org/>  
<http://www.buildingcommunity.org.uk/>

## Case Study 4: Torbay Council and the Importance of Process



### Strategic Developments

In Spring 2008, Members of Torbay Council agreed a process whereby surplus Council assets for disposal would be routinely offered to local communities – a ‘window of opportunity’ for communities. Advertisements were placed in the local press as well as on to the assets themselves during July of the same year, inviting Expressions of Interest to be submitted for transfer of 6 buildings and 12 plots of land. A total of 20 community submissions were received and officers agreed that 12 should be progressed to the Council’s Asset Transfer Panel. Members subsequently recommended that 8 should proceed to a Stage Two Application, and a Stage Two Application Pack is set to be disseminated in due course.

The Council’s Asset Transfer Panel includes Members and Officers, as well as third sector representatives in an advisory capacity, and is structured to preclude Members from taking decisions about assets that are located within their own wards. This helps to de-politicise the Panel’s work. An updated Community Asset Transfer Strategy will be considered by Cabinet in Autumn 2009 and will

include more realistic time frames for progression of transfer efforts (reflecting learning from some delays that have occurred to date due to capacity issues).

A dedicated Officer is also being seconded to provide the additional capacity needed to deliver the in-depth support applicant groups are likely to require. A further 5 assets are set to be advertised to the local community during Autumn 2009.

### Asset Transfer Pilot

Groundwork South West will ‘test’ the Stage 2 Application process as the pilot organisation supported through the Advancing Assets Programme. It submitted an expression of interest to develop a base for its Purist Soap Manufacturing project in response to a Council advert. The intention is to develop a social enterprise providing local training and employment opportunities which will be incorporated as a wholly owned trading subsidiary of Groundwork South West. The organisation is also considering whether it might become a third sector developer and landlord if the pilot proves successful and demand from local groups continues to grow.

The Council’s Asset Transfer Panel includes Members and Officers, as well as third sector representatives in an advisory capacity

Useful Links

<http://www.torbay.gov.uk/>

<http://www.groundwork-sw.org.uk/>

## Case Study 5:

# South Gloucestershire District Council and Winterbourne Medieval Barn Trust

Winterbourne Medieval Barn Trust (WMBT) campaigned for over 20 years to have the Barn identified as a building of historic importance, at risk and in need of renovation and repair, and for the use and enjoyment of the community

### Asset Transfer Pilot

Built in 1342, Winterbourne Medieval Barn is a building of national importance – a unique survival of the medieval agrarian economy. It is a Grade II\* Listed Building which, due to its high risk category, was purchased by South Gloucestershire District Council in 1998 with the help of funding from English Heritage and the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. The urgent works required to support and stabilise the structure of the main Barn and south range, and to give protection from the elements and allow walls to dry out, began in February 2002 and were completed shortly thereafter.

Since then, WMBT has been granted charitable status and has received support from the Advancing Assets programme to undertake vital drainage work; improve governance arrangements; forge relations with the

Architectural Heritage Fund; and undertake business planning activity to help secure the £1.6m capital investment required to redevelop and transfer the site into community ownership.

WMBT aims to provide enterprise accommodation and education facilities, as well as a space for hosting community events.

### Strategic Developments & Support

Support to the local authority built upon a strong existing commitment amongst Members and officers to support community asset transfer wherever appropriate; the Council had already transferred a number of assets based upon a tried and tested approach to working with interested community groups. Specifically, the programme facilitated discussion about developments elsewhere in the country which resulted in a redrafting of the Council's existing transfer policy. This will be issued for external consultation during Autumn 2009 prior to formal adoption by the Council.

The Council offers transfer recipients support to develop transfer plans with an emphasis upon enterprise and sustainability; has agreed standard lease terms for those groups with whom it is keen to work; and provides tapering 'start-up' grants linked to service level agreements to assist transfer recipients in the early phase of asset management. It is also developing a list of 'available' assets which it intends to publish online to aid groups and communities in identifying suitable premises and service outlets in their local area – and portfolio expansion.



Useful Links  
<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/>  
<http://www.winterbournebarn.co.uk/>

## Case Study 6:

# Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Efficiencies and Transfers

### Asset Transfer Pilots

The Advancing Assets programme has provided direct support to 3 community building projects during 2008-9 – Vale House, Moreton and Grosvenor. Support has included assistance with incorporation and business planning to help the management committees to meet the standards set by the Council for transfer recipients.

### Strategic Developments & Support

A Strategic Assets Review (SAR), undertaken by Wirral MBC during 2008-9, resulted in proposals to invest £20m over four years in 12 state of the art public sector complexes. The Council aims to reap efficiency savings from the closure and disposal of assets that are no longer deemed fit for purpose, cost effective or energy efficient, whilst providing local communities with new high-quality public sector service outlets.

The Council also applied to join the Advancing Assets programme so it could access help in developing a two year community asset transfer offer to local communities and third sector groups interested in benefiting from the closure of established neighbourhood facilities. The facilities include community centres, leisure facilities, libraries, museums and heritage assets.

Support was provided to Wirral MBC to develop an appropriate strategy and related policies and processes. Community Assets ‘for transfer’ can now be viewed via the Council’s website, where its community asset transfer policy and standard expression of interest form are also available.

Effectively, the Council has afforded local communities a ‘window of opportunity’ during which they can register an interest in community ownership and management of such community centres,

In addition, it intends to procure expert support to assist communities and third sector organisations expressing an interest in assets ‘for transfer’ – in recognition of the community development and capacity building work which may be needed to ensure transfers go ahead on a robust and sustainable basis.

### Key Lessons and Factors for Success

- Despite local opposition to elements of the SAR, the level of interest in assets ‘for transfer’ from local communities is very encouraging, and multiple transfers are expected in the months ahead;
- The future viability of assets which proved not to be cost-effective in public ownership will provide a litmus test for the community ownership model on Wirral going forward;
- The Local Authority does not intend to advertise all assets marked for disposal ‘for transfer’ – since it requires capital receipts from the sale of some assets in order to progress its investment plans.



Useful Links  
<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/>

## Case Study 7:

# Brighton & Hove City Council and the Open Market Traders Association

The work of Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) and the Open Market Traders Association (OMTA) was cited as evidence of good practice in the Quirk Review. Two years later, the story continues...



### Asset Transfer Pilot

BHCC and OMTA have been working together since 2005 to develop plans for the transfer of the Open Market site into community ownership. Hence, in April 2006, the Council took a decision not to market the site for at least a 12 month period to afford OMTA the opportunity to produce a detailed feasibility study and business case – a ‘window’ during which to forge appropriate relationships and explore investment capital options.

In May 2007, the Quirk Review made reference to the project in calling for government grant funding in support of transfer prospects. In short, the project had by then identified the need for public sector investment of circa £2.5m to ‘unlock’ the bulk of the finance required to complete the proposed scheme; £5.5m from a registered social landlord and loan finance of £2.5m serviced with annual income generated by OMTA.

Following an unsuccessful bid for funding from the Community Assets Programme in Autumn 2007 BHCC applied to join the Advancing Assets programme in April 2008.

### Strategic Developments & Support

Although progress has been incremental since then OMTA, partnered with Hyde Housing, received landowner consent from Cabinet in December 2008. They

were supported through the Advancing Assets programme to establish a Community Interest Company and to undertake related business planning activity. In addition, the programme worked to build the capacity of the local ‘Community Buildings Network’ to provide ongoing support to third sector organisations interested in asset based development, and to proactively raise awareness of the agenda in the future.

BHCC’s Asset Management Plan 2007-11 references its work with OMTA in calling attention to its efforts to progress the recommendations set out in the Quirk Review. It also points to forthcoming activity to develop a dedicated community asset transfer strategy - given additional impetus via a cross-sector workshop delivered to 50 local representatives in August 2008.

### Key Lessons and Factors for Success

- It takes time – sometimes, a long time - and unfettered investment capital to facilitate successful community asset transfers;
- Technical support and expert advice are a prerequisite for success where larger, more complex asset transfers dependent upon multiple funding sources and strategic third sector partnerships are concerned

Technical support and expert advice are a prerequisite for success

Useful Links  
<http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/>

## Case Study 8: Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Sneyd Green Community Association

### Asset Transfer Pilot

With support from the Advancing Assets programme, Sneyd Green Community Association (SGCA) has been working closely with the City Council's neighbourhood management team since May 2008 to pilot a community asset transfer of the Sneyd Green Community Centre. Local residents expressed concern that the centre represented something of a 'closed shop' as it was run by an ageing management committee who did little to encourage wider community use. In fact, the management committee was keen to hand over responsibility for the Centre and, with support from the Advancing Assets programme,

membership was expanded to form a 12-strong management committee which has been operating the Centre under a license agreement for the past year.

They have also expanded their activities for children and young people, and having redecorated internally and transformed the bar operation, are now fully booked for ad hoc rentals, weddings and parties until 2010. SGCA have set up a trading arm for their enterprise activities and, in addition, have secured £13,000 of inward investment into the centre and local area during the lifetime of the programme. SGCA remain on course to take on full management responsibilities for the asset in Spring 2010 on the basis of a long lease. The level of drive and enthusiasm they have engendered in the local community and their success to date is proof positive that community asset transfer is every bit as feasible in a deprived area struggling with low attainment levels as it is anywhere else.

### Strategic Developments & Support

Community Development workers from within the Council hope to learn enough from what they envisage will be a 2-year process to be in a position to roll-out transfer to other community halls in the City in the future. Other officers, linked to the Council's Strategic Asset Management team, have also learned a great deal from the larger and significantly more complex town centre refurbishment and transfer of the Mitchell Memorial Theatre with support from the Community Assets Programme –



the impact of which is telling in terms of the strategic developments that are now underway.

The Council's Asset Management Plan (2008-11) describes the potential for a regeneration company to be created in Stoke, linked to the potential for asset transfer to create a local asset base to support regeneration activity. The Council's Draft Policy for Vacant Land and Buildings makes explicit reference to the role that community asset transfer might play in future decisions linking corporate assets to delivery of its strategic objectives. Finally, a Draft Community Asset Transfer Policy sets out the basis upon which transfer will be considered in future.

Support through the Advancing Assets programme focused upon the needs of SGCA – providing help to develop their constitution; legal advice; and broadranging facilities management training. Advancing Assets also supported an independent survey of the building to inform the lease negotiations, and helped SGCA establish a not for profit company limited by guarantee to take forward its enterprise and income generation activities.

### **Key Lessons and Factors for Success**

- SGCA benefit from a determined Chair whom the Council refer to as the 'nuclear reactor of community activism', but have also worked hard with the neighbourhood management team to strengthen the management committee and introduce effective succession planning;
- Council officers reacted promptly to local concerns. This helped them to form a strong working relationship with SGCA around a shared interest in developing a community vehicle capable of realising local aspirations and firmly linked to area objectives;
- A comprehensive approach to piloting community asset transfer provided a learning experience which will endure beyond the tenure of individual officers;
- Members are now confident in their ability to support progression of the agenda beyond ad hoc transfer efforts.

**Follow the Sneyd Green transfer story through to formal transfer via the Asset Transfer Unit's building community website.**

The group has also worked hard with the neighbourhood management team to strengthen the management committee and introduce effective succession planning

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Useful Links

<http://www.stoke.gov.uk/ccm/portal/>  
<http://www.buildingcommunity.org.uk/>

## Case Study 9:

# North Hertfordshire District Council, the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative and Baldock Arts

North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) serves a predominantly rural population with a small-scale voluntary and community sector

### Hitchin Town Hall

A totemic asset for communities living in Hitchin, NHDC responded to local concern about the town hall being sold to the private sector in 2007 by submitting a joint bid for funding from the Community Assets Programme with the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative (HTCi).

A number of factors subsequently conspired to draw prospects of a transfer to a close:

- When the initial bid was unsuccessful, HTCi appeared to 'lose momentum' and the project rapidly lost valuable energy;
- HTCi decided, on balance, that it preferred to remain a company limited by guarantee – which curtailed alternative fundraising opportunities identified with input from the programme;
- Whilst opposition to private sale of the town hall was vociferous, the project lacked a significant and creative third sector with a clear vision for future use



based upon local need. Hence, no one 'stepped up' when HTCi 'stepped back'.

The Hitchin Town Hall transfer also encountered obstacles involving the local authority – ranging from competing proposals for development of the asset, to legal issues surrounding the Council's outright ownership. These factors highlight some of the challenges that are linked to regeneration efforts underpinned by an impetus to preserve the built environment, and compounded the difficulties the Council faced initially in trying to secure private sector interest in the building.

The Council has now opted to explore plans to house the District's museum in the town hall, and the prospect of transfer into community ownership has passed.

### Baldock Town Hall

NHDC responded to local concern and a lack of private sector interest in Baldock's town hall by applying to join the Advancing Assets programme. An arts group, with the backing of community stakeholders, approached NHDC about developing an arts and cultural resource within the town hall. A theatre designer drew up plans, and local people were surveyed about the proposed use of the building.

A number of events took place over the course of Summer 2008, culminating in a festival attended by more than 600 people in October – all of whom were also asked for their views about the town hall to broaden community engagement efforts.

In short, a community-driven solution to redevelopment of the town hall looked feasible, and NHDC offered a significant window of opportunity as well as officer input and support for vital repairs to enable further progress to be made.

The project continues but at a markedly slower pace, following a change in leadership of the arts group – which still needs to become formally constituted and to formulate a comprehensive business plan for a building which is challenged by scale and the prospect of limited footfall. Add in the need for investment capital of about £5m, and delivery of the project is likely to be very challenging before the window afforded the group by NHDC comes to an end in Autumn 2010.

#### **Strategic Developments & Support**

The Council's Asset Management Plan (2009) makes reference to the Quirk Review, the Government's community asset transfer agenda, and efforts to pilot transfer of the Baldock Town Hall into community ownership - implying a stepchange in its existing policy towards community ownership and management of assets is underway. Support from the Advancing Assets programme was largely focused upon the two pilot projects with the aim of obtaining further buy-in from Members and officers

through tangible demonstration of success in transferring assets other than traditional community buildings.

Specifically, assistance was provided with fundraising, enterprise development, governance arrangements and community engagement. In the event that both projects fail to go ahead – in the absence of a robust third sector organisation and sound business planning in either case - a significant risk attaches to the agenda's future in the area, as two failed attempts may be remembered for some time to come.

#### **Key Lessons and Factors for Success**

- Costly refurbishment projects involving heritage assets, and in need of an enterprise component, are amongst the most complex to deliver and therefore carry significant risks – especially where the size of the asset negates the prospect of a public sector anchor tenant to bolster viability;
- Unconstituted groups lacking a track record may require significant time and in-depth support if communities are to capitalise upon transfer offers – in particular where the third sector is largely comprised of smaller groups, with little or no experience of asset management.

Assistance was provided with fundraising, enterprise development, governance arrangements and community engagement

#### Useful Links

<http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/>  
<http://www.hitchin.net/community/htci>  
<http://www.baldocktownhall.co.uk/>

## Case Study 10: Calderdale MBC and Hebden Bridge Community Association

Hebden Bridge Community Association (HBCA) aims to serve local residents by promoting regeneration efforts through training, employment and enterprise support

### Asset Transfer Pilot

Hebden Bridge Town Hall requires relatively modest investment capital in comparison to other town hall pilots being supported by the Advancing Assets programme. Like so many totemic assets from the Victorian period, the Council has no plans for either retention or disposal of the asset at this juncture, but further neglect of the asset will only add to the eventual cost of refurbishment or lead to its closure and loss to the community at some point in the future.

Often, communities come together to preserve local heritage assets and safeguard totemic elements of the built environment. However, town halls up and down the country present particular challenges as a direct result of scale: the scale of their

neglect; the scale of refurbishment capital required; the scale of generated income required to maintain them for future generations post-refurbishment; and, of course, the scale of public 'attachment' to them. In many instances, this precludes straightforward sale to the private sector. Nor are most easy to render 'fit for purpose' from the point of view of modern public sector usage as operational facilities. Accordingly, their future is often dependent upon the evolution of creative partnerships between the public, private and third sectors, akin to that which now exists in Calderdale between the local authority and HBCA.

Hebden Bridge Town Hall was first identified as a local regeneration catalyst in 2003 by the Upper Calder Valley Renaissance Project – local political support for which led to the formation of a Town Hall Working Party in 2006. The group agreed to develop plans, taking their impetus from the Quirk Review, and undertook headline feasibility and community consultation work before submitting a bid to the Community Assets Programme in Autumn 2007.

Although short-listed, they were ultimately unsuccessful in securing monies from the Fund which was significantly over-subscribed. The group therefore welcomed an invitation from the Local Authority to join them in the Advancing Assets demonstration programme in Spring 2008. Since then, progress has been steady and, now formally constituted as both a charity and not for profit company, HBCA submitted a formal expression of interest in the town hall to Calderdale MBC in Summer 2009. The group is now poised to apply for investment capital from the Community Builders Fund in the Autumn.



### Strategic Developments & Support

Calderdale MBC received support from the Advancing Assets programme to develop strategy, policy and procedural documentation with which to progress the community asset transfer agenda throughout the local area. Its 'Framework for Community Management of Assets', which covers the spectrum of community management options from hourly hire to freehold transfer, was formally adopted by Cabinet in April 2009. The document provides a comprehensive overview of national policy drivers, offers a local interpretation of the Quirk Review's recommendations, and sets out the parameters the Council will utilise in assessing expressions of interest from the community in respect of transfer prospects.

It follows thorough consultation efforts and will be reviewed following testing during its first year of operation – first and foremost, in relation to HBCA's submission concerning the town hall.

HBCA, for its part, was supported in accessing additional business development finance to undertake a comprehensive and up to date feasibility study. It has also produced a draft business plan over the course of the year.

The group is now poised to apply for investment capital from the Community Builders Fund

### Key Lessons and Factors for Success

- A Town Hall Working Group benefiting from significant political support attracted determined and creative individuals from the local community to drive the project forward, and has since evolved into a significant membership organisation in the form of HBCA. The importance attached to membership is underpinned by a desire to ensure that the town hall is genuinely owned by the local community post-transfer through an organisation which demonstrably democratic and accountable;
- As one of five town halls involved in the Advancing Assets programme during 2008-9, Hebden Bridge is the smallest and requires the least capital investment to bring it into community ownership and usage; immediate remedial work to facilitate occupation is only estimated at £45k, and may yet provide the impetus for a phased approach facilitating early transfer. Nonetheless, the transfer is likely to have relied upon consistent and focused efforts on the part of the local community for the greater part of a decade – demonstrating, once again, that transfers require a significant investment of time, energy and money;
- The capacity within the local authority to process a number of such transfers remains unclear. This will need to be addressed if HBCA is successful and stimulates wider local interest in the agenda. In a number of other local authorities, this issue is being successfully addressed through dedicated time-limited appointments, secondment opportunities and portfolio expansion.

Useful Links

<http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/>

<http://www.hebdenbridgetownhall.org.uk/>

# Looking Ahead

## 4

This report welcomes the significant progress made in demonstration areas and showcases the success of individual local authorities and third sector organisations at the cutting edge of demonstrating community asset transfer in practice. It also draws attention to the continued complexity of the operating environment in which public-third sector partnerships must work to progress transfer activity, as well as the risks both parties need to address if transfer is to deliver the benefits to communities envisaged by Government.

The Quirk Review concluded that the purpose of community asset transfer is to contribute towards community empowerment. However, practical experience born of demonstration activity reveals that the driving force behind CAT activity is increasingly coloured by fallout from the prevailing economic climate and, in particular, the Government's efficiency agenda. That is not to suggest that CAT activity led by local authorities in pursuit of efficiencies overlooks community aspirations and established needs, or that the motives of local authorities progressing CAT projects are not also connected to a desire to support the development of a thriving third sector; indeed, recent survey data solicited from local authorities suggests that CAT is most frequently pursued to deliver outcomes in the spirit of National Indicators 4 (% of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality) and 7 (Environment for a thriving third sector). Nonetheless, the gravitational pull exerted by the efficiency agenda upon local authority asset management practices is liable to grow ever stronger over the months and years to come. Moreover, it could well result in a transfer culture without the time and money needed by the third sector to transform related opportunities into positive outcomes.

It is therefore incumbent upon the Asset Transfer Unit to provide the guidance and support needed to progress CAT activity in the contemporary politico-economic landscape – potentially, at 'whole area' level and based upon forward thinking strategies which challenge local third sectors to respond to a fast evolving public sector. In particular, it must work to promote appropriate 'windows of opportunity' and access to the range of financial instruments that may be used by the third sector to continue undertaking asset based development activity, and support exploration of alternative models to facilitate multiple transfers in a relatively short space of time. The recommendations outlined in this review of progress are intended to develop the CAT agenda upon such a basis.

# Further Advice, Support and Information

**Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)**

<http://www.acre.org.uk/>

**Adventure Capital Fund (ACF)**

<http://adventurecapitalfund.org.uk/>

**Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF)**

<http://www.ahfund.org.uk/>

**Asset Transfer Unit (ATU)**

<http://www.atu.org.uk/>

**BIG Lottery Fund**

<http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/>

**Charity Commission**

<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>

**Communities & Local Government (CLG)**

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/>

**Community Matters**

<http://www.communitymatters.org.uk/>

**Development Trusts Association (DTA)**

<http://www.dta.org.uk/>

**Futurebuilders England**

<http://www.futurebuilders-england.org.uk>

**Heritage Lottery Fund**

<http://www.hlf.org.uk/>

**Homes & Communities Agency**

<http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk>

**Institute of Historic Building Conservation**

<http://www.ihbc.org.uk/>

**Local Government Association**

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/>

**National Housing Federation**

<http://www.housing.org.uk/>

**Office of the Third Sector (OTS)**

[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector.aspx)

**Social Investment Business**

<http://www.socialinvestmentbusiness.org/>

**UK Association of Preservation Trusts**

<http://www.ukapt.org.uk/>

# Appendix 1

The table opposite provides details of all Advancing Assets Year 2 demonstration areas in receipt of support from the programme during 2008-9

Local Authority	Community Asset Transfer Projects
Allerdale Borough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Wigton Community Centre</li> <li>● Wigton Market Hall</li> </ul>
Barnsley MBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rockingham Sports Complex</li> </ul>
Bradford MDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Keighley Central Hall</li> </ul>
Brighton & Hove City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bristol Estate Studios</li> <li>● London Road Open Market</li> </ul>
Calderdale MBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hebden Bridge Town Hall</li> <li>● Luddendenfoot Civic Centre</li> </ul>
Cheshire West & Chester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Blacon Alliance</li> <li>● Hawthorn House</li> <li>● Lache Community Centre</li> </ul>
Gateshead Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Birtley Community Hub</li> <li>● Whickham Community Centre</li> </ul>
Herefordshire County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Grange Court, Leominster</li> </ul>
High Peak Borough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Glossop Town Hall</li> </ul>
Hull City Council	n/a
Kings Lynn Borough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● South Lynn Opportunities Trust</li> </ul>
Leicester City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Highfields Community Centre</li> <li>● Leicester Outdoors Pursuit Centre</li> </ul>
LB Barking & Dagenham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Marks Gate Community Centre</li> </ul>
LB Bexley	n/a
LB Southwark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Albrighton Centre</li> </ul>
Maidstone Borough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Heather House</li> </ul>
Newark & Sherwood DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lincoln Road Pavillion</li> </ul>
Newcastle City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● West End Fire Station</li> <li>● Western Lodge</li> </ul>
Northamptonshire County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fletton House</li> </ul>
North Hertfordshire DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Baldock Town Hall</li> <li>● Hitchin Town Hall</li> </ul>
Northumberland County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prudhoe Library</li> </ul>
Oxford City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Asian Cultural Centre</li> <li>● East Oxford Community Centre</li> </ul>
Portsmouth City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Portsmouth Lido</li> <li>● Portsmouth Skate Park</li> </ul>
Sedgemoor District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bridgwater Town Island Site</li> </ul>
South Gloucestershire DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Winterbourne Medieval Barn</li> </ul>
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sneyd Green Community Centre</li> </ul>
Torbay Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Groundwork Devon &amp; Cornwall</li> </ul>
West Lindsey District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● YASIG Youth Café</li> </ul>
Wirral MBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Liscard Community Centre</li> <li>● Morton Community Centre</li> <li>● Vale House</li> </ul>
Worcester City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● King George V Community Centre</li> <li>● Warndon Community Centre</li> </ul>



